



MONASH University

**Mediating Buddhism in Thai Television Drama in the Digital Era
as Religious Practice**

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B.A. (Political Science) (2nd Class Honours), MA Scenography

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

Monash University in 2022

School of Media, Film and Journalism

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Abstract

The thesis examines how the television drama industry in Thailand circulates Buddhist ideology through contemporary television drama distributed on online platforms. The thesis investigates the current online participatory culture focusing on how online Thai and regional audiences mediate their reading with other online members. The study's scope is from 2014, when the Thai media landscape officially shifted to the digital television era, to 2020. The project asks three main questions: 1) What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas? 2) How does the Thai audience make meaning of Buddhism through online participatory culture and social media? 3) How does Buddhism form social, cultural, and spiritual connections between mainland Southeast Asian peoples? The study employs an analytical framework that examines three levels of religious mediation: 1) ideological negotiation between Buddhism and other ideologies that Thai television drama is made to perform; 2) the producer-generated representation of Buddhist teachings (the Eightfold Path) in contemporary television dramas, and 3) the audience's participation and self-made products exchanging their religious understanding and other values of television drama consumption with other virtual members. The thesis examines three popular case studies aired in Thailand that respectively exemplify Buddhism's didactic, semi-explicit, and implicit mediation approaches: *Buddha* (2013), *Cage of Karma* (2019) and *Love Destiny* (2018). The study uses mixed methods, including textual analysis and online audience analysis.

The findings show that Buddhism offers an understanding of the text to those local and international readers with religious proximity. Not only does embedding Buddhist themes in television dramas where Buddhists are present give specific identity to the text in the global market, but the popularised Buddhist fictions also play a role in reinforcing social and cultural connections between Thai and mainland Southeast Asian peoples. The textual analyses of the case studies reveal that producer-made textual localisation, melodramatisation, genre hybridisation and contextualism help construct and reinforce the conservative meaning of Buddhism in relation to other dominant ideologies negotiated by contemporary Thai audiences. Multi-channel distribution, transmedia, and cross-

media productions (from traditional television drama to other media forms, contents and platforms) have enriched the information networks from which any enthusiasts can participate and benefit. The audience's online engagement via multiple roleplays, including practitioners, storytellers, and members of the Buddhist community, significantly reinforce the mediation values of consuming the popular Buddhism-related television series as a way to make meaning of their world. The publicised social media platforms such as YouTube have markedly facilitated the media user to explore, connect, and learn from other people without being constrained by geographical boundaries. The information gathering from a series of the content and related materials exchanged on YouTube has helped the audience to practice an ongoing reassessment of their ethical codes.

The study's three-level framework contributes to the scholarship of religious mediation in multi-screen culture. The inclusion of socio-cultural and political context to the textual analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the local participant's worldview and contributes to studies of Thai media and communications. Finally, the digital ethnographic analysis of audience participation and multi-screen media practice contributes to emerging scholarship of media convergence and multi-screen studies in mainland Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Buddhism, Thai television dramas, religious mediation, media convergence, participatory culture, digital ethnography

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Print Name: Apinya Anphanlam

Date: 4 April 2022

Acknowledgements

I want to pay my gratitude to Prof. Therese Davis for taking me on the doctoral education journey at Monash University. In the first half of my candidature, I truly appreciated the prompt and generous support of my primary supervisor Prof. Therese Davis whose sharp thought and understanding always shaped my ideas into place while exploring a range of directions. Despite a short time of working with my associate supervisor, I would like to thank Dr Julia Vassilieva for her materials and encouragement. I also would like to thank my associate supervisors, Dr Andy Ruddock and Dr Andrew Johnson, for the project direction guidance. Dr Andrew Johnson helped me look at the project from a different viewpoint and inspired me to construct the analysis framework. In the second half of my studies, I would like to pay colossal gratitude to Associate Professor Olivia Khoo, who became my primary supervisor and Prof. Therese Davis, who still supported me as the external supervisor. Olivia's prompt support, constructive supervision and precise feedback of my drafts were invaluable. I was so fortunate to have such brilliant supervisors with me. My appreciation of their supervision is endless and I will take their practice as archetypes.

I pay the utmost gratitude to my compassionate parents and our warm family for the tremendous support throughout my life. I am grateful to the Faculty of Fine-Applied Arts and Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University. Also, I would like to thank Belinda Glynn for her caring editorial assistance. Many thanks to my peers whose offline and online presence meant so much in the educational journey.

Many thanks go to the producers of the three cases studied in the thesis and all the online participants for leading me to new and profound learnings about the Buddhism-related narrative strategies and the audience's active meaning-making of the text and their participatory culture in the convergence era.

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Introduction

Mediating Buddhism in Thai Television Drama in the Digital Era as Religious Practice

Since 2014, there has been an increase in the number and popularity of television dramas made in Thailand due to the official establishment of the digital television system and the growing opportunity for transnational distribution. The escalation of marketing-driven television series raised a concern over the industry's unplanned development and the increased exposure of violence and sexuality in Thai television dramas. However, the most popular local television series were those that reinterpret the discourse and practices related to conservative ideologies including family and Buddhism. Alongside the television drama industry growth has seen a rise in user engagement with these television dramas on social media, particularly YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LINE and Instagram (TV Digital Watch 2021; InfoQuest 2019; 2020). The popularity of Buddhism-related Thai television dramas and the audience's engagement with sharing their reception of the television series' ideological message on social media has highlighted the role of moral codes in the consumption of Thai television dramas and multi-screen media practices.

However, very little is known about the way Buddhism is currently presented in mainstream Thai television dramas and, furthermore, how the reception of Buddhist-oriented television series is transformed when media organisations expand their reach from traditional broadcast television to new personalised interactive media spaces such as online television, free-to-watch online platforms (especially YouTube) and social media. To date, there have been no comprehensive studies addressing the emerging issue of the role that mainstream television dramas and social media networks play in religious circulation in Thailand or in other countries in mainland Southeast Asia.

There are two essential terms that are central to this project that require definition: religious mediation and religious practice of Buddhism. Firstly, the notion of "Buddhist religious mediation" in this project refers to how people in Thailand connect their set of Buddhist beliefs and practices to others via television drama storytelling and interactive social media (YouTube). Secondly, Buddhist religious practice in the thesis refers to

personal conduct that is explicitly expressed online in the conversational form showing the practice of morality, mindfulness, concentration, and spiritual wisdom.

The framework developed in this thesis examines the interactive circulation of Buddhist interpretations through Internet-based platforms from television drama producers to viewers and from viewers to other members of their online communities. The study framework consists of three levels of Buddhist mediation, as follows.

The first level examines the socio-cultural context and mediating function of Buddhism as performed in the television drama industry in Thailand with other local ideologies such as family, modernisation, capitalism, nationalism, the monarchy and folk beliefs. The second level focuses on how the producers represent their understanding of Buddhism to audiences. The third level pays attention to the online audience's activities generated by watching Buddhism-related television drama on YouTube. To examine online participation, this study contemplates the YouTube users' digital ethnography and user-generated content that illustrates their meaning-making of Buddhism from television drama.

The study encompasses the period between 2014 and 2020. This thesis contributes to studies exploring the relationship between a variety of producer-generated mediation approaches and the capacities of participatory convergence media culture to create personal and collective transformation (McLuhan 1964; P. Taylor and Harris 2005; Couldry 2008) by stressing on the Buddhist Eightfold Path notion (the core practice of Buddhism). This project argues that local producers continually reinterpret the operating socio-cultural ideologies, explore new narrative strategies and maximise media distribution channels in order to connect with contemporary audiences. At the same time, this study contends that while local users are diversely developing their media practice primarily for entertainment purposes, a significant number of the audience also actively take this convergent media opportunity to *make* meaning of their viewing experience and socio-cultural identity (Wilson 2009). More specifically, the thesis aims to answer the following research questions.

Main research questions

- RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?
- RQ2: How do Thai audiences negotiate Buddhism's meanings in new digital distributed texts into their religious awareness through online practices of participatory culture and social media?
- RQ3: What role does Buddhism in Thai television drama play in reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia in the era of regional cultural trade?

This thesis will also address the following subsidiary research questions in order to understand the sociocultural context of local consumption of Thai television drama.

Subsidiary research questions

- SRQ1: What is the socio-historical context of Buddhism, Thai society, Thai television drama, and Thai audiences' reception and uses of Buddhism in Thai television drama in the digital era?
- SRQ2: What are the distinctive features of Buddhist Thai television drama that deliver shared cultural taste and Buddhist values with Thai and regional audiences throughout the period from 2014-2020?
- SRQ3: What entertainment values and experiences do Thai and foreign online audiences seek from Thai television drama in the digital era?

By addressing these questions, this research has a number of aims. Firstly, this thesis seeks to understand how the contemporary mediation of Buddhism-oriented representation is influenced by viewers moving in the space of multi-screen practice. Secondly, the thesis aims to comprehend the collective creation of mediated space and discourse for Buddhist-related drama communities through online distribution and the establishment of a democratic form of online communication. Finally, the project looks at the mediation of Buddhist practice in the audience's YouTube-based conversation. It investigates the current Thai Buddhist worldview sense-making and the use of Thai

television drama broadcast in Thailand as a religious resource via the new media application of online communities in the cultural trade era.

The thesis' three-level framework of analysis will contribute to scholarship on religious mediation that integrates local people's ideological negotiation (between Buddhism and other operating socio-political ideologies, especially family, culture, gender roles, working and state ruling), religious articulation, and the media practices of producers and audiences. The project is distinguished by the multidimensionality of its approach and its ability to provide a uniquely Thai perspective on existing frameworks of western narratology of film and television drama and online audience analysis. Combining methodologies and analyses of cluster-based data of users' participation practiced in YouTube rooms hosted by Thai media players will also benefit the methodological field of media studies in mainland Southeast Asia about which global media scholarship may have limited knowledge.

Religious mediation

A key aspect of this research is investigating the role of religious mediation in the reading practices of popular television drama consumed in Thailand. Therefore, it is important that the definitions of the overlapping terms "mediation" and "mediacy" are clarified.

The term "mediacy" was coined by Franz Stanzel (1955) to define the textual operation of a story – either through the narrator's direct narration (teller mode) or the whole presentation of the story and the consciousness of characters (reflector mode). Meanwhile, Gérard Genette (1972) differentiates mediacy from the term "mediation," which he defines as a two-fold operation that underlines the narrator's narration and the discourse (*récit*) (Hühn et al. 2009). In contrast, Roger Silverstone views the term "mediation" from a broader social-scientific perspective as the essential "dialectical process" in which the institutionalised media of communication operates in the circulation of social symbols across the community (Silverstone 2002). However, Stewart Hoover disagrees about the analytical insufficiency of the "instrumentalist paradigm," which conventionally bases the mediation of religion on the side of production. Instead, he suggests the importance of investigating the meaning-making process and the media operation through audience practices that compose the circulation of meaning across

groups and cultures (Hoover 2011). Additionally, after recognising the current gap of online audience studies, Andrea Press and Sonia Livingstone highlight the necessity of analysing such collective meaning-making with an understanding of the participants' socio-political context too (Press and Livingstone 2008).

This thesis examines the ideological flow through different uses of media and content practiced by the television drama producer and the audience. The television drama series and the audience's digital ethnography are products of the religious interpretation and further media in the circulation process of the religion in popular culture. Therefore, the term mediation primarily applies in the thesis.

The varied definitions and application of the term mediation above suggest several possible frameworks to explore how social participants apply specific tools and strategies to circulate their view with others. Firstly, when looking at the religious mediation practiced through popular media, the thesis applies the concepts of the dominant ideology, intertextuality, and meanings suggested by several scholars such as Stuart Hall (1973) and Louis Althusser (1971). The study finds Antonio Gramsci's writings about hegemony and politics of religious-moral discourse beneficial in understanding conduct in popular culture. The contextualisation and ideological analysis in this book will pay attention to the socio-political context and other similar television drama texts in the industry.

Secondly, the thesis will explore the producer-made strategies to propagate meanings of practicing Buddhism to make sense of their struggles with a range of personal, cultural, and socio-political difficulties. For the producer-made mediation analysis, the study will apply the notions of denotation and connotation. I aim to understand *what* the producer says about the function of Buddhism concerning other existing ideologies (denotation) and *how* the producer constructs the meaning via their television drama representation (connotation.) The connotation-oriented production of a television drama series composes a wide range of elements, e.g., the theme, genre, plot, characterisation, the cast, the cast's appearance, and their performance, language, dialogue, camera movement, aesthetic composition, music, songs, special effects, editing, to name a few. Therefore, the study must narrow the area of textual analysis down to a feasible size with an emphasis on the delivery of the Buddhist discourse. Consequently, the key ideological discourse-driven elements that the thesis will look

closely at are the use of genre, plot, and characterisation as discourse-mediation approaches. Moreover, the study will employ the Buddhist Eightfold Path signified by characters' actions and dialogue as the core framework to interpret the function of Buddhism vis-à-vis the characters' struggles with other dominant ideologies. The thesis will apply qualitative analysis of the case studies' significant discourse embedment and other textual adaptation where the original novel and the television drama version reveal significant religious discourse adjustment or enhancement for a particular purpose.

Thirdly, the online audience's meaning negotiation requires comprehension of the interactive idea of meaning. Thus, the two orders of signification that consist of denotation and connotation operate in a particular cultural system that people exchange the same code (Fiske 2010, 15). Hence, the thesis will use the concept of signification and meaning to investigate the YouTube readers' mediation of their sense-making of the case studies (or the audience-made YouTube videos if relevant), Buddhist credo, and the online community. To understand the audience-made circulation of meaning, the thesis will take YouTube users' products of their participation into account. The products include written material (e.g., comments, sharing their story and argument), self-made or self-cut YouTube videos, and other expressions offered by YouTube (e.g., clicking like, dislike, sharing).

According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a denotative reading refers to the recognising obvious meaning of the sign (Saussure 1857-1913 in Fiske 2010, 41–42; Parmentier 2016). The producer-made selection of the information to tell the reader is equally central to the reader's meaning-making. Barthes uses the term 'connotation' to explain this second order of signification that the sign meets the users' feelings or emotions and the values of their culture (Fiske 2010a, 8). For example, the same objects shot in push-in camera movement from medium shot to close-up at the flowers may suggest the reader respect and frequent worship paid to the religion. On another hand, recording the same scene in a long shot with a pan left/right movement to include its surroundings where the reader will see heaps of the same kind of flowers dried and thrown away carelessly next to the shrine may shift the reader's focus and note the conflicting relationship between those objects, the community, and their belief. The thesis will take their comments into the connotation category.

Considering the area of the television drama industry, more recently, distribution platforms have changed to multiscreen, engaging local and international participants in various fashions to maximise the popularity and commercial benefit. Hence, investigating the mediation operation and function performed by multi-players in the online participatory culture requires a mixture of those audience-based frameworks above. The mediation especially needs to take into account the global consumption market with cultural differences and the extension of media platforms (from traditional television to multiscreen). Subsequently, an analysis that looks at multi-national audiences' media practice and engagement with the text and other members is essential to uncover the collective meaning-making produced in the mediation process. The study will contend if such changes in the digital era have essentially impacted approaches of religious circulation in the popular fiction industry.

The study uses three cases to interrogate the religious meaning-making of the case studies' producers and the audience. This thesis contains three case study chapters. Each of these chapters consists of two sections: textual analysis and audience analysis. The thesis conducts a textual analysis of each case study to explore how the Buddhist belief represented in the television drama negotiates with other dominant ideologies such as romance, family, culture, politics, nationalism, the monarchy, folk beliefs, for instance. The analysis aims to understand the case studies' significant strategies for constructing new meanings of the existing ideologies and establish the television series' ideological function for viewers. The second section analyses the audience's digitised reception of the case studies on social media with other virtual members. At the conclusion of each chapter, the combined findings of the producer- and audience-made discourses will reveal the *mediated* religious practice of Buddhism in the multi-screen era.

The thesis will apply the reception framework consolidated by Carolyn Michelle (2007) to understand the religion-related reception of the audience. The model suggests the four primary modes of viewer interpretation: *transparent*, *referential*, *mediated*, and *discursive reading*. The framework examines how the viewers' sense-making is shaped by socio-cultural context and social group memberships (Michelle 2007). For transparency reading, readers respond to the text and the community as if directly experienced (Richardson & Corner 1986). Referential reading points to the viewer

being involved with the characters or situations featured in the text by relating to certain people and situations in their life-world (Liebes & Katz 1990, 100). Meanwhile, discursive reading refers to how the audience reads the ideological connotations of the content. This type of reading consists of analytical and positional aspects (Michelle 2007). Finally, the study will examine their media practice with the four modes of media and viewer interrelation suggested by Cecilia von Feilitzen (1998) and Janet Staiger (2005).

The study will apply the concept to analyse the television drama audience reception. The four modes are 1) media as education source, 2) media as reinforcement thesis, 3) media as mediation, and 4) media as power relation (Staiger 2005, 21; Marsh 2009, 257–62).

To describe the four modes of media and viewer interrelation briefly, television drama as an educational source refers to the audience's consumption of media for new information. Reinforcement thesis refers to the media's reproduction of culture, values and religion. When the audience enjoys the viewing experience, we can say that the content reflects their culture, belief and values. The mediation mode refers to the audience's television consumption as a mediated tool to connect to their world. It also refers to cognitive and affective experiences that involve imagination, feeling, sensation, memory and perception. The choices the audience make to engage with particular media contributes to the structure of their daily life. Lastly, media as power relation refers to the capacity of the media to attract and fascinate the audience. Despite the audience's power to question the fictional story, the audience chooses to suspend their disbelief, free their imagination and follow the narrative journey. During the viewing, the audience exercises their critical interpretation asking themselves (or others) questions about the meaning of the story and the plausibility of the plot and characterisation. At times, a media text can also affectively overpower the audience (Marsh 2009, 259–62; Staiger 2005).

The context of Buddhism and television drama in Thailand

The following section will provide a brief context of the Thai television drama industry in relation to the Buddhist worldview. The section also contextualises the ideological mediation of Buddhism-oriented storytelling, and the function of Buddhist teachings present in Thai television drama. The following overview section will explain the context

of the Thai television industry, the local consumption, and the current online participatory culture in Thailand.

Brief context of Thailand

Thailand is a mainland Southeast Asian country sharing geographical borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. Currently, its total population is approximately 69 million, composed of Thai 97.5%, Burmese 1.3% and other 1.2% ('Thailand' 2021). Thai is the official language of the country. The dominant religion is Buddhism (about 95%). Groups that constitute the other approximately 5% of the population are animists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, and Taoists. Most Buddhists also include Hindu and animism into their worship. The Buddhist Order consists of two main schools of Theravada Buddhism: Mahanikaya and Dharmayuttika (Office of International Religious Freedom 2019, 2). Thailand has been a democratic monarchy since 1932 (Marto and Tampreht 2019). Despite its claim of democracy, the civil governance struggles with several political problems including military control, corruption and inequality.¹

Brief context of Thailand's neighbouring countries in mainland Southeast Asia

Myanmar shares its border with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. About 88 percent of the Myanmar people are Buddhist, followed by Christian (6 %), Muslim (4 %), and other religions (2%). The government of Myanmar has shown violent acts concerning the people's religious freedom. In Myanmar, religion closely links to ethnicity. The Buddhist majority is Bamar, followed by Rakhine, Shan, Mon, and some Karen and Karenni groups. (Demy and Shaw 2019, 327). A study of regional audiences' Thai television drama access and consumption in Myanmar remarks that, compared to other ethnic groups, Shan people are the active reader of Thai television drama. Following specific cultural preferences and rural geography, the Shan audience consumes Thai television drama in a unique way. For instance, the local theatre-like viewing in the community is practiced. In the evening, the local audience will gather at a house that

¹ Connors 2002; Hewison 2014; Nicoll and Delaney 2015; InfoQuest 2019; Phongpaichit and Piriyaarangsarn 1996.

shows popular Thai television series with a cheap viewing fee. Live or recorded dubbing is conducted but with limited concern of the accordance to the original meaning of the dialogue. Many local viewers use the Thai television dramas as sources of socio-cultural learning about Thailand before entering the country for educational or working purposes (Jirattikorn 2015). The popular genres among the Shan include melodrama, royal tales, and others that reproduce their moral code (Kasemrat 2009; Kijrungpaisan 2017).

Laos borders China, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Its landlocked geography affects politics, religions, and international relations (Demy and Shaw 2019). Also, the mountainous topography divides the country into highland, midland, and lowland region. Such a geographical challenge restricts the media infrastructure investment. About two-fifths of the country lies in the south, linking with Thailand and Cambodia (Cosslett and Cosslett 2017, 8).

In 2015, approximately 64.7 percent of the population is Buddhist, followed by folk religions (Animism) and no religion (31.4 percent), Christian (1.7 percent), and other religions (2.1 percent). Overall ratings for freedom of expression, political rights, and civil rights were one of the world's lowest (12 out of 100). The Lao gained 0 out of 4 scores for press freedom (Demy and Shaw 2019, 314). According to the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP) fragile states framework that investigated the country over the period 1980-2012, Laos has been in extreme fragility numerous times due to structural factors that limit the ability of Laos to establish long-term stability and state development. The relatively stagnant government cluster and the limited improvement after major fragility incidents (such as droughts, border clashes with Thailand, floods, and the Asian financial crisis) suggest capacity problems. Laos remains an aid-dependent country and relies on several NGOs and Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) to support human development-oriented projects (Carment et al. 2015). Due to the under-development of the local media infrastructure, local training of media production-making, and no time gap between the two countries, a considerable number of Lao people regularly consume Thai television programs (Jirattikorn 2015).

Cambodia has geographical connections with Thailand and Vietnam. The faith-based practice in the country is the rich combination of Hinduism and Buddhism. About

86 percent of the population identifies as Buddhist, making Buddhism the official state religion. Christians, Muslims, and others comprise 14%. The Cambodian people have suffered under the harsh military government fostered by Western powers during the 1970s-1980s and ongoing political violence since then. However, most Cambodians interpret those struggles by Buddhist doctrines. Over the past 25 years, the government founded Buddhism for Development Association as part of the national development. The implementation shifts the religion's spiritual function to the social force (Demy and Shaw 2019, 249–51). Cambodia struggles to produce local Khmer television dramas following the shortage of professional production-makers. Thus, collaboration with foreign professionals and companies is practiced (Skuse, Gillespie, and Power 2011). The two main approaches the local audience access Thai television dramas consist of official telecast of television networks and informal fan-based market. In the fan market, the enthusiasts can rent or purchase the desired television series in a hard copy (DVDs, VCDs) or electronic form (downloading to USB) at a cheap price (Jirattikorn 2015). Recently, Thai free-to-access Internet-based forums allow more Cambodian readers to enjoy the programs.

Vietnam (the Socialist Republic of Vietnam) borders China, Laos, and Cambodia. It is a one-party state considerably dictated by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The majority of the population practices folk religion (73%), Buddhism (12%), Christianity (8%), indigenous religious groups of Caodaiism (5%), and Hoa Haoism (1%). The economy of the country is growing significantly. Nonetheless, issues of government corruption, social inequality, and religious freedom violations operating in the country are concerning (Demy and Shaw 2019, 393–94). Following non-geographical connections to Thailand, the Vietnamese access and consume Thai television dramas online. Significantly, the Vietnamese media users practice prompt translation and distribution to supply others via local websites. The fans also establish fan clubs to gather and create activities among members. A section of young Vietnamese fans also favours exploring Thai GLBTQ dramas as such the interest is still limited in the local production (Jirattikorn 2015).

Malaysia shares its border with Thailand, Borneo, Indonesia, and Brunei. The indigenous Malay people were introduced to Islam by the Arab traders in approximately

1,000 CE. According to the 2010 World Factbook, the majority of the Malay population is Muslim (61.3%), making Malaysia an Islamic nation. Other religious practitioners include Buddhist (19.8%), Christian (9.2%), Hindu (6.3%), traditional Chinese religions (1.3%), other (0.4%), no religion (0.8%) and unspecified (1%). Following the civil and sharia law, converting from Islam to another religion is a crime. The survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2014 indicates that what the Malay found the most dangerous threat was religious and ethnic hatred. They explained that religious intolerance may lead to estrangement, discrimination, and persecution (Demy and Shaw 2019, 135–37). A study of Islamic television drama in Thailand in 2013 remarks the local Muslims' frustration with the Thai love-oriented plot. Therefore, the local Muslim producers create television dramas that mediate Islamic doctrines without a love interest. The narrative themes often centre on exploring the use of Islamic perspectives to understand and deal with secular circumstances successfully. The gratitude to Allah and parents is commonly found in the representation (Namsirilert 2013). Such the Thai Muslims' response to the discourse of Thai television drama may indicate a similar view of the Malay to Thai television drama.

International audience sections and access to television dramas distributed in Thai language

The Internet penetration of mainland Southeast Asia in 2021 shows that Malaysia has the most share of the population at 89%, followed by Thailand (83.6%), Vietnam (77.4%), and Cambodia (73.4%), respectively. Whereas Myanmar and Laos have Internet access to the same degree at 52.1% (Statista Research Department 2021). The Internet-based capability of the peoples suggests that the close neighbouring countries have offline and online access to the Thai text, depending on their media access and preference. Whereas, those who are from other countries tend to be online-based consumers.

For the offline audience section, existing local studies have noted the neighbouring audiences' consumption of Thai television drama as follows. Laos, Burmese, and Cambodian audiences whose countries share borders with Thailand have more options to access Thai television dramas: i) official broadcast from local television networks that collaborate with Thai television channels; ii) live spilled-over telecast; iii) hard copies of

television series in a VDOs or DVDs form (often without official copyrights); and iv) file downloading to cell phone or USB (Jirattikorn 2015). More recently, v) Internet-based platforms have become increasingly popular for the people who have the Internet access and facilities.

Whereas those audiences from other countries that do not share geographical connections such as Vietnam, Malaysia, China, may consume Thai television drama through a) official telecast in television networks that officially purchase the copyrights to air in the receiving countries; b) official websites; and c) social media platforms (Jirattikorn 2015; Kijrungpaisan 2017; Kosai 2002; Thanomjittra 2015). More currently, the regional Netflix has included Thai television dramas in the platform for a wider global access with multi-language subtitles.

The consumption above indicates the three main audience sections following their media access: conventional telecast viewers, hard copy consumers, offline digital downloaders, and online viewers. However, the study focuses on the activeness of online users, so the practical criteria for audience categorisation for the thesis include their origins (defined by different languages), discourse reading (engagement to varied forms of embedding Buddhism in popular television drama), and online activities. The online media practitioners can be divided into four sections: 1) local YouTube users, 2) media users from border-based neighbours, 3) consumers from other countries in mainland Southeast Asia, and 4) viewers from outside mainland Southeast Asia) and their content interests. The study will identify the nationality of the international media users by a combination of a) their language, b) their YouTube name, and c) their statement or a sign of the country they are from (e.g., the national flag).

The neighbouring media users' consumption activities define their role played in the industry. The main three role-plays are the ordinary viewer, the content distributor, and the producer. Online viewing refers to occasional viewing, regular consumption, and taking part in an online conversation in the Thai YouTube television drama community. The producer role-play involves textual organisation such as recording, downloading, and editing. Meanwhile, the content distributor indicates those players who share the original or altered Thai texts further within their social networks for communal entertainment and/or commercial benefits. The concept of reproducing the existing content into a local

preference is not new as the offline practices have been done in the neighbouring countries as discussed above. Only the actions follow the digitalised media and the production skillset required. For example, some Lao and Cambodian media practitioners post popular Thai texts with the changed title to their local languages. Vietnamese fans share Thai television series fan-dubbed in Vietnamese on YouTube.

I. Thai worldview

The Thai worldview has evolved from the ideological interaction between local wisdom and that of ancient India and China (Assavavirulhakarn 1990; Kanchanapan 2010; Butr-Indr 2011). Some of the commonly found beliefs in Thailand include *naturalism*² (that nature is more powerful than human beings); *humanism* (those human beings are under the law of the Three Common Features³ and the law of karma); *moderation* (the Buddhist notion of the mindful and moderate life conduct); and *relativism* (the importance of building and maintaining amicable relationships with each other) (Kanchanapan 2010, 121; Butr-Indr 2011, 300–301).

According to Thailand's casual agriculture-based lifestyle and the local belief that each individual has innate merit, many Thai people believe in individualism, leadership, partialism, and support feudalism and patriotism. It is argued that such attitudes restrict the effective development of the civil administration system as well as the self-reliance and teamwork of the country's residents (Ruengsilp 2002; Butr-Indr 2011, 131). Likewise, misuses of seniority and socio-political hierarchy obstruct criticism, work transparency and effective problem-solving within Thailand (Assavavirulhakarn 2003). Since the official organisations related to national development struggle to perform their roles, Buddhism and local faiths are some of those tools to compensate for their economic insecurity (Pongsapit 2006). One of outstanding examples of Buddhism in Thailand includes when the reclusive and widely acclaimed monastic saint named Phra Ajarn Mahaa Bua launched a moralistic and nationalistic campaign in 1998. By the end of 2000, the campaign received 3.097 tonnes of donated gold from Thais' personal jewellery hoarded

² Generally, this kind of narrative involves several existence dimensions such as human beings' world, heaven, under-marine world, and the world of Metteyya (or Metriya) (meaning: the next epoch of the most prosperous Buddhism and the ideal Buddhist membership) (Butr-Indr 2011; Kanchanapan 2010).

³ The three common features of all existence consist of impermanence, suffering and non-self (Anatta).

to help the country escape from the national IMF debts during the Asian economic crisis (J. Taylor 2001). For spiritual comfort in everyday life, Thais often conduct prayer, meditation, donation and utilisation of amulets (Srichampa 2014).

II. The television drama industry in Thailand

Thai television commenced its first broadcast in 1955 following a state policy to promote nationalism during the Cold War and the operation of Communism in the Thai borders, especially in the North and the Northeast regions that accommodated Communists from neighbouring countries (Harrison 2011). The nationalism reinforcement policy resulted in prominent themes in Thai television drama that traditionally supported the nation, religion and the king (Thai: ชาติ, ศาสนา, พระมหากษัตริย์)⁴ (Harrison 2011) as well as light entertainment programs that enhance collective awareness of Thai culture and reinforce the importance of the institution of the family (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 17–18). In the period of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikajorn (1964-1973), more than half of the whole number of Thai television dramas were about Buddhist teachings. Meanwhile, a very limited number of Thai television dramas discussed political or social problems such as corruption or economy and social issues, according to political and commercial influences (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 131–33).

According to the early Thai television channel co-operation with that of some western and far eastern countries, especially the U.S., the U.K., China, Taiwan, Japan, for instance, importing popular television dramas and films to dubbed and broadcast in Thai television channels has long been part of the Thai television industry. The executives of the television channels were in charge of the product selection, translation, dubbing, and degree of censorship (if any). When the government considered the foreign television drama imbalanced to the consumption of locally made productions, the television channels would limit the distribution of those foreign television dramas (Bhamornsatitaya 1985).

After political tensions eased, Thai television transformed into a full-blown industry during 1977-1991 (Siriyuvasak 2001 in Daorueng 2007). Local politics, commercialism

⁴ Bhamornsatitaya 1985; Harrison 2011; Hewison 2014; Jewachinda Meyer 2014; Liamputtong 2014; Nicoll and Delaney 2015.

and other social changes lead the next Thai television drama discourse to another more commercial characteristic, primarily measured by television rating system.⁵ However, in a broader aspect of form and content of Thai television drama, the apparent production policy is simply a strategy of imitation, adaptation, appropriation, intertextuality, and remaking from the existing products to make a quick profit (Possamai 2005, 129). Production-based elements and media technology of the industry have advanced over the years (Possamai 2005, 129), while practices of ideology, formats (television series, mini-series), plots, and genres are much the same as they were in the 1970s.

For instance, a survey of Thai Media Monitor in 2008 reveals that during the 2000s, the Thai television drama's top popular themes were 1) promoting the practice of goodness, 2) conquest of goodness against injustice, 3) family institution, 4) determining an individual's social value, 5) forgiveness, 6) love, 7) friendship, 8) harmony, 9) problem-solving without violence and 10) promoting nationalism and pride of homeland (Media Monitor 2008). Since 2014, while some new digital channels explore and, at times, amplify discourse of polygamy, superstition, sex, GLBTIQ relationship, youth and violence to build their audience niche, mainstream channels continue to produce traditional themes.⁶

It is important to note that the increasing commercial orientation of Thai television drama has produced a focus on violence, discrimination, polygamy, homosexuality, and rape crime.⁷ Thai television drama content is also considered reinforce gender stereotypes, bias, patriarchy and discriminative representation of ethnic minorities or people with disabilities, in both overt and subtle forms (Muppidi 2012). The sexual expression, violence and social discrimination regularly depicted in Thai television

⁵ Throughout the last thirty years until recently, the local television rating has been conducted by AGB Nielsen Thailand by the operation of the People Meter Current System. The monitoring tools are composed of a Transmission Unit, Base Unit, Display Unit, and Remote Meter embedded in the viewer's televisions. There are approximately 2,000 households covering about 6,300 viewers throughout the country that carry this monitoring system. The meters monitor the viewed content signal and indicate the key information such as the programs watched, locations, time and duration of consumption, for instance. Nonetheless, according to the questionable transparency of the monopoly system and commercial bias, the new multi-platformed media landscape and the media users' changes of the media practices, the television rating system as well as other digital media channels are undergoing a process of reorganisation and supporting media laws and regulations (Thairath Online 2014; Tungkijvanich 2004).

⁶ 'จับตาดูละครไทยยุคทีวีดิจิทัล (English: Watch Thai dramas in digital TV era)' 2014; 'ลิมิตการทำละครไทยในยุคทีวีดิจิทัล (English: Limit of Thai TV drama production in digital TV era)' 2015.

⁷ Townsend 2016; Chuykrom 2013; Muppidi 2012; Media Monitor 2008; Chokriensukchai 2006; Seelekdee 2000; Sukrachandra 1994.

dramas raises critical concern over reception, impacts on younger audiences as well as encouragement of criminal conducts,⁸ especially when the youth audience can access these texts with limited parental guidance.⁹ Meanwhile, the popularity of foreign products such as those from South Korea and Taiwan increase negative comparisons between local and transnational television dramas in the market.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the top ten local television dramas that gain the highest television rating each year are those shaped by conservative discourses such as morality, family, social class, love and love loyalty, dream hunting, gender roles, animism, localism, nationalism, culture, and socio-political problems (NBTC 2020; TV Digital Watch 2020).

Several local studies found that the local audience favour local television dramas for several reasons. Primarily, the local viewer benefits from the program's entertainment, relaxation and social participation. Likewise, the audience addresses the relatability of the program's embedded moral, cultural, social and material values to apply in their life. The spiritual values function as part of their mental cleanse and self-development, particularly from tragedy and sentimental drama.¹¹ Also, getting involved with the popular television series also supplies communal needs of individuals as a means to become and maintain membership of their desired communities, such as family or close peers. Viewing television dramas with their family is considered the quality familial time when casual conversation and social cultivation process can be performed along with the viewing activity (Hobson 2003; Chantarabul 1996). Traditional Thai representation such as manner, traditions, costumes, locations, morality, to name a few, play as a collective tool for Thai viewers to enhance their cultural pride (Yuthithum 2011, 102). However, textual preferences and approaches to gain those values differ according to their favourite casting, demography, personal tastes, and reading experiences.¹²

⁸ Chuykrom 2013; Jirabovornwisut 2011; Yuthithum 2011; Ngarmwuthiworn 2010; MGR Online 2009; Nuchphitak 2009; Wittayapanpracha 2009; Media Monitor 2008; Kraiwimol 2002; Arunyawongsakorn 2001; Srikanjanapert 2001; Kotcharat 1999.

⁹ Rattanamongmeke and Suthiworaset 2016; Thongsrigate 2009.

¹⁰ Charoenkul 2013; Deemak 2012; Chanpen, Napasap, and Nimcharoen 2011; Tuntiwong 2009; Visesrith 2009; Wattanasupakul 2007; Vichitakul 2003.

¹¹ Laipat 2015; Yuthithum 2011; Archavabul 2003; Lohawatwong 2000.

¹² Suwanmalee 2017; Yuthithum 2011; Wongchanta 1998.

As such, we can see that Buddhism-based dramas play a complex role as a functional agent for social integration, an ideological tool, and affordance of spiritual justice and personal practice. Thus, religious mediation in the Thai television drama industry has become a media tradition, a part of national and institutional policies and a resource for personal religious conduct.

III. The circulation of Buddhism in the Thai television drama industry

The relationship between Buddhism, Thai culture and mass media in the modern period is complex and closely related to nationalism, modernisation and cultural cultivation.¹³ The Buddhist-oriented television drama remains popular among the Thai audience, who believe in its function to make meaning of well-being. Consequently, Thai television drama continues to feature Buddhism within its content, coexisting with the growing variety of market-driven content. Again, Buddhism and other local co-existing faiths, and post-modern values are juxtaposed, negotiated and presented in a wider diversity.

To explore deeper into the matter of the circulation of Buddhism in popular television drama, this study surveyed formats, genres and ideologies of 578 examples of original Thai television drama productions shown during 1936 - 2020 (excluding remakes and reruns) from a Thai streaming services channel www.seesantv.com, clips on YouTube, reviews in Thai television websites and books. The findings show that, broadly, Buddhism is represented in Thai television drama industry in didactic, semi-explicit and implicit mediation style.

This study's definition of *didactic* Buddhist television drama refers to a doctrinal narrative with a Buddhist teaching theme that involves religious characters and pedagogical dialogues. The objective of the didactic television drama is based on religion propagation, emphasising the transcendent benefit of religious practice. The *semi-explicit* Buddhist drama refers to those secular dramas that construct Buddhist ideas as themes. Nonetheless, the leading characters and setting (location and situation) are not necessarily related to official religious characters and institutions. The purpose of the semi-explicit, generally, is negotiating lay life conduct with elementary precepts (Buddhism's Five Precepts). Lastly, the *implicit* Buddhist drama involves market-driven

¹³ Harrison 2011; 2005; Harrison and Jackson 2009; Kaewthep and Eiamrerai 2011.

productions that employ Buddhist doctrine as subtheme to support other more dominant themes. Despite some presence of Buddhist ideas and practices exhibited in audio-visual expression or dialogue, the narrative does not highlight the creed. At times, some productions utilise the religion as part of cultural-political apparatus for social order. The purpose of the implicit Buddhist television drama is generally to reproduce the existing socio-political regime and values.

The study finds that implicit Buddhist television drama takes the most significant share of the market at 547 productions, followed by semi-explicit and didactic Buddhist television drama at 19 productions and 12 productions, respectively. The data show that over time, Thai television dramas are shifting from didactic and semi-explicit to implicit discourse of Buddhism. Notably, in early 2021, there is no new didactic Buddhist television drama series, and only one semi-explicit Buddhist television mini-series, titled *ฟ้ามีตา* ('Fah Mee Ta' 2007) remains in the telecast schedule. Compared to the Thai television drama in the period of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikajorn in 1964-1973 that the majority of Thai television dramas were Buddhism-related (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 131), such a drastic decrease of didactic and semi-explicit Buddhist television drama notes the correlation between the media market structure, the government policy and the sponsorship concerning the television channels' production plans.

The decrease in real-time television popularity and the increase of on-demand online consumption have forced television executives and producers in Thailand to significantly and continually adjust their work policies and strategies over the last few years (Banomyong 2019). This situation has been dramatically amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted domestic and international trading and marketing investments since early 2020 until the present time (mid 2021). Subsequently, the local entrepreneurs have reduced payment at a high rate for advertising on television in prime time which the audience consumes less. Conversely, the traders pay more attention to advertisements on social media that cost less but approach consumers more frequently (TV Digital Watch 2021).

As a result of these recent changes in television viewing practices, the television decision-makers have adjusted their production-making and distribution approaches to follow the market's fast movement and audience's multiple-screen media practices. Some

of the local television channels' current strategies include cancelling or cutting the budget of new, less-marketable productions, postponing production processes (for example, shooting, editing, airing), and rerunning previously successful television drama series (TV Digital Watch 2021; 2020). This production data does not necessarily suggest the foreseeable absence of Buddhist mediation in television dramas. Nonetheless, it raises the necessity of reconsidering flexibility in mediating religious ideology in the disrupted media era.

Regarding the dominant forms of the mediation, Thai television drama generally uses television series and mini-series as essential tools for delivering the dharma notions to audiences. Common genres which include explicit and semi-explicit mediations of Buddhist teachings at their centre are drama, social drama, investigation, drama fantasy and drama horror. Meanwhile, the implicit Buddhism-related television drama has more flexibility to be implemented within a greater range of genres, and it is common for producers of Buddhism-related television drama to hybridise many genres together to excite audiences. The most popular genres for implicit Buddhism-related television drama are drama, family drama, social drama, melodrama, drama fantasy, drama action, romantic comedy and comedy.

Plots are fundamental in storytelling, especially in the contemporary period, with its media-saturated audience that is always seeking new viewing experiences. The Buddhism-related plotting centralises the stories' source of inspiration, which can be classified as one of three practices: fictionalisation, semi-factual adaptation, and factuality.

There are two central practices for *fictionalised plotting*: locally-made fictionalised plotting and internationally-influenced plot adaptation. Usually, the Thai television drama producers apply two sub-styles of fictionalised plot-making. The first method is the producer-made original productions that remix existing plots in the market. The second approach is the producer-led remake of a previously successful television series, which reuses the same plot but features a new popular cast, other aesthetic elements and more complexity to the plot. Enhanced and modernised characterisation with witty and catching dialogue are crucial in remakes. However, it is fundamental to address that, despite some representational differences between the two approaches, in a broad sense, the

producers of the both methods generally plot and apply complex narrative strategies to thread conventional motifs of ethics, local beliefs and values with the chain of karma law and reincarnation, impermanence, sin and merit.

For internationally-influenced plot adaptations, an emerging means of plotting is borrowing plots from international productions with the aim of modernising the Thai plots. Another exercise is remaking franchised plots from international television dramas locally. These two types of plot generation may not necessarily involve Buddhist teachings, especially franchised plots that are based on foreign cultures which may be non-Buddhist. However, it is also not unusual for international-oriented television series to include representations of Thai Buddhist cultural products (for example, yellow robes, an ossuary), activities (for example, a food offering to monks, praying), and architecture (for example, temples, churchyards).

A *semi-factual plot adaptation* is the collaboration between the producer and the audience, as discussed in relation to the semi-factual television series *Cage of Karma* in Chapter Two. Generally, there are two sub-styles of the semi-factual plotting, following the involvement between the audience (or documents) and the producer: one-off plot inspiration and co-plot-making.

Biographical plot is the least practised in the primetime television drama industry, as the protagonist of this kind of plot needs to be extremely well-known as their archetype. Subsequently, the leading characters in this type of production tend to be dedicated kings, queens and, occasionally, well-known persons whose works greatly contribute to significant areas such as medical advancement, human rights and Thai classical music, for instance.

As this thesis will show, while the Thai television industry has explored a range of entertainment-driven television drama content, national audiences continue to show great interest in explicitly Buddhist texts. For example, in 2015, the Thai audience praised the imported Indian television serial *Buddha* (Sham 2013), which delivers extensive Buddhist teachings through the entire life journey of the Buddha. The series was officially dubbed into the Thai language and gained its highest television rating during its first telecast at

3.79.¹⁴ The Thai localised series inspired a range of transmedia and cross media across television channels as contribution to the Buddhism community. Most importantly, a considerable section of Thai and mainland Southeast Asian audiences valued the series as a popular religious inspiration.

Although the localisation does not change the origin status of non-Thai television series, the pedagogical access and the outstanding reception generated by the local distributor's localisation are not to be ignored. Essentially, the paratextuality that the local distributor and other local producers practice supports the local audience's interpretation of the series' discourse significantly in the way that no other local or international television dramas have performed to that level. Hence, for this particular case, the thesis examines the mediation of the Buddhist discourse performed by both the Indian producer and the Thai producer that equally play a key role in the Thai reception of the series.

The semi-factual family drama, titled *Cage of Karma* (Thai: *กรงกรรม*, lit. *Krong Kam*) (Wachirabunjong 2019) promotes dharma for householders by illustrating a Buddhist law of karma and family values for lay people. Through the process of melodramatisation, the series' Buddhist message was highlighted and achieved the highest nationwide rating at 11.136.¹⁵ In early 2018, the implicit Buddhism-related drama, titled *Love Destiny* (Thai: *บุพเพสันนิวาส*, lit. *Buppe Sannivas*) (Panangkasiri 2018), famously offered a reinterpretation of history and state ideologies, such as the monarchy, nationalism, religions and religious politicisation. The series' phenomenal success recorded the highest television rating of the digital era, so far, at 18.6 nationwide, generating economic flow in cultural consumption and influx of tourists (InfoQuest 2019, 24) for more than 10 billion Thai baht - equal to approximately 0.06% of the national GDP of the previous year (Wongkittikraiwal 2018).

Current digital media platforms available in Thailand (such as Internet-based streaming channels called Over-The-Top (OTT) and YouTube) offer extensive archives of productions, including versions of reruns and remakes. Access to this archived data has enabled current researchers to study the trend of producer-centric mediation in

¹⁴ 'แฟนพันธุ์แท้ | พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก | 26 ก.ย. 58 | ตอนแรก (English: True Fans | The Buddha | 26 Sep 2015 | 1st Episode)' 2015.

¹⁵ Phakdeemuanchon and Rattanasimakul 2019; TV Digital Watch 2020.

clusters of genres, plots, characterisations, and other audio-visual representation strategies. Simultaneously, fan-made comments and para-texts concerning the current versions of Thai television shows as well as reruns and remakes on social media have allowed studies of the ongoing *process* of the local audience's sense-making of Buddhism-oriented television drama the way that it has never done before.

The circulation of Buddhism-related dramas in the Thai television industry has remodelled over time along with broader industrial and technological shifts. However, there is little work that examines these changes. Hence, the Thai television drama industry and media users need a more updated knowledge of their local and potential international participation if they are to understand the role of religion-oriented content, representation and media connection to create a meaningful experience for the virtual community as part of their religious practice in the contemporary era.

Changes in Thai television drama consumption and online participatory culture

The Thai television drama industry has been very active throughout its history. In terms of local consumption alone, a survey conducted in 1985 found that approximately one-third of the population consumed television dramas, with most of this audience based in the countryside (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 2). In 2017, Thai television drama series occupied the most popular program with audiences at 27%, followed by sports (16%), feature film (15%), light entertainment (10%), mini-series (10%), news (7%) and others. Considering the proportional breakdown of television drama aired in Thailand in 2017, based on the country of origin, the national productions maintained their proportion at 71%, followed by other Asian dramas from Korea (14%), China (6%), Japan/India (4%), with the other 2% from western origins (Peatrarut 2017).

During 2020–2021, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns caused local viewers to spend more time consuming on-demand Internet-based content and connecting with other virtual community members. The results of research on the online consumption behaviour of Thai media users conducted by NBTC and the Chula Unisearch in 2020 revealed that participants of all ages have markedly integrated or even replaced their television content consumption with online platforms. Most of the participants accessed

content daily via mobile phone at 65%, followed by Internet television (17.3%), tablet (8.9%), and desktop and mobile computer (8.3%) (NBTC 2021). The most viewed content included television series (46.9%), films (22.3%) and game shows (8.6%). Regarding the origins of the viewed content, the findings found that the Thai audience preferred locally-made content, at 55.3%, followed by that of South Korea (21.5%), the United States (US) (20.2%), China (4.6%) and Japan (4.4%) (NBTC 2021).

The above data shows that there are three distinctive features of the ecology of the Thai media landscape: the abundant supply of materials and services, media availability across integrated and accessible platforms, and bounded supply for viewers' consuming attention (Webster 2010). These combined factors allow Thai viewers to manage their viewing according to their preferences. The Internet also offers non-linear access to content across time and regions for audiences (Hartley 2011), either through home televisions or companion screen (second screen) devices. The shift in media ecology and practice has tremendously challenged the ontological differentiation among existing media's new ideas and media forms (Uricchio 2009 in Evans 2011). The continual decrease of television popularity results in television channels' struggle to maintain their previous business model. The advertising revenue for television media has dropped drastically due to the decreased television consumption and the rise of Internet-based platforms (NBTC 2021; TV Digital Watch 2021). This change is likely to occur at an even faster rate in the foreseeable future. Hence, viewers, television producers and television networks must continually adapt to ongoing changes within the multi-screen industry.

Since the official launch of Internet Thailand's full-scale services in 1995 (Koanantakool 2001), Thai media users have significantly developed their interactive media practice. Currently, Internet-based tools and concurrent connections are crucial for a large section of Thai people. An Internet usage survey conducted by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) shows that in 2018, all Thai audience groups spent 9 hours and 48 minutes on average surfing the Internet during workdays and 10 hours and 54 minutes during weekends and holidays, which is 3 hours and 41 minutes higher than in 2017 (Electronic Transactions Development Agency 2018 in InfoQuest 2019, 3).

Social media is the most favoured platform. Subsequently, Thai media users use more than one type of social media routinely. The ETDA's survey revealed that in 2018, in one hundred Thai media users, they access YouTube at 98.8%, LINE (98.6%), Facebook (96%), Facebook Messenger (88.4%), Instagram (67.2%), Pantip.com (64.2%), Twitter (43%) and WhatsApp (10.6%) 2017 (Electronic Transactions Development Agency 2018 in InfoQuest 2019, 3). When immediate and accurate participation is required, particularly during a popular television drama such as *Love Destiny* (Panangkasiri 2018) or if there is urgent breaking news, Twitter is another tool the Thai viewer uses to communicate with other media users (InfoQuest 2019, 4, 14). Twitter in Thailand showed the fastest growth rate in popularity in Southeast Asia, increasing by 275% in 2018. Users in the 16–34 years old group were 68% of all users (InfoQuest 2019, 7).

The new media users have been increasingly active in their self-directed content consumption, textual interpretation, production, and circulation (Livingstone 1999, 2004 in Bilandzic et al. 2012, 19). The popular media practices consist of both personalised and publicised online spaces in an almost equal manner. While Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp are individual-oriented forums, YouTube and Pantip.com are the publicised arenas managed by individual hosts for affordable broadcasting.

There are a range of arguments on the impacts and benefits of new media diversity to date. Many scholars show public concern for the loss of collective identity and more class widening, particularity within plurality.¹⁶ At the same time, cyberbullying and violence-related expression on social media raises increasing concerns about mental and physical health.¹⁷ However, digital networking enables those media practitioners to be users as much as producers of information (Bruns 2007 in Bilandzic et al. 2012, 19). There has been disagreement concerning the new active role of the audience in public spaces where online platforms offer a new mass ritual communication model on which participants are free and equal to have a rational and democratic conversation (Tulloch

¹⁶ Webster 2010; Ross Poole 1989, Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson 1983 in Tham 2009.

¹⁷ Boonya-Anuchit and Piyaraj 2018; Sittichai and Smith 2013.

2000; Jenkins 2006). The thesis will contend the assumption by observing and investigating the Thai and international YouTube users' online conversation to investigate their course of action in relation to the reading and circulating the religion-related entertainment in the digital era.

Thus, it is beneficial to take the latest patterns of media consumption and participation into close consideration as a fundamental part of local and mainland Southeast Asian media studies. The experience of watching Thai television dramas online has been merging into communal connections and debates upon cultural preference and identity.

The analysis of the online audience's interaction to television dramas and their virtual peers in social media practices needs complex methods and analysis (Hills 2015). It is because understanding fans and their activities in the media convergence landscape involves exploring the media users' multi-screen media practice, role plays and discourse exchanged differently in each social media platform (Jenkins 2004). The audience in any territory is not a viewer with a single identity, holding one fixed set of preference and repetitive viewing habits. Instead, they have various capacities to deploy reception levels and attention modes (Morley and Hall 1986).

Ethnography has long been a primary approach for discovering social members' variations of religious expression. Its implementation may range from traditional surveys, interviews, observation, participation and ethnographical document analysis to digital ethnography, depending on available resources that benefit particular research purposes (Murchison and Coats 2015). The multi-screen media and their affordances allow the audience to be proactive, and to customise and individualise their consumption through on-demand interaction with their favourite program, including sharing, copying, for instance (Tay and Turner 2010). Also, the Internet has afforded audiences the ability to create and archive user-generated content on YouTube and other social media (Turner and Tay 2009; Hartley 2011, 19). Considering the notion of studying digital ethnography, Allard (2005) argues that cyber-ethnography helps reduce the danger of the participants' self-presentation and helps to explore the fans' practices in social media platforms where traditional reception studies encounter some limits (Bilandzic et al. 2012: 224). Those

audiences' media practices, discourses and self-made products have subsequently become valuable data for online audience studies to explore (Hills 2002).

For examples of this approach, Kelly Hu studied the Chinese audience's online reception of Japanese television dramas by observing and conducting surveys on two transcultural fan websites to analyse the fans' textual discourse and its meaning-making of interpretative communities. Her study indicates that the consumption of international television dramas can be digitised and comprehended through online ethnography (Hu 2005). Meanwhile, Weiyu Zang applied mixed methodologies by collecting first-hand online fan conversations from Internet forums and utilising in-depth interviews and textual analysis with quantitative methods (survey and social network analysis) to understand the more complexed perception of users' commercial and political interests (Zang 2016). There are many other studies related to the subject in various sites, such as Pullen (2004), Hills (2002), Jenkins (2006), Wood (2007), Hartmann (2006), Ross (2008), and Radway (1991). Nonetheless, as online fan studies are new to mainland Southeast Asian scholarship, this methodology has yet to be examined.

The following section will provide the parameters of the study and the methodologies employed in the thesis.

Methodologies

This project seeks to understand the ideological circulation of Buddhism in three selected Thai television dramas: *Buddha* (2013), *Cage of Karma* (2019), and *Love Destiny* (2018). These television dramas are representative cases of didactic, semi-explicit, and implicit styles of the mediation of Buddhism in television drama respectively.

This thesis contains three chapters analysing the mediation process performed by producers and media users to negotiate the meanings of Buddhism embedded in the case studies that reflect the larger picture of the functions of Buddhism in the Thai television drama industry. Each chapter contains two parts: textual analysis and audience analysis. Each part employs different methodologies, as below.

In the textual analysis, the thesis aims to grasp the following levels of mediation:

- 1) the ideological negotiation between Buddhism and other ideologies; and
- 2) the production-based mediation of the negotiated ideologies in 1).

Textual analysis of the Thai television drama case studies aims to bring the Buddhist teaching strategies embedded in it to the surface. Firstly, this thesis will look at the first level of ideological interpretation in the television drama, which refers to understanding the local socio-cultural context, the ideological conflicts discussed in the story, and the relevant Buddhist teachings. Secondly, the study investigates the second level of mediation of the thesis – official religious articulation and symbolisation of Buddhist ideologies from producers to mass audiences through primetime television drama. The discourse will closely investigate *how* the producers represent and popularise such views with the audience through specific narrative techniques with awareness of the audience’s convergence media practice.

In order to understand the content and textual strategies of the selected religion-oriented television drama series, this research will use a mix of well-developed approaches in western narratology of film and television drama series to perform a critical analysis of the case studies. Thus, this thesis will explore the television dramas’ adaptation, genre, plotting, characterisation and dialogue to examine the producers’ practical approaches to promoting ideological messages to the audience. The analytical discussion will show how those elements are constructed to mediate the reinterpretation of the existing law of action and consequence, following religious beliefs, to promote religious credo and practices in the contemporary era.¹⁸ The thesis’ model of textual analysis of negotiating Buddhist teachings to other ideologies is below.

Table A: The thesis’ conceptual model of the producer-made mediation of Buddhist teachings with other ideologies

Elements of producer-made mediation the thesis aims to explore	Sub-sections of the producer-made mediation
1. Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-factual drama genre - Fantasized and hybrid genre

¹⁸ Theeler 2013; Wittayapanpracha 2009; Archavabul 2003; Lohawatwong 2000; Bhamornsatitaya 1985.

<p>Elements of producer-made mediation the thesis aims to explore</p>	<p>Sub-sections of the producer-made mediation</p>		
<p>2. Plot</p>	<p>3 styles of mediation of Buddhism in television drama</p>	<p>1) Didactic Buddhist television drama</p>	<p>Plot: a spiritual journey of the religious protagonist</p>
		<p>2) Semi-explicit Buddhist television drama</p>	<p>Plot: leading lay characters' struggles with life difficulties and finally learn a Buddhist theme</p>
		<p>3) Implicit Buddhist television drama</p>	<p>Plot: leading lay characters encounter and overcome conflicts, primarily, by realizing other ideologies (e.g., love, family, identity, nationalism, capitalism and so on) but add more values to the text with some traits of Buddhist teachings</p>
<p>3. Characterization</p>	<p>1) Preferred change of characters (towards dominant ideology)</p> <p>2) Oppositional change of characters (against dominant ideology)</p>		
<p>4. Action & Dialogue</p>	<p>The Buddhist Eightfold Path (the core practice of Buddhism)</p>		
	<p>Morality</p>	<p>Concentration</p>	<p>Wisdom</p>
	<p>3) Right Speech 4) Right Action 5) Right Livelihood 6) Right Effort</p>	<p>7) Right Mindfulness 8) Right Concentration</p>	<p>1) Right Understanding 2) Right Thought</p>

It is vital to give a definition of how the thesis defines the meaning of each element of the Eightfold Path which combines the simultaneous conducts of:

- 1) Right Understanding (Sammaditthi);
- 2) Right Thought (Sammāsankappa);
- 3) Right Speech (Sammavaca);
- 4) Right Action (Sammakammanta);
- 5) Right Livelihood (Samma-ajiva);
- 6) Right Effort (Sammavayama);
- 7) Right Mindfulness (Sammāsati), and
- 8) Right Concentration (Sammāsamadhi).¹⁹

Looking at the thesis' interpretation of those conducts of the Eightfold Path, from the perspective of the television drama discourse and the audience's expression, is as follows.

- 1) Right Understanding (Sammaditthi): for the didactic television series and the audience's reading, the interpretation of the right understanding refers to the understanding of 1) the Four Noble Truth;²⁰ or 2) the wholesome and unwholesome roots²¹; or 3) the Law of Dependent Origination²² (Paticca-samuppada) (Payutto 2016, 215).

Meanwhile, for semi-explicit Buddhist television drama and the audience's reading may circulate the understanding of the relationship between cause and result (karma and consequence); the worldly and spiritual benefits of laypeople

¹⁹ A crucial meditation tool to detach from causes of suffering is a mindful observation, called 'vipassana', on a) the body, b) the feelings, c) the mind, and d) the nature dharma, as they are (Harvey 1990, 253–55).

²⁰ The Four Noble Truth: the suffering (the ongoing cycle of rebirth and death); the causes of the suffering (attachment to impermanence that leads to committing karma on purpose); the state of non-arising of any suffering as causes of suffering are no longer formed (Payutto 2012, 229); and the approaches to achieve the complete salvation (spiritual awakening.)

²¹ The Three Unwholesome Roots (The Three Akusalamula; greed, hatred and delusion) and The Wholesome Roots (Kusala Mula; non-greed, non-hatred and wisdom) (D.III.275; It.45 in Payutto 2016, 84).

²² The Law of Dependent Origination composes of 1) ignorance (avijja); 2) compositional factors (samskara); 3) consciousness (vijnana); 4) name and form (nama-rupa); 5) six sense spheres (ayatana); 6) contact (sparsa); 7) feeling (vedana); 8) craving (trnsa); 9) grasping (upadana); 10) becoming (bhava); 12) old age and death (jara-marana) (Keown 2004).

- to maintain their morality by, at least, practicing the Five Precepts despite several life difficulties; for instance. On the other hand, the right understanding shared in implicit Buddhist television dramas may only refer to the general understanding of the karmic chain and unleashing oneself from mental attachment, for example. In contrast, those television dramas and the viewer show their disbelief of correspondent causes and results; the understanding of permanent and controllable self; and the understanding that seeking for personal pleasure at present is the meaning of life rather than self-control and precept practice, for instance. From the view of Buddhism, the thesis would count those expressions as wrong understanding.
- 2) Right Thought (Sammāsankappa consists of 1) thought of renunciation; 2) thought free from hatred; and 3) thought free from cruelty (A.III.446. in Payutto 2016, 85). In contrast, those fictional representations and the audience's expressions that feature unwholesome thought (thought of sensual pleasures, thought full of ill-will, and thought of violence and cruelty) (A.III.446. in Payutto 2016, 85) are considered the wrong thought.
 - 3) Right Speech (Sammavaca) or good conduct in word suggests abstinence of lying, inciting, impolite speech and delirious talk. Meanwhile, misconducts of speech refer to doing the opposite of those right speech (D.III.215; Dhs.1306. and D.III.214; Dhs.1305 in Payutto 2016, 90–91)
 - 4) Right Action (Sammakammanta) or good conduct in act refers to the restraint of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct (D.III.215; Dhs.1306. and D.III.214; Dhs.1305 in Payutto 2016, 90–91). Vice versa, those fictional revelations and the audience's conversation that suggest their action or intention of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are defined as the wrong action.
 - 5) Right Livelihood (Samma-ajiva) refers to the ethics of earning a living without encroaching on oneself and others. Wrong livelihood for lay followers suggests engagement in five types of business e.g., weapons, human beings, meat, intoxicant, and poison (AN 5.177 in Access to insight 2005). Those producer-made and audience-made expressions of conducting activities related to these five types of business would fall into the category of the wrong livelihood.

Elementarily, Buddhist lay people are encouraged to practice *the Five Precepts* (Payutto 2016, 175), which is composed by:

- 1) to abstain from killing (Panatipata veramani);
 - 2) to abstain from taking things that are not given (Adinnadana);
 - 3) to abstain from sexual misconduct (Kamesumicchacara);
 - 4) to abstain from false speech (Musavada); and
 - 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness (Surameraya-majjapamadatthana).
- 6) Right Effort (Sammavayama) refers to 1) the effort to prevent unwholesome action, 2) the effort to overcome those arose negative dharma, 3) the effort to develop wholesome dharma, and 4) the effort to maintain and flourish the developed wholesome dharma (A.II.74,16,15. in Payutto 2016, 121). The television drama content and the audience's conversation that show the opposite practice of these attempts would be counted as the wrong effort.
- 7) Right Mindfulness (Sammāsati) is the mindfulness of breathing with four major bases: 1) mindfulness observation of physical movement, 2) mindful feeling, 3) full awareness of the experience of the mind, and 4) mindful contemplation of the natural happening (dharma) of breathing (Vin.III.70; M.I.425; M.III.82; S.V.311; A.V.111; Ps.I.162. in Payutto 2016, 261–65).
- 8) Right Concentration (Samma samadhi) (or the Four Jhanas) means meditation of 1) object-scrutinizing Jhana and 2) characteristic-examining Jhana. In the full practice of meditation, the right concentration leads to four stages of absorption. Those who reach the fourth absorption experience equanimity (Upekkhā) and the one-pointedness of mind (Ekkakata) (Payutto 2016, 61, 215). The representation of television drama and the audience that features deep meditation will be counted as the right concentration. Whereas, those who note their non-practice or practice misuse meditation (e.g., meditation for magical or shaman-oriented power over others) will be categorized as wrong concentration.

Each chapter also has a second section that explores the third level of mediation: the audience-generated mediation related to the series. The discussion will examine the collaboration between producers and the audience in the mediation process (if any) that occurs in pre-production, production and post-production stages. Furthermore, the project employs digital ethnography to comprehend the viewers' meaning-making of the case studies. The study pays attention to the media users' comments and other significant features of audience participation that will illuminate their utilisation of online communities to mediate their religious interpretation to others. Also, the analysis will consider expressions about consumerism, fandom, and communal belonging that benefit the understanding of the media participants' current values. Due to the highly complex nature of social media networks, the project narrows the data sources down to a manageable scale by focusing only on YouTube.

YouTube is a Web-based social media that offers opportunities for media users to broadcast themselves with peer-to-peer interaction. The YouTubers who generate and share their content as well as those who view and comment on those materials and other members' saying have control over what Seija Ridell (2012) calls public visibility of interactions. That is, the media users can choose how much information other members would recognise themselves. Visibility to other people is one of the criteria of publicness in YouTube and many other social media platforms. To a certain extent, media users feel secure with their interaction in an open space that contains various member groups. However, for a social media audience study, the varied, and, at times, disguised visibility and identity of participants requires another approach to comprehend their cause of mediating action. That is, rather than seeking to understand the relationship between their demography and their actions, the thesis looks at the discourse in the shared content and the participants' communicative intent. This is an online audience study method, adapted to changing media environments and audience activities, which go beyond the act of conventional reading. The analysis is based on observations of producer-made and audience-made YouTube posts related to the case studies.

Although the thesis takes YouTube as the primary source to understand the multi-level mediation among the producer and the viewer, the thesis may also engage some media users' shared view on Pantip.com and some Facebook fan pages where Thai

media users most often connect to the public if deeper information about their YouTube reading is required. Towards the YouTube audience analysis, the thesis will structure the model of the readers' meaning-making mediation developed from a reception model of Carolyn Michelle (2007) and the connotation reading of the Buddhist Eightfold Path, as follows.

Table B: The thesis' analysis framework of YouTube readers' reception modes

The thesis' analysis framework of YouTube readers' reception modes				
1. Denotative reception	Discursive mode (Text as a message)	Analytical reading	Motivation of the text	
			Implication of the text	
		Positional reading	Dominant reception	
			Negotiated reception	
Oppositional reception				
2. Connotative reception	A. Transparent mode (text as personal life)	a) Religion-related sensation		
		b) Personal experience – individual biography		
	B. Referential mode (Text as like-life)	Reference to other people's experience		
		C. Mediated mode (Text as a production)	i) Mediated-aesthetic receptions (visual or textual aesthetics)	
			ii) Mediated-intention receptions	
Other	i) Analytical identification (comprehension of the YouTube audience's action and conversation)	The Buddhist Eightfold Path (The core practice of Buddhism)		
		1) Right Understanding		
		2) Right Thought		
		3) Right Speech		
		4) Right Action		
		5) Right Livelihood		
		6) Right Effort		
		7) Right Mindfulness		
		8) Right Concentration		
Consumption and media access				
e.g., question & answer, random and irrelevant comments, for example				

It is important to note that full official clips on YouTube channels are not often continually available due to the distribution by the producer or the local distributor (in case of international productions) that is designed to encourage audiences to watch reruns on television. These clip deletion and blocking practices obstruct the consistent observation and collection of data. The study, therefore, focuses on short highlighted clips that tend to be more available on the platform from the original telecast until the period of the data collection.

The selection criteria of the YouTube clips centre on their relevance to the dominant themes of the series. Nevertheless, the thesis will narrow the themes down to Buddhism, romance, family, social class, culture, nationalism, and the monarchy following the more frequent and conventional ideologies reproduced in Thailand as discussed earlier in the section of the Thai television drama history and context. The study also includes clips re-posted after reruns as well. The variation of the audience's comment clusters in different months/years gives insight into the local audience's contemporaneous reception about the same productions and ideology. The study also examines fan-made clips posted on YouTube, especially those that gain considerable popularity and participation from other community members.

Let us look at the conceptual framework concerning the diversity of multiscreen audiences and the participatory model. The exploratory survey of fan studies scholars conducted by C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Beilby (2007) underlines the challenge of defining global fandom and practical methodology to measure the reception of imported texts on national and cultural identities (Harrington and Beilby 2007 in Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss 2007, 179–80). Their question of an ideal framework and methodology that fits international consumption is highly debatable. That is, the existing approaches to investigate the range of media users include traditional social science tools such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups. However, there is a debate about the inability of those conventional to capture the mediated experience of the audience (Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss 2007; Hills 2002).

The qualitative ethnographical approach is recommended to respond to this concern (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017; Hills 2002; Marwan and Murphy 2003). Nevertheless, the ethnographical studies also alert the restriction of the depth and the

breadth of the ethnographical data and the findings. The ethnography alone is insufficient to reveal the complex media practice and activities of the global audience. Vice versa, fan studies researchers should not fail to acknowledge the benefit of empirical fan studies either. Therefore, a mixed qualitative and empirical methodology is necessary for the online audience studies field.

The mixed methodology then raises the challenging question of the concept and criteria of audience categorisation in the publicised social media platform. Juluri (2003) argues the necessity of defining each group of the audience following how the media and the reader interact and generate meaningful experiences (Juluri 2003, 9 in Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss 2007, 181). Meanwhile, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and John Fiske (2010) suggest determining audience groups by their degree of emotional, psychological and behavioural investment with the media text (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Fiske 2010). On another hand, Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss (2007) note differing the audience by their communities, sociality, self-identification, and consumption frequency (Gray, Harrington, and Sandvoss 2007, 186). The possibilities seem endless.

Thus, it is important to look back at the research questions to define the practical approach to comprehend the YouTube audience. The research questions contend the different modes of producer-made and regional audience-made circulation of their religious understanding. Hence, the study's primary criteria of separating the audience sections lie in the denotative and connotative modes of reading and the nationalities of the YouTube participants. The language-based and origin-based identities evidenced on the YouTube platform help categorising the audience. Nonetheless, in social media platforms, such identity-based expression is optional for media users. Many local and international media users may not desire to reveal their real identity in public. According to the nature of an observational survey, the study needs to be aware of the implicit consumption that a considerable section of the audience practice. Besides, the consumption record in each YouTube site may note the total number of viewing and the frequency of individual participants' comments. However, the YouTube observation cannot record the frequency of silent rewatching and rereading of individuals' media practice, for instance.

Such limitations above may sound restrictive for a deeper investigation of the online audience's identity and engagement. However, it is what usually happens in social media practice. To understand the audience from their viewpoint, the thesis needs to adjust the investigation methods following the information ordinary YouTube users experience in the community.

The study codes the audiences' comments in each selected clip into the NVivo program. The coding structure is based on the reception analytical framework developed by Carolyn Michelle (Michelle 2007) and Buddhism's Eightfold Path practices. The data coding follows the two types of audience reception: denotative and connotative reception. Concerning the denotative reception, the study looks at the audience's different types of decoding. Firstly, a transparent mode (text as the audience's personal life) alludes to those comments that express the audience's direct sensations or personal experiences concerning the content of the clips. Secondly, a referential mode (text as like-life) examines the reception that the audience made according to non-personal references such as experiences of other people, the broader socio-cultural system, and the suspension of disbelief. Such suspension (including commenting on visual appearance, awards and characterisation) suggests the audience's alienated reading between their view and the text. Another type of denotative reception is the mediated mode (text as a production). The mediation-oriented reading includes the audience's expressions about the production's audio-visual aesthetics, generic aspects (for example, characterisation and genre) and edutainment-oriented intentions. The study also documented the participation of international audiences in the consumption analysis.

Connotative reception focuses on the discursive modes of the audience's reading. In this study, connotative reception consists of analytical identification and positional interpretation. The analytical identification includes the audience's analytical expressions about culture, plot, characters' motivation, Buddhist teachings and ideological implications. This study analyses the data of this section in two parts. One part is the audience's recognition of the related religious teachings embedded in the story, while the other part is the comments that show the audience's relevant religious conducts. The positional interpretation alludes to the audience's expressions that reveal their agreement, negotiation and objection to the implanted ideologies.

After the data coding, the study calculated the data frequencies of each thematic group into percentages to analyse the significant findings within and across the theme groups. Relatively, some readers may find such the representation of the processed data unconventional compared to some existing audience studies approaches. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the thesis aims to understand the circulation of the religious discourse practiced by all parties from a social scientific point of view. Thus, for a massive and ongoing YouTube-based interaction, the study focuses on a cluster-oriented reading rather than looking at individual comments from a psychological or demographical perspective, for instance.

Following the optional interaction nature of the YouTube interface, there is a limitation of collecting detailed data of all the viewers' interpretations of the given texts. Thus, those percentage data may not be able to represent all aspects of the audience's entire reading. Those online data are prone to ongoing change following to several factors, such as the increased size of the viewer and online conversation, the media users' deleting or editing messages they previously wrote in the room, less popularity caused by numerous clip accumulation following to the viewing history of the viewer, deletion of the materials and reposting edited clips, for instance. Therefore, the data should be read as moving data clusters that data tendency rather than fixed figures following the extremely dynamic distribution and consumption practiced in such the public and popular online platform like YouTube.

The analysis will give significant examples of the comments to support the discussion. The analysis will also include relevant data such as the size of other participants' agreements and arguments vis-a-vis the total comments. The quantitative data analysis pays attention to the significance of data clusters within and across the thematic groups.

The audience analysis also involves qualitative analysis from observations of audiences' expressions and media practices. Further attention is paid to forums on the discourse topics, participant roles, and activities that reflect the mediation of their interest in Buddhism to other forums' members. The analytical frameworks for the audience analysis of each case study include audience reception, fan culture, religious communication and the modes of the audience reception of religious fiction.

The analysis will uncover the interrelation between the empirical data and the qualitative clusters of the audience's reading of Buddhist-related television dramas. The study requires analysis with a fuller understanding of the audience's everyday life, culture, and socio-political circumstances, which the study will address in the textual analysis. The extensive examination of the relationship between textual and audience analysis' findings will unveil how audiences integrate Thai television drama into their lives to practice Thai Buddhism and how Buddhism engages audiences from other countries in mainland Southeast Asia in particular.

The following section provides the rationale of each case study and the main argument of each chapter.

The rationale of the case studies and the significant argument of each chapter

The thesis structure follows the different styles of Buddhist mediation that are commonly found in Thai television drama: explicit, semi-explicit and implicit.

Chapter One examines one of the most didactic Buddhist biographical dramas broadcast in Thailand, titled *Buddha* (2013). The series is the localised version of the original Indian series of the same name. The series strictly applies Buddhist doctrine to achieve the characters' sacred goal. The chapter explores the Buddhist discourse mediated an international text into the Thai local consumption. The fundamental arguments in the chapter centre on the contemporary interpretation of Buddhism vis-à-vis political context of the ancient period for the producer's peace-making objective; the producer's mixed production of biography and entertainment-driven fictionalisation and the reader's reaction; his heavy-handed embedment of Buddhist teachings in the series; the localisation of the Indian television series for the Thai audience; and the roles that spiritual engagement and religious practitioners play for the local and mainland Southeast Asian media users. The most outstanding impact on the audience orients on their media practice concerning their preferred discourse and personal religious practices exchanged online. The interrogation of its fans will argue about the popularisation of a religious propagation text and the media users' ideological identity. However, the producer's

objective to make the series a peace-making tool gained no significant evidence of the audience's reception.

Chapter Two explores semi-explicit Buddhist mediation in the semi-factual family drama, titled *Cage of Karma* (2019). The importance of the series is its negotiation between a section of the Buddhist beliefs (the karmic law), a local shamanism practice, bourgeois ideology, social discrimination, patriarchy, gender roles, and Thai-Chinese familial values. Also, the significance of the case study lies in the locality-based circulation of the dominant religious notion. The textual analysis of the series contends the operation of melodramatisation in highlighting the moral code of the story, the karmic cycle, forgiving and self-development. The focus of the chapter is dharma for household life and the circulation of the existing social system and values. The argument of the chapter centres on the redundancy of the ideological code that the case study is one of many to repeat in the local television drama industry. The chapter will debate the status quo of ideological redundancy, popular culture, and the audience's reception. Besides, looking at the audience's co-storytelling role via offline and online domains will help to understand the operating concept that the local people share dhamma as part of the religious practice. However, the fans' favour to the cast and their performance more than the karma-driven plot will contend their familiarity of the text's message and entertainment values in Thai popular culture. Also, the analysis will contend the interrelation between local discourse, cultural proximity, and international consumption.

Chapter Three investigates the implicit Buddhist-related hybrid historical romance drama, titled *Love Destiny* (2018) that politically navigates controversial issues of virtuous rulership and good governance. The debate in the chapter is based on the societal function of Buddhism interrelated with political institutions as manipulated by the producer through popular Thai television drama. The series' propagation of virtuous kingship and nationalism performs a state apparatus role, promoting the existing socio-political system. This popular case study features fantasized a Brahman theme while Buddhism plays a cultural background. The ideological negotiation between Brahmanism and Buddhism in Chapter One and Chapter Three shows the active co-existence of the two ideologies at two ends of the television drama industry in Thailand.

The textual analysis will reveal the series' use of contextualism and genre hybridisation to continually entertain the audience and promote the nationalist and monarchic ideologies, while navigating sensitive socio-political subjects. The audience analysis in this chapter will discuss the role of the audience as a member of the Buddhist culture in Thailand and a cultural consumer in the television drama industry. The analysis will explore the factors as to why the audience's overwhelming fandom overshadowed the audience's awareness of religious politics implanted in the series. The analysis will debate the local and international fandom and their activities that generated the fear-of-missing-out impacts on other members' online and offline consumption.

The findings of the three case studies will answer the three main research questions which concern the role of religion in the varied forms and contents of contemporary television drama (RQ1) in relation to how the media users read and respond to the religious ideology embedded in the text (RQ2). The thesis will contend if such different styles of representing the Buddhist discourse and the interactive online community such as YouTube have any significant relationship with the reader's meaning-making of the credo and the promotion of cultural connection between audiences from different geographical areas (RQ3). The online audience participation in the series and its paratexts observed over the period 2014 – 2020 and analysis will reveal a variety of the local and neighbouring reader's reception modes and interaction tendencies over the years.

Limitations of the study

The study aims to monitor the ongoing Buddhist mediation in Thai television dramas and audiences' cluster-based interaction on secondary screen forums. However, there are restrictions concerning the study's methodology and case studies that need to be clearly stated. Firstly, although digital platforms may reveal some traits of demography, identity and media users' location, a large section of the local participants' information involves pseudonyms and unclear gender-related expression. Therefore, this project does not include media participants' demographic identities as part of the overall audience analysis. Only the use of different languages plays a crucial differentiation role

in audience contemplation, as it reflects on national origins that supports the thesis' query regarding international consumption.

Secondly, there are different levels of affordance of interactivity, evidential participation, hidden meaning and cultural expression in Thai and regional audiences. Therefore, the analysis in this research will focus on frequencies and clusters of expression. The viewers' participation in the digital platforms is an ongoing process, and digital ethnography can only afford data observation and analysis captured in a specific period of investigation. The data of the audience's comments are generally available from the first telecast period until the latest rerun. Hence, the data figures should be read within such time and media constraints.

Thirdly, the data from online sources and short comments produced by the audience cannot *thoroughly* understand the audience's complex structure of feeling and in-depth sense-making of the Buddhist articulation. Due to the cluster-based data collection and assessment methodology, the audience analysis in this research will provide findings from a sociological perspective. This thesis does not examine psychological comprehension.

Fourth, following the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the ethics and privacy protection policy for digital participants on social media may restrict the direct quotation of audience comments. This may result in generalisation of audience discourse.

Fifthly, some relevant materials on YouTube may be different to material from television official distributing sites, as some original series have been withdrawn from the television channel's official platforms, including the YouTube site, due to copyright issues. Following the discontinuity of the official materials while its demand went on, a section of the audience created their own products to share with other members in the community. The audience-made products' discourse, popularity and the communal engagement raise significant notions concerning the audience-made mediation of the ideology worth in-depth investigating. Therefore, the study includes the most relevant materials of significance on audiences' reception, para-textual creation and participation generated by the case studies.

Lastly, concerning the case studies, I am aware that a case study explored in the thesis titled the *Buddha* series is not originally Thai. However, during the time range explored in the study (2014-2020), there has been no locally-made Thai television drama that explicitly delivers Buddhist teachings and generates the national enthusiasm to the level that the *Buddha* series has performed. Moreover, the thesis' argument is on the mediation of Buddhist discourse made by the producer to Thai audience and the online conversation between the Thai and other international audiences. Thus, the thesis counts the post-production localisation made by Thai producers that substantially results in local access and viewing experience with the edited discourse part of the television drama practice in Thailand. Without such the particular localisation made for the *Buddha* series, the original version and its discourse might not well approach Thai audiences and those neighbouring mainland Southeast Asian audiences who consume the television drama in the Thai language. Such the mediation practiced by the Thai producer has crucially generated public engagement to the text, the paratextual production, and online conversation. Meanwhile, the original Hindi version broadcast on Netflix shows no public and significant evidence of the Thai audience's religious reading of the show.

Hence, it is undeniable that localisation does play a crucial role in the discourse enhancement for local consumption. Besides, the thesis looks at the audience-cut and audience-made YouTube videos related to the series to supply other enthusiasts as the response to the official distribution restriction. Some fan-made YouTube clips that the thesis examines contain a medley of the protagonist's dialogue taken from preaching scenes. This kind of local paratextuality has shifted the material status to Thai media-user-made productions distributed across several social media platforms, including YouTube and, in some cases, their Facebook pages to maximise the approach to their audience. I consider the intermedia practice generated by the series important to include in the study and closely explore to comprehend the current discourse circulation performed in the country in the digital era.

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Chapter 1

Localisation and Audience Reception of Buddhist Doctrines in Didactic Buddhist Biographical Television Drama: *Buddha* (Sham 2013)

This chapter looks at the Thai-localised version of the Indian-produced television biographical drama series *Buddha* (Sham 2013). The production first aired in India in Hindi in 2013. It was then dubbed in Thai and titled พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก, telecasting in Thailand in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2020 across three different television networks: Workpoint TV, True4U, and Channel 3 Family. Despite its non-Thai origin, the series is notable for receiving record ratings in Thai primetime for pedagogical dramas. The series has been chosen as a case study of a Buddhist-oriented television drama in Thailand because it raises crucial questions for this thesis, as follows.

RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?

RQ2: How do Thai audiences negotiate Buddhism's meanings in new digitally distributed texts into their religious awareness through online practices of participatory culture and social media?

RQ3: What role does Buddhism in Thai television drama play in reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia in the era of regional cultural trade?

The chapter's analysis requires a combination of analytical methodologies. The approaches are categorised into two groups of methods regarding the targeted data: context and textual analysis of the series; and analysis of audience's para-texts exchanged on public online domains. The application of these methodologies will be discussed in the following sections.

Introduction

Buddhism originated in ancient India between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. The doctrines are based on the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism aspires to cease suffering caused by misperception of the non-existence of the self and impermanence. The essence of the teachings is to guide practitioners to understand the problem, the cause, the goal and the solution, called the Four Noble Truths. Then, the Eightfold Path is the practice guidance

to achieve the goal. However, Buddhism is not the dominant belief in India currently (Alpert 2016; Harvey 1990). In 2001, Buddhists accounted for only approximately 0.8% of the total population in India (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India 2001).

Historically, there have been many film and television biographical narratives of the Buddha. Those productions show that the biographical story about the Buddha has been reproduced in various countries. While productions that are locally made in India are limited, producers in the East, the South and the Southeast Asian countries where Buddhism is rooted tend to be more active.

Some examples of these productions include silent live-action films such as *Buddhadev* (Dada Saheb Phalke, 1923); *The Light of Asia* (Hindi: Prem Sanyas; (Niranjan Pal, 1926). Feature films include *Daibutsu Kaigen* (Teinosuke Kinugasa, 1952); *Shaka* (Kenji Misumi, 1961); *Seokgamoni* (Il-ho Jang, 1964); *Siddhartha* (Conrad Rooks, 1972); *Little Buddha* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1993); *Sri Siddhartha Gautama* (Saman Weeraman, 2013); *A Journey of Samyak Buddha* (Praveen Damle, 2013). *Tathagata Buddha: The Life & Times of Gautama Buddha* (Allani Sreedhar, 2008) was released in a form of Telugu film on DVD. The representation in a manga form is found in *Buddha* (Osamu Tezuka, 1972). Two-dimensional animation films are also popular, such as *The Legend of Buddha* (Shamboo Falke, 2004); *The Law of the Sun* (Takaaki Ishiyama, 2000); *The Life of Buddha* (พระพุทธเจ้า; Kristmant Whattananarong 2007); *Buddha: The Great Departure* (Kozo Morishita, 2011); *Thus I Have Heard* (พุทธศาสนา; National Buddhism Office, 2011); *Buddha* (Tulsi Ghimire, 2013); and *Buddha 2: The Endless Journey* (Toshiaki Komura, 2014). Television serials are found in *Buddha* (P.C. Reddy, 1997) and *Buddha: Rajaon ka Raja* (Dharmesh Sham, 2013). These examples show that presenting the story in a television series format was not globally found until the series *Buddha* (Sham 2013).

Buddha-oriented narrative broadly falls into three major situations: content, production, and distribution. Regarding the content, the narrative directions are either based on a) conventional repetition of the text from a dominant Buddhist school of its site, or b) new fictionalization from sections of Buddhist texts that are still closely related to the Buddha character, or c) newly invented fictions that explore some Buddhist notions. For

the first type, it is often found in the lands Buddhism is part of their religious identity and national pride, such as India, Sri Lanka, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand.

Compared to other Buddhist learning countries, the sense of belonging and fundamentalism of the first group seems to be stronger, resulting in much of the repeating practices continue until the present time. At times, those acts can become a ritual practice, as part of being Buddhists, that may not necessarily compatible with their religious understanding and actual practice. In contrast, countries that hold a simplified version of Buddhism such as Mahayana and Zen tend to have a less strict convention to the text. Their productions have much freedom to invent, challenge and argue with the characters and socio-political conflicts within the story. Some samples of this kind of fiction are *'Siddhartha'* (1972) by Conrad Rooks, *'Buddha'* manga series (1972-1983) by Osamu Tezuka, and extended texts: *'Buddha: The Great Departure'* (2011) directed by Koza Morishita and *'Buddha 2: The Endless Journey'* (2014) directed by Toshiaki Komura.

Those bold texts may fall into the either-love-it-or-hate-it reading in various receiving sites. For instance, most Thai audiences have never recognized *'Siddhartha'* (1972). A possible reason may lie in its misleading character who has the same name as the prince Siddhartha Gotama, sexual scenes, and the questionable learning of the protagonist that rejects the Buddha whom Buddhist Thais consider the holy teacher. Likewise, the violent content and unfamiliar interpretation of the prince and supporting characters in *'Buddha: The Great Departure'* (2011), the anime film is not as popular and the following volume *'Buddha 2: The Endless Journey'* (2014) is not officially available in a Thai market – either in a dubbed or subtitled version. This shows that although Buddhist Thais have an interest in the Buddha-oriented text if those texts are not compatible with their conventional expectation in terms of proximal representation of their prophecy and the religion, the objection and criticism tend to occur.

Apart from the productions listed above, there are other popular television dramas from international origins that feature a spiritual journey of a historical monk. For instance, the Thai audience is familiar with the Chinese fiction *the Journey to the West* which has been adapted in various media forms including animation, film, and television dramas. The story is one of the most successful stories in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and more (Well 2017).

The Journey to the West television series displays an adventurous odyssey of a Chinese Buddhist monk and his non-human disciples to ask for a Tripitaka copy from ancient India to China. The adaptation of the story is usually associated more with popular culture. The reproduction often reduces its religious and philosophical discourses to fantasy (Well 2017). That is, its major interest is based on magic and supernatural representation with special effects. Generally, its discourse is the negotiation between Animism and Buddhism.

Nevertheless, when looking closer into each episodic discourse, there is a limited didactic representation and dialogue related to the Eightfold Path. Each episode tends to repeat a similar plot pattern that the pilgrims encounter obstacles during their journey mostly in the form of monsters and demons with varied religious backgrounds. Then, the monk can finally overcome the problems with help from his non-human peers' supernatural faculties and the monk's holy advisor (Well 2017). The text enhances the notion of perseverance, patience, self-control, and wisdom which are sections of the Eightfold Path. The thesis regards *the Journey to the West* as a semi-Buddhist television series because its exhibition of Buddhism is outstod by supernatural entertainment.

Another Indian television series that discourse is closer to Buddhism is *Ashoka* or *Chakravartin Ashoka Samrat* (Gavandi 2015). The series' plot features the story of King Ashoka - the well-known Indian King who officially supported and spread Buddhism across many Asian countries. The text's message is based on King Ashoka's ambitious attempt to unite India. Only at the final episode after king Ashoka is realised the brutal loss in the Galingka war which is the climax of the story. Then, there is a voice-over summarising what happened after the war. Very limited mention of Buddhism is presented in this final moment of the series (Ashoka, Gavandi 2015, episode 235). According to the almost absence of mediation of Buddhist teachings in the series, the thesis does not consider the series a Buddhist text.

Similarly, there are many other Indian faith-based television series aired in Thailand. Some examples of those classic faith-oriented stories include several adaptations of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*. Other Hindu gods' stories recently aired in Thailand include that of Shiva, Krishna, Ganesh, and Hanuman, to name a few. Nonetheless, these productions contain Hinduist god-based ideology. Therefore, the

thesis does not count them practicing Buddhist mediation in the television drama industry as well.

Meanwhile, another well-known Buddhist television production broadcast repeatedly in Thailand is a Japanese historical comedy anime series titled *Ikkyu-San* directed by Kimio Yabuki (Tangtawewattana 2001). The plot features the early life of the wise Zen Buddhist monk Ikkyu who has always tested his problem-solving approaches in a sit-com-like manner during his stay at Ankoku-ji Temple. Even though the production is well received by Thai readers of all ages, the thesis' interest in live-action television dramas restricts the inclusion of the anime series *Ikkyu-San* in the study.

Considering the situation of didactic Buddhist television dramas in the global market, fictional mediations of the Buddha's life story are limited by the lack of complete details of Buddha's biography in any Buddhist scriptures, especially during his life as a prince. The first time that Buddhism was recorded in a written form was at the Third Council, which was held in BCE 247, 236 years after Buddha's death (Thomas 2000, xix). After this, Buddhism expanded rapidly and developed into three primary factions of Buddhism: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The three schools further split into eighteen by the end of the second century after Buddha's death (Thomas 2000, xviii). Hence, the historical materials are fragmented. Sections of Buddha's personal life story first appeared in *Pali Sutta* and *Vinaya*. The earliest large-scale portrayal of the Theravada tradition's narrative was in the *Nidanakatha* (The Story of the Origins, fifth century CE). In Sanskrit alone, there are the *Mahavastu* (Great Story), which is the preface to the Lokottaravadin *Vinaya*; *Buddhacarita* (Acts of the Buddha); *Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya*; and the *Lalitavistara* (The Extensive Account of the Plays of the Bodhisattva) (He 2012, 1).

Furthermore, the prominent language during the time Buddha was alive was Magadhi. However, the present Scriptures are preserved and translated into other languages, such as Singhala, Burmese, Thai, Tibetan, and Chinese. To date, there is no agreement among scholars over dialect origination; therefore, fragmented events about Buddha's personal life are woven with new stories by commentators to create an extended narrative (Thomas 2000, xix). Representation through popular fiction generally

selects and simplifies those ideologies further to enforce specific issues for textual coherence.

In Thailand, where Buddhism is the state religion, we find debates concerning how to mediate Buddhism and the Buddha's biography in various media and styles of content creation. Conventionally, explicit conversations about Buddhist teachings in the Thai television industry are mediated through non-fiction approaches, in particular documentaries and doctrinal television programs. Thai television drama producers, therefore, can find creating strong religious television series challenging. Primarily, the producer needs to overcome the difficulties of embedding profound religious teachings into fictional entertainment without causing a popular audience to be bored by the didactic approach or creating offense over the act of *Saddharmapatirupaka*²³ (A Counterfeit of the True Dharma).²⁴ Also, in Thailand, profit-based television channels usually schedule marketing-driven television dramas in the primetime slots, as these are the most attractive shows for audiences and thus attract advertising revenue. Subsequently, despite the religious value of the cultic television series, television channels' business terms can make their creation hard for local producers.

Thai producers navigate potential criticism by making live-action films of well-known historical monks. Some examples of Thai Buddhism-driven biographical films include a Thai fantasy-adventure-drama film titled *Angulimala* (องคุลิมาล; Tunnirut, 2003), and a Thai drama film, titled *Krua Toh* (ขรัวโต อมตะเถระกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์; Ruenprapat, 2015). Other producers have used two-dimensional animations to display the Buddha's biography instead. Some examples of Thai animation films displaying the Buddha's biography are *The Life of Buddha* (พระพุทธเจ้า; Whattananarong, 2007) and *Thus I Have Heard* (พุทธศาสนา; National Buddhism Office, 2011).

Of all previous titles of the Buddha's biographical fictions produced in live-action film and animation given above, only *Little Buddha*, *Thus I Have Heard* and *Buddha is*

²³ *Saddharmapatirupaka Sutta* notes the Buddha's explanation about the five causes of the disappearance of the true Dharma: "Where the monks, nuns, male and female lay followers live without respect, without deference, for the Teacher. They live without respect, without deference for the dharma... for the Sangha... for the training... for concentration. These are the five downward-leading qualities that tend to the confusion and disappearance of the true dharma." SN 16.13 (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2005; 'สังฆกรรมปฏิรูปกสูตร' 2017).

²⁴ 'ทำไมไม่ค่อยมีหนังเกี่ยวกับพระพุทธเจ้าหลังตรัสรู้ (English: Why are there not many movies about the Buddha after enlightenment?)' 2015.

well recognised in Thailand. Discussing this, some members of the Thai web blog forum Pantip.com expressed their concern about the scarcity of the texts about the Buddha. One member said that:

I admit that mostly, they [Little Buddha, Thus Have I Heard and Buddha] are well made. The productions impress and provide us knowledge about the history of the Buddha until the enlightenment day when the Buddha was 35 years old. However, the vital thing of Buddhism took place after that. [...] If anyone would like to make another production, they can do it as a series, following the story of other interesting Buddhist disciples or the laypeople who attained the transcendence. (M.O., 2015)

Other members debate the idea that:

This is what I want to watch. Take the content in Suttas to make a movie. There should be someone who does it. It would be very interesting. Make it till the last episode – the final sermon. (M.N.7, 2015).

I think it is possible. Only not to be in a documentary or traditional Thai fashion. Make it in a style of normal people that we can touch. I want to see Rajgaha or Veruvana Monastery. I want to see the Buddha's routine. This is one of my dreams. (M.N., 2015).

It is very difficult to do. Production-makers, scriptwriters, and performers are inexperienced. It is seldom to dare use live performers. The direct narrative would be boring, but using symbols or personification may fall into a Dhamma reformation. It is very challenging. The negative consequences of presenting Dhamma reformation are severe. (Those who have some knowledge do not want to take the risk). [...] Like 'Thus Have I Heard' which has monks take care of the script by adhering to the Pathom Somphōthikathā. I think this production is the most complete in terms of content. But for the film value, I'm not sure. (C.T.R., 2015)

It is pitiful that no one dares to present the Dhamma essence at all. (L.P., 2015).

Note: Please note that throughout the thesis, all viewers quoted were assigned a pseudonym and all of the cited text has been translated by the researcher.

From the debate above, it represents the problems and conflicts that are yet to be resolved over the situation among local Thai audiences and production makers, despite the current advancement and potential of the Thai media industry. Since the consumers are aware of the content demand and the religious benefits, local content makers and a section of the audience are restrained, especially by the misunderstanding or the fear over negative karma over producing a text that involves *Saddhammapatirupaka* (a Counterfeit of the True Dhamma) if done without their profound knowledge and religious experience. *Saddhammapatirupaka Sutta* notes the Buddha's explanation about the five cases of the disappearance of the true Dhamma: '[...] where the monks, nuns, male and female lay followers live without respect, without deference, for the Teacher. They live without respect, without deference for the Dhamma... for the Sangha... for the Training... for concentration. These are the five downward-leading qualities that tend to the confusion and disappearance of the true Dhamma.' (SN 16.13, Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2005; “สัทธรรมปฏิจูปกสูตร” 2017). When interpreted by local Thai laypeople with limited profound contemplation and confirmation from respected Buddhist monks/institutes, the notion of ‘deference’ for the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the Buddhist training, and the meditation may be misunderstood and lead to criticism and self-restriction. It might also be because of the local practice of raising the Buddha, Buddhist arahants, and the Dhamma high apart from ordinary people.

It is known in Thai society that the unnecessary specialization of Buddhism causes a delusion among Thais and their actions (Taweesak 2011). The fear-based paradigm about the circulation of the dominant religion is closely tied with the belief of serious karma and communal sanction. The believed-to-be religious order restricts the local people's practice of democratic criticism, doctrinal contemplation, and a wider range of didactic productions of the dominant ideology in the entertainment industry.

On the other hand, some Thai drama production makers assert that the function of mainstream television drama is not direct religious teaching. For the prime-time television drama industry, popularisation and commercial revenue are the first priority for their duty. Besides, production makers humbly consider themselves as learners who have not achieved spiritual wisdom too. The self-claiming of insufficient understanding of the Dhamma to the level of doctrinal production navigates their production to a less explicit

representation of Buddhism. Consequently, more subtle moral embedding is commonly practiced to promote multiple values to the text and their profession (Jirabovornwisut 2019; “นักเขียนบทละครโทรทัศน์มือฉมัง ‘ยิ่งยศ ปัญญา’ (7-2-59)” 2016). When the local production is restricted as discussed above, foreign texts that reach those criteria are welcome.

Then, let us look at the situation of Buddhism-related television dramas in Thailand. This study took 578 samples of locally made Thai original television drama productions (excluding remakes and reruns) that aired between 1968 and 2020. Essentially, the study looked at the productions’ year of broadcasting, format, genre and dominant ideology. The resources for the data include the online streaming service titled Seesan TV, YouTube clips, official television websites and web blogs of the productions’ reviews and synopsis.

From 578 television drama samples, the study finds 12 television drama productions that explicitly deliver Buddhist teachings. The data show that the pedagogically mediated television dramas have the smallest share of the market compared to the implicit and semi-explicit mediated Buddhist television drama. Table 1.1 below reveals the production-based information of the Thai explicit Buddhism-based television dramas.

Table 1.1: Samples of the explicit Buddhist Thai television drama productions and genres released between 1968 and 2020

Years	Title	Drama fantasy	Horror	Investigation	Social drama	Drama	Biographical drama	Comedy
Series								
1968-1970, 1977	พิภพมัจจุราช (<i>Pipop Majuraj</i>)	✓						✓
1986	เปรต (<i>Pret</i>)	✓	✓			✓		
1987	เพลิงบาปจอมทมิฬ (องค์ลีมาล) (<i>Pluerng Bap Jom Tamil</i>)						✓	
2000	เจ้ากรรมนายเวร (<i>Chaokam Nai Vera</i>)	✓	✓	✓		✓		
2000	หลวงตา (<i>Luangta</i>)				✓			
2003	เปรตวัดสุทัศน์ (<i>Pret Wat Sutat</i>)	✓	✓			✓		
2003	พุทธานุภาพ					✓		

Years	Title	Drama fantasy	Horror	Investigation	Social drama	Drama	Biographical drama	Comedy
	<i>(Buddhanupab)</i>							
1982, 1987, 2000, 2014, 2018	เงา <i>(Ngao)</i>	✓				✓		
2015	หลวงพี่ดิจิทัล <i>(Luang Pi Digital)</i>					✓		✓
2020	เงาบุญ <i>(Ngao Boon)</i>	✓	✓			✓		
Mini-series								
2010–2020	หลวงตามหาชน <i>(Luangta Manachon)</i>				✓			✓
Sitcom								
2009–2011	หลวงพี่มาแล้ว <i>(Luang Pi Malaew)</i>					✓		✓

The data in Table 1.1 shows that throughout the period 1968 to 2020, the explicit Buddhist television drama has played a part in the market in three forms: primetime television series, daytime mini-series, and daytime sitcoms. The didactic Buddhist television series often symbolises sections of Buddhist doctrines using the genres of fantasy drama, horror, social drama and drama. Meanwhile, the self-contained daytime mini-series combines social drama and comedy genre to deliver dharma (Buddhist doctrines) with a sense of humour. Notably, explicit Buddhist television series are infrequently shown in primetime slots. Instead, the less commerce-driven daytime drama schedule allows a space for the more religious-oriented programs.

However, the airing time of mini-series programs varies, resulting in inconvenience for the audiences to follow particular shows. Importantly, less marketing-driven television dramas have encountered budget-cutting or program cancelling due to television channels' economic struggle caused by the reduced popularity of television in the multi-screen era (NBTC 2019) and the pandemic COVID-19 lockdowns and ongoing spreading (Nielsen Television Advancement Measurement in Kokkamhaeng and Laorrojwong 2020). For example, in early 2021, there were no new productions of explicit Buddhist television drama have been broadcast. Subsequently, fans of this type of show have to re-watch local programs on Internet-based platforms.

Despite the day-time television program titled *ฟ้ามีตา* (English: *Fah-Mee-Ta*) (2007-present) significantly plots on the notion of karma, the thesis categorizes the program as a semi-explicit television drama. It is because its textual representation orients on lay people's learning about the consequence of their immoral acts in a less doctrinal manner. Chapter Two will discuss the Thai semi-explicit Buddhist television drama and how the local television industry players negotiate their understanding of Buddhism with other conflicting socio-cultural ideologies (e.g., patriarchy, bourgeois ideology, Thai-Chinese family values) and the other co-operating beliefs in Thailand such as Animism, Shamanism, and Hinduism in their daily life.

While the locally-made explicit Buddhist television drama is in decline, in the period 2015 to 2020, the Thai dubbed version of the long-form Indian television drama series *Buddha* (Sham 2013) provided a different viewing experience for Thai people. The series proved the religious television drama's value by achieving record ratings in primetime. The unparalleled success of *Buddha* in Thailand makes it a significant text through which to analyse the production's strategies of embedding Buddhism into popular fiction.

However, the original series is in Hindi and there are many representations of Indian culture and entertainment embedded in the series. The *Buddha* series was introduced to Panya Nirunkul, the executive of Workpoint Entertainment Co., Ltd. after his pilgrimage to India. According to his and his executive team's personal religious belief and interest in the series, they decided to purchase the broadcast rights and conducted a careful textual adjustment for Thai viewing as a religious practice ('พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก: มหาภคพยากรณ์ ละครซีรีส์ ตอน 2' 2015). The decision made Workpoint TV the first distributor of the series in 2015 in primetime.

The excitement upon the text and their faithful dedication to supporting the religion established a healthy production team for translation, dubbing, editing, and ending song. All the production work conducted by the Thai post-production team was to create a religious mood into the text while suiting broadcasting conditions. By tailoring the text to Thai Buddhist taste and accessibility, the series achieved national recognition, with a relatively high rating at 3.79.²⁵

²⁵ 'แฟนพันธุ์แท้ | พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก | 26 ก.ย. 58 | ตอนแรก (English: True Fans | The Buddha | 26 Sep 2015 | 1st Episode)' 2015.

The decent rating and the audience's feedback encouraged him to rerun the series soon after the first airing. Panya emphasized in his talk in 2015 that the text is an effective religious mediation for the mass audience. The series' discourse simplification and other aesthetic representations (e.g., the cast, their performance, and other visual attraction) engage the audience to learn more about the creed.

Later, in 2016-2017, the True4U network bought the copyright and aired the series in the evening. The network noted the return of the series and underlined the additional features that differentiate the current telecast from other previous ones ('ซีรีส์ พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก เริ่ม 7 กันยายนนี้ - True4U ช่อง 24' 2017, 24). Those different elements include the newly designed title image, the special program appendix by Netchanok Wipatasilapin, the executive of True4U Station Co, Ltd., and discourse analysis of each episode by a well-known Thai monk filmed during a pilgrimage trip in Nepal and India ('ตามรอยพระพุทธเจ้า อินเดียถึงเนปาล "พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก" 2016; 'ซีรีส์ พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก เริ่ม 7 กันยายนนี้ - True4U ช่อง 24' 2017). After that, Channel 13 bought the copyright and aired the series in 2018. More recently, Workpoint TV re-purchased the rights and telecast the series again in early 2020 during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Thailand. Despite the several reruns in the country since 2015, the series was the most viewed international television drama in 2020. The highest rating was at 2.48 (TV Digital Watch 2020). The ongoing popularity of the series in Thailand since 2015 has proved the value of the series, the local audience's interest in the religion, and the importance of the localisation.

The textual analysis in the chapter below focuses on important relevant questions. What explicit religious content are Thai audiences seeking at the present time that local television dramas do not yet offer? What role do networks and social media play?

Understanding Buddhism's mediation via the biographical drama series and its impacts on Thai viewers requires comprehension of the series' context. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, the study will investigate the series' didactic storytelling strategies, localisation and transmedia exercised in Thailand. In the audience analysis, the study argues that the series' significant impacts on Thai and regional audiences did not occur only in the first airing or rerun period. Public awareness flourished after its release through para-textual extensions created by the local distributor, other professional producers of other television channels and, especially, the audience.

PART I: Textual analysis

The textual analysis in the chapter will examine the series' narrative strategies to mediate Buddhist doctrines through the biographical drama, enhanced plot, characterisation and pedagogical dialogue. The findings of the textual analysis part will answer the following research question.

RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?

This study's analytical investigation begins by understanding the historical conditions of telling the Buddha's biography. This research also looks at the producers' intention, as expressed in relevant data sources such as interviews in news reports, marketing clips and web blogs. Next, the analysis involves content and narrative analysis of the original Hindi version with English subtitles viewed on Netflix and the Thai dubbed version viewed on Seesaa TV. Here, the study took in-depth notes to investigate the series' narrative construction (genre, plot, doctrinal embedment strategies, characterisation, and dialogue) and audio-visual representation (performance, audio-visual elements and editing) to discover the depth and the breadth of the narrative and the textual localisation. This study performed a granular close sequence and doctrine breakdown (The Eightfold Path, see Appendix) to understand the religious communication strategies and the articulation of Buddhist teachings in the series. After this was done, the researcher examined the trans- and cross-media components of this series as a Thai television event, such as documentaries, talk shows, game shows, web blogs, and more, to map collective mediation about the Buddha and his teachings in the Thai media industry.

I. Background to the series

Buddha (2013) is an Indian long-form biographical television series, comprising 54 episodes, plus one special episode (approximately 55 hours in total length). It is explicit in its engagement with Buddhism, manifesting the Buddha's whole spiritual journey and practice until his death. The dharma delivery covers almost half of the whole series' length (from episode 34 to episode 54). The original version was performed in Hindi and telecast in India in 2013 on Zee TV and a government-owned television channel, Doordarshan,

on weekends. The series has been distributed in other countries and, more recently, on Netflix with English subtitles for a broader global market.

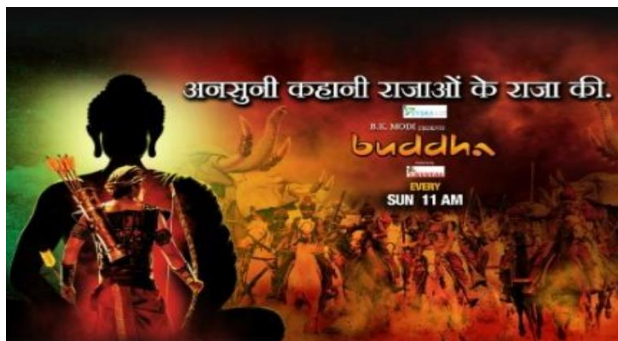


Fig. 1.1: A promotion page of the original Indian version of *Buddha*
Source: <https://YouTubehindivideos.com/buddha-serial-episodes>²⁶
(Accessed on 19/5/2021)

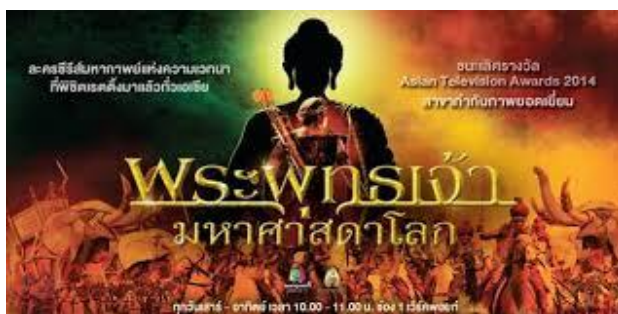


Fig. 1.2: A promotion page of the Thai dubbed version of *Buddha*
Source: <https://www.siamhahe.com> (Accessed on 21/10/2109)

The producer, B. K. Modi, presented the Buddha's biography in a long-form television series format in order to manifest a wide range of Buddhist principles ('Buddha Is a Global Subject: B.K. Modi' 2013). He aimed to make the series an apparatus for Buddhist propagation and global peace-making.²⁷ This resulted in a didactic television series. The series utilises critical features of biographical narratives, such as humanising the Buddha to present him as a man who spiritually evolved until becoming a supreme awakener (Kottary 2013). Therefore, it omits almost all magical elements mentioned in some traditional Buddhist literature.²⁸

²⁶ Site Admin 2020.

²⁷ 'Buddha Is a Global Subject: B.K. Modi' 2013; 'Making of Buddha' 2013; 'Buddha - The King of Kings Will Impress Youth the Most, Says Producer' 2013; Yangchen 2014; Kane 2018.

²⁸ Thomas 2000; He 2012; Nanamoli 2001; Piyadassi Thera 1982.

Due to the lack of evidential references of the Buddha's early life, the series integrated biographical drama with newly developed characters and situations. The new narrative displays a socio-political context to rationalise the Buddha's worldview. Such historical context involves political regimes and political insecurity; the rise of traders' negotiation power to the royal institution; the caste system, discrimination, and injustice; and existing religious tradition of extremity and animal sacrifice (Payutto 2012, 2–3). The fictionalisation, however, resulted in a serious dispute.

In India, the series raised substantial public controversy by introducing the idea that the Buddha is another avatar version of a Brahman god. Additionally, a section of the audience disagreed with the invention of familial relationships and the questionable historical basis of events and characters. Petitioners Samta Sainik Dal and Bharat Leni Sanvardhan Samiti urged the Bombay High Court to order broadcast determination accusing the producer of the series, the producer of the Zee Group and the storywriter of the negative sentimental impact on the Buddhist audience.²⁹ Although there was no substantial evidence to conclude the debate, some sections of the Indian audience doubted the series' credibility, so it did not meet their expectations. Hence, the spiritual involvement and the projection of identity led them to regard the show as no more than fiction. However, to a certain extent, the legal case and controversy increased the public's interest in the series.

II. Narrative analysis

This section will contemplate the vital blueprint of the series and identify the textual strategies that have made the series a thriving success in the Thai media market. The textual analysis will investigate genre, plot, the strategies of embedding Buddhist teachings in the fictional narration, characterisation, and pedagogical dialogue.

i. Biographical drama

Following the producer's aim to present Buddhism through the experience of the man who became the founder of Buddhism, the biographical genre was employed as a tool to tell the story in a realistic way. The series is narrated in a linear, omniscient, and closed perspective to frame the audience's reading experience within the Buddha-oriented world

²⁹ "BUDDHA" Serial to Kill Buddhism' 2013; 'Plea to Take TV Serial on Buddha off the Air' 2014.

without confusion. However, to engage the audience throughout its episodic distribution, the content is represented in a dramatic performance style, punctuated with Buddhist doctrines' explicit teachings throughout the series.

ii. Plot

The plot of the series follows the Buddha's life stages from his birth until his death. The narrative arc of the series is divided into three main acts. The first act is during Prince Siddhartha's childhood and shows his family life until his renouncement (episodes 1–27). The second act is the shortest of the three, and it reveals his spiritual search until enlightenment (episodes 27–34). The last act shows his teaching journey after enlightenment until his death (episodes 34–54). Each act carries ethical illustrations, progressively embedding Buddhist teachings into the final two episodes, which have the highest degree of didactic text in the show.

In its depiction of the life of the Buddha, the plot unfolds the progress of Buddhist practice from household morality, conducting a religious quest, to achieving and sharing the experience with others. The plot execution is similar to a historical practice commonly conducted in the ancient Indian time, called *Asramas* (The Four Stages of Life), which consists of *Brahmacharin* (studying), *Grihastha* (having a family), *Vanaprastha* (separation to forest), and *Sannyasin* (spiritual quest) (Saksena 1970, 46–47).

The series' religious message is constructed within the framework of the Eightfold Path, which is the principal practice of Buddhism. In the first act, where Buddhism has not been found, the narrative demonstrates characters' suffering and struggles to cease the problems with existing beliefs, the misuse of political power and superstitious rituals. The sequence and doctrine-based analysis in Table 1.2 shows how the series' first three episodes address the socio-political context of the ancient period and characters' chaotic problem-solving.

Table 1.2: Narrative sequences and dharma embedded in the series *Buddha* episodes 1, 2 and 3

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
1/1	King Suddhodana and his troop return victorious.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1/2	King Suddhodana, Maha Maya and Maha Pajapati are desperate to have a child.	x	x				x	x	x
1/3	Mangala and Dronadhan plan to make their son the next king.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
1/4	Performance of an oblation rite and Maha Maya conceives.	x	x		x		x	x	x
1/5	Maha Pajapati treats Maha Maya well during her pregnancy.	●	●	●	●		●		
1/6	Efforts of Mangala and Dronadhan to murder Maha Maya.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
1/7	Siddhartha is born at Lumbini grove.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2/1	Siddhartha is named Prince Siddhartha Gautama. The royal priests offer fortune telling as the only the way to please King Suddhodana.	x	x	x				x	x
2/3	Maha Maya dies and King Suddhodana suffers from his loss. He ignores Siddhartha.	x	x	x	x			x	x
2/4	Maha Pajapati becomes queen and Siddhartha's foster mother.	●	●		●		●		
2/5	Asita predicts that Siddhartha will be the Buddha. King Suddhodana strongly objects to the foreseeing.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
3/1	Mangala and Dronadhan have hope for their son if Siddhartha leaves the throne.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
3/2	King Suddhodana becomes extremely paranoid about the prediction and seeks advice from the royal priest Vachaspati.	x	x	x	x			x	x

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
3/3	Mangala expresses her intimate desire to King Suddhodana (and the throne) but gets rejected.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
3/4	King Suddhodana corrupts the state council to establish the 'New City' to accommodate the aged, the ill and the Prince's death.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3/5	People are separated from their families by force.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3/6	Siddhartha is eight years old. He has compassion for all creatures.				•	•			

Key: • = practice, x = misconduct, - = neutral

The data shown in Table 1.2 suggest that throughout the first three episodes, the plot is driven chiefly by wrongdoers through their moral misconduct. The series stresses that when characters have poor intentions, verbal and physical actions often follow. In comparison to *all* other previous films about the Buddha listed earlier where political conflicts were absent, this series, conversely, amplifies political issues such as the misuse of power, corruption and afflictions caused by socio-political injustice.

Then throughout episodes 4 to 27, the narrative stresses the familial and socio-political disorders practised in the historical period and the complex conflicts Prince Siddhartha encounters. Such conflicts in the series can be categorised into three significant types: personal conflicts; communal conflicts (familial discord); and institutional conflicts (encroaching faith-based tradition, social inequity and political collision). The series demonstrates characters' actions and their consequences in a clear way without ambiguity. That is, the series constructs the plot to show that those who conduct a proper living and offer generosity to others generally have a more balanced life. They are also peaceful, loved and respected. In contrast, those who conduct misdeeds experience chaotic results, such as personal distress (for example, having a restless mind, unhappiness, guilt and physical punishment), others' affliction and a community disorder.

The narrative also highlights characters' suffering through melodramatic acting. The use of melodramatisation helps to boost emotional involvement with the audience and enhance the morality-oriented message (Zarzosa 2013; Mercer and Shingler 2004; Kaplan 1993). The function of melodramatisation in television drama will be discussed more in Chapter Two.

Towards the end of act one, the series uses the intense plot and several types of conflicts to underline that no matter how luxurious a prince's life might seem, the problem-solving employed by the show's protagonist is insufficient to cease household, political and spiritual restlessness. Ultimately, the audience will see Siddhartha make the inevitable choice to seek his path for enlightenment. This turning point's resolution shows the now more peaceful Siddhartha adjusting himself to the new journey and his family's struggle to cope with their loss.

The series' newly added multiple events follow the concept of contextualism mode of explanation which is often found in historical drama (White 1973). The variety of additional events offers opportunities to construct the protagonist's context of his renouncement of his family, new-born child and the throne which many contemporary audiences may question his family-based responsibility. More discussion about the operation of contextualism and its effects to the audience's reception will be in Chapter Three.

iii. The strategies of embedding Buddhist teachings in the fictional narration

The textual analysis shows that the plot and subplots in the first act (episode 1–27) juxtapose the leading characters' actions and their consequences following the notions of The Three Unwholesome Roots (The Three Akusalamula; greed, hatred and delusion) and The Wholesome Roots (Kusala Mula; non-greed, non-hatred and wisdom) (D.III.275; It.45 in Payutto 2016, 84).

The second act (episodes 27–34) addresses the three types of knowledge-gaining approaches called The Three Wisdom³⁰ (Payutto 2016, 96; 2012, 59–61) and The Four

³⁰ The Three Wisdom consists of *Sutamayapañña* wisdom resulting from the study of knowledge passed on from others; *Cintāmayapañña*, wisdom resulting from reflection and consideration; and *Bhāvanāmayapañña*, wisdom resulting from individual's direct mental development and practice (Payutto 2016, 96; 2012, 59–61).

Paths of Accomplishment³¹ (The Four Iddhipada) through the spiritual journey of the character Siddhartha until enlightenment. Such implementation stresses the importance of an individual's passion, determination, perseverance, assessment and research until they finally accomplish their goal. At this stage of the narrative, the enlightenment marks the third turning points of the series.

The third act runs through episodes 34 to 54, conveying dharma ideas and applying Buddhism into the everyday lives of laypeople, Buddhist monks and nuns. The third act's dramatic climax is in episode 50, when the sinful King Ajatasattu spiritually surrenders to Buddhism and the Buddha's lifelong antagonist Devadatta dies. The final plot point is the Buddha's announcement of his death in episode 52. This point moves the narrative to denouncement. Throughout this relatively short section, episodes 52–54, the narrative is intensely doctrine-driven with limited conflict. The importance of social revolution for equality, non-discrimination and non-violent strategies are underlined throughout this section. Table 1.3 below describes the climax sequences and denouement of the third act of the series.

Table 1.3: Narrative sequences and dharma embedded in the series *Buddha* in episodes 50–53

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
50/1	Sariputta and Moggallana explain to monks about Devadatta's false claim of his new Buddhist approach.			•	•				
50/2	Monks begin to see the point and decide to return to the Buddha's monastery.	•			•				

³¹ The Four Paths of Accomplishment (The Four Iddhipada) is composed of Chanda (aspiration); Viriya (perseverance); Citta (active thought; dedication); and 4) Vimamsa (examination; reasoning) (D.III.221; Vbh.216., Payutto 2016, 160).

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
50/3	Devadatta comes back from visiting his dying mother and finds that all disciples have left him.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50/4	Devadatta goes insane and severely punishes himself. Devadatta decides to murder the Buddha.	x	x		x		x	x	x
50/5	After the departure of Amrapali, Ajatasattu finds peace from a Buddhist monk.				•				
50/6	Ajatasattu offers his crown to the Buddha.	•	•	•					
50/7	The Buddha returns the crown to Ajatasattu and guides him to self-forgiveness and spiritual liberation.	•	•	•	•				
50/8	Ajatasattu surrenders himself to be a Buddhist layman.	•	•	•	•				
50/9	Devadatta asks Ajatasattu for troops with which to attack the Buddha's monastery but gets rejected. He decides to murder the Buddha himself.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
50/10	Devadatta's attempts to kill the Buddha in the forest but fails.	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
50/11	The Buddha meets a Brahmin who repeatedly puts himself to a cold river to cleanse his sins. He suggests the man Kalama Sutta (advice on considering a doctrine).	•	•	•	•				
50/12	Devadatta rolls a huge rock down the hill to kill Buddha but falls himself and becomes fatally injured.	x	x		x		x	x	x
50/13	Devadatta repents. The Buddha forgives him then Devadatta dies.	•	•	•	•			•	

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
51/1	The Buddha sets the Pavarana Day of praying for parents.		•		•				
51/2	Rajguru objects to the Buddha's missing explanation about metaphysic subjects. Ajatasattu addresses the non-importance of those questions concerning the cessation of suffering.	X	X		X				
		•	•	•	•	•	•		
51/3	The Buddha visits the dying Sudatta.		•	•	•	•		•	
51/4	Magadha soldiers are absent from work. They object to using violence to protect merchants.	X	X		X	•	X		
51/5	Sariputta leaves the Buddha for his unwell mother.		•	•	•	•			
51/6	Ajatasattu seeks advice from the Buddha about making collaboration agreements with Brahmins concerning civil administration.	•	•	•	•	•	•		
51/7	Brahmins reject following Buddha's problem-solving rules. There is a report about the traders' damage caused by soldiers' duty omission.	X	X		X				
51/8	The Buddha guides Ajatasattu about the middle path of non-violence and justice duties. The Buddha tells Ajatasattu a metaphoric story of a harmless snake.	•	•	•	•	•			
52/1	Moggallana is murdered during his meditation and goes to nirvana.							•	•
52/2	The funeral of Moggallana is held.				•				
52/3	The Buddha teaches laypeople.			•	•	•			
52/4	Sariputta passes away.							•	
52/5	The Buddha teaches Ananda about death and Tathagata.	•	•	•	•				

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
52/6	The Buddha announces his parinirvana (death) date.	•		•				•	
52/7	The Buddha gives the last preaching at Gutakal, Mahawan Forest, Vishali.			•	•	•			
52/8	The Buddha answers four questions about Buddhism.	•	•	•					
52/9	Ananda recalls about the Lotus Sutra. ³²							•	
53/1	The Buddha bids farewell to Ajatasattu on the way to Pawa.	•		•	•				
53/2	The Buddha preaches Cunda's family.			•	•	•			
53/3	The Buddha has the last meal from Cunda.	•			•				
53/4	Buddha falls very sick on the way. He asks Ananda to bring him some clean water.				•		•		
53/5	The Buddha and disciples arrive at Kusinara.						•		
53/6	The Buddha teaches four monks in meditation.			•	•				•
54/1	The Buddha grants Suphada attendance and ordination.	•		•	•	•	•		
54/2	The Buddha gives the last teaching.	•	•	•	•		•	•	
54/3	The Buddha attains parinirvana (death).							•	•
54/4	Buddhist disciples hold the cremation of the Buddha.				•				
	The eight kings argue and claim the rights of Buddha's relics.	X	X	X	X		X	X	

³² The Lotus Sutra is a religious classic of the most essential and popular doctrine in the Mahayana tradition (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica 2019).

Ep/ Sq.	Key actions	The Eightfold Path							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Right Understanding	Right Thought	Right Speech	Right Action	Right Livelihood	Right Effort	Right Mindfulness	Right Concentration
	Dona Brahman offers judgment.	•	•	•	•	•			
54/5	Voice-over of the Buddha comforts Ananda and encourages him to practice Buddhism mindfully.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Key: • = practice, x = misconduct, - = neutral

The data shows that the last three episodes deliver substantial teachings. The producer constructively covers all of the Eightfold Path elements by gradually increasing the intensity and variety of discourses from the beginning to the end of the series. At the end of the story, the producer encourages the audience who might feel lost after the Buddha's death to practice Buddhism with confidence, mindfulness and perseverance. In addition to that, producer B. K. Modi adds a special episode giving a speech directly to the audience. In the special episode, he highlights the series' essential discourses, such as non-violence, death and good governance.

iv. Characterisation

In a paradigm of narratology, characterisation is required to give credibility to the characters and their actions (Mittell 2015, 118). However, Asian dramas tend to use stereotypical characterisations for ethical demonstrations (Dissanayake 2012). Essentially, the construction of characters aims to create factors of the text that influence the relatedness between the character and the viewer. The factors include the transfer of perspective, the viewer's sensational inclination toward the character, and evaluation of characters in the text (Fotis Jannidis 2009 in Hühn et al. 2009, 15).

Considering the transfer of perspective, mythological characters are personified abstractions as divinised heroes against those who are shown to be their opposite to provide societal feelings of repression (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 428–29). In biographical storytelling, the character Buddha explicitly represents the Buddhist perspective, which pro-Buddhist viewers share. The respect for the real Buddha allows sensational inclinations to the character Buddha with limited effort. Likewise, previous knowledge of

the real Buddha's life journey supports a section of the pro-Buddhist audience's sense-making of the series' newly added subplots and the characters' interaction with the situations.

Following the religious objective of *Buddha*, all characters in the series perform moral functions. The Buddha, who is the main character of the series, is characterised in a non-conventional dramatic manner. He represents an ordinary man who evolves through his constant learning and self-assessment. This main character does not offer emotional engagement with the plot's events or other characters but rather performs as a model of consciousness and wisdom. Therefore, the series' worldly drive is run by other supporting characters who have not yet gained spiritual awakening. The symbolic construction of supporting and secular characters is generally closed and melodramatic to bring out the serenity of the Buddha and other enlightened characters.

An example of a supporting character is King Shuddhodana (the father of the Buddha), who represents those who struggle to balance social and personal expectations. Notwithstanding, he is a trainable person and learns to improve his virtue and duty performance through the Buddha's guidance. Maha Pajapati (or Prajapati, the aunt and stepmother of Prince Siddhartha) is a favourable woman character who can tactfully balance her roles for her family and herself with compassion, intelligence and articulation. In contrast, the fictional characters Mangala and Dronadhan (the aunt and uncle of the Buddha) represent the causation of ill wills, wrongdoings and negative consequences. The text intentionally asserts the influence of parents' attitudes and behaviours on their children. However, the historical King Ajatasattu represents a temperamental person who commits a crime due to his immaturity and others' incitement. Nevertheless, he eventually surrenders to the Buddha and rectifies himself. Finally, Prince Devadatta, a historical character and antagonist to the Buddha, is characterised to be the Buddha's opposite in all senses. His story illustrates the consequences of misperception and evil deeds. However, despite a series of crimes committed by him, the series indicates that he is a man who can repent and be forgiven.

From the main characters' brief characterisation and moral functions described in the previous paragraph, it is vital to note that the production utilises the Pali canon and principle historical characters to structure the plot-driven narrative. This employment is

central to the construction of the series' emphasis on the ideological cultivation of deeds and consequences. The use of historical characters promotes the credibility of the religious message and inspires public interest in the content. However, while the real characters increase the narrative's depth, they also restrict the new production's interpretation. The audience's expectation of particular characters can be a considerable challenge to meet, especially the Buddha character, who is regarded as a man with outstanding faculties. The pro-Buddhist audience's serious objection to the series' historical accuracy and religious hegemony (in particular, that the series notes that the Buddha is an avatar of the Brahman god) caused considerable controversy.

On top of that, the original title song in Hindi confuses the audience of its credibility as it clearly states in the first two sentences that 'Satya Katha, Purusharth Katha. Suno Suno Sidharth Katha' - meaning 'A true story, a story of human pursuit. Listen, listen to the story of Sidharth. In this case, if such unfamiliar subplots and characters may exist in a local interpretation of Buddhist scripture, but are unknown to other groups of Buddhist learners in India and other countries, the claim of its truth seems to be unconvincing.

The series *Buddha* is another case that reveals positives and negatives concerning its biographical fiction-making. While the biographical series faces challenges associated with reproduction and criticism about some fictionalisation of the Buddha's biography, the series' plotting and characterisation greatly benefit from the biographical references and supporting historical resources too. Existing references and knowledge about the Buddha and the religion reinforce the audience's meaning-making of the series' mediation of Buddhism. However, misleading fictionalisation of religion-based discourse and characterisation with insufficient para-texts to support the reading of the series may result in confusion and disagreement for the audience.

v. Pedagogical dialogue

Buddha pays particular attention to political discourse and Buddhist sermons more than any other socio-cultural matters. However, the structures of the two ideological dialogues are dissimilar. Following the producer's stated aim of making the series a tool for peace-making, the representations of political debate are intense in many scenes.

An example of this is a conversation between King Suddhodana (the father of Prince Siddhartha) and his ministers in episode 3. The meeting is held in a secret palace

when King Suddhodana decides to persuade all members of the Shakya convention to build the New City in another part of the state to accommodate those who are poor, aged, ill and dying. King Suddhodana firstly convinces others by making a false claim about the health benefits for the populace. Later, when there is disagreement, King Suddhodana shifts to forcefulness to take complete control and proceed with the project for his personal benefit.

King: *We won't be unjust to them. In return, we will give them a comfortable life. We will send them to a place where the sick will be treated. The poor will get food. The aged will be respected. We will achieve our objective and serve the people at the same time.*

Minister: *[...] Where do we move so many people? Besides, they should leave willingly.*

King: *I will convince them.*

Minister: *What if they refuse?*

Commander Sumant: *We will force them to leave. Everyone bows to the power of the weapon.*

King: *We will build a health colony and a new city on the other side of the mountain. People will get everything there.*

Minister: *We can't make such a huge decision ourselves. We have to call the convention of the Shakyas.*

King: *Persuade them, reward them, punish them or divide them. Do everything you can to clear the proposal. I won't let Siddhartha become an ascetic.*

On another day, King Suddhodana quickly talks with his close generals before entering the Shakya official convention meeting:

King: *After I address the meeting, the proposal should be passed unanimously.*

Minister(s): *Rest assured, Your Majesty.*

All of them have been made to see the reason.

Some accepted the gold coins.

Others were forced into it.

There is no opposition.

Everything will happen as per your wishes.

(English subtitles of the series in Netflix, episode 3)

Notably, the political talk contains not only characters' speech but also encompasses a range of political irony that the audience might find referential to local politics. However, despite some debate about how to apply Buddhist ideas in civil governance, many political conflicts in the series are left unresolved.

Broadly, the series employed a non-conventional discourse to what is generally practised in mainstream television drama storytelling, the production ambitiously applied all Buddhist communication strategies performed by the Buddha: preaching, having a conversation, gradual instruction, and explanation in a range of situations (Anderson 1994).³³

The analysis reveals that the preaching technique was used to convey the principal doctrines of Buddhism.³⁴ The practices of the Eightfold Path was noted in the conversation in the series through all episodes. Likewise, gradual instruction underlined general understanding for appropriate life conduct.³⁵ Meanwhile, the explanation approach supported everyday interests.³⁶ The explanation strategy was also used to answer questions about Buddhism, such as the three elements to achieve freedom of mind (morality, meditation and wisdom); negativism of Buddhism (seeing life suffering); an accusation of making young people ordained; and the conflict between non-violence

³³ Buddhist strategies of communication: *desana*: preaching, *katha*: conversation, *anupubbikatha*: gradual instruction, and *vyakarana*: explanation/ analysis (Anderson 1994).

³⁴ Those teachings include 1) the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, 2) detachment, 3) moral kingship, 4) three good deeds and the Advice for Considering a Doctrine (the Kalama Sutta), 5) *the Four Sublime States of Mind and Right Thought* (a part of *the Eightfold Path*), 6) *the Sikkha* (the Threefold Training: morality, concentration and wisdom), *the Eightfold Path*, and *the Kalama Sutta*, 7) *the Three Akusalamula* (the Unwholesome Roots of Evil Acts), 8) *the Four Sangahavatthu and the 38 Highest Blessings (Mangala Blessings)*, 9) *the Tilakkhana* (the Three Characteristics: declination is the nature of all existence) and *the Right Mindfulness*, and 10) *the Tilakkhana* (the Three Characteristics of things: i) *Aniccata*: impermanence; transiency, ii) *Dukkata*: state of suffering or being oppressed, and iii) *Anattata*: soullessness; state of being not-self) (S.IV.1; Dh.277–9 in Payutto 2016: 89).

³⁵ The general understanding of decent life conduct includes notions of karma and consequence, morality, religion, the middle path, death, awakening, and peace of mind.

³⁶ The everyday interests discussed in the series include such subjects as sin and self-made redemption, woman's beauty and aggregates of perception, karma and consequences, an unwholesome roots and solution, advice on considering a doctrine, spirit and reincarnation, and definitions of love.

policy and duty. Another audio approach at the end of the series was a voice-over of the Buddha character, noting Buddhism and the Buddha's existence.

Below is an example of dialogue that follows the conversation mode of the Buddha's religious communication. It is a talk between the Buddha and Sanjay in episode 38.

Sanjay: *The day my students became your disciples, I was eager to meet you. [...] What have you learned? What are your principles? I personally do not believe in any principles.*

The Buddha: *[...] Do you believe that you are a non-believer?*

Sanjay: *You are just playing with words.*

The Buddha: *No, your mind is playing with you.*

Sanjay: *It doesn't matter whether I'm a believer or a non-believer. I just asked you what your principles are.*

The Buddha: *If any person holds onto one principle, then he loses his freedom. He becomes a fundamentalist. He feels that only his principles are right. That only his belief is true and that everything else is false. When the freedom of thought dies, one thought takes over. The person becomes narrow-minded. That is where conflict and struggle begin. (Sanjay thinks along.)*

[...] My views are built from experience. It can neither be held on to nor can it be worshipped. You can say that my wisdom is akin to a boat. It can be used to cross the river. But after crossing the river, we do not carry the boat with us.

Sanjay: *I feel like bowing my head before you. But there is still a feeling that is holding me back.*

The Buddha: *There are three types of feelings: happy, sad, and neutral. The roots of the three feelings are in our body and mind. Feelings rise like waves, and then they die down on their own. I suggest looking deep into the rising feelings. Understand and know them. Where are they originating from? Be it a happy feeling or a sad feeling, just see where it is emerging from. When you go to its root, you*

will find that there is emptiness there – an emptiness like the blue sky. The sky is no doubt empty, but it is engulfing everything inside it.

Sanjay: *Just like a blanket.*

The Buddha: *Continue learning. [...] If you go deeper, you will find what your faults were. That you had given importance to trivial worldly, mortal things. Ignorance is the root of all disparity. [...] Ignorance cannot be cured by rituals, fasting, sacrifices, or meditation. You were in a deep sleep for really long, Sanjay. Wake up. Rise. Understand yourself.*

Sanjay (falls on his knees): *You are a mirror, Buddha. For the first time in life, after listening to you, I saw my beliefs being proved wrong. I will not lead a life of a blind person anymore. Please accept me as your disciple. I go to the Buddha for refuge. I go to the Dharma for refuge. I go to the Sangha for refuge.*

The Buddha raises his hand as a sign of acceptance. The scene ends.

(English subtitles of the series in Netflix, episode 38)

The example above shows that the series' pedagogical dialogue conveys a long, didactic and propagating message to the audience. Usually, the conversation progresses from challenging or questioning the Buddha, followed by debating, then following and surrendering. Towards the end of teaching scenes, the participation often ends with the other character's admittance of their previous false perception compared to the current enlightened moment after gaining new understanding. Then the talk finalises by summarising the other character's problem and suggesting an action. In the example above, the Buddha says to Sanjay – "*You were in a deep sleep for really long, Sanjay. Wake up. Rise. Understand yourself.*" Afterwards, the taught character shows surrendering gestures (for example, kneeling, putting hands together, bowing, crying, putting down weapons on the ground) before announcing their undertaking of Buddhism as spiritual refuge. Other constructions of the religious feeling in the scene include an increased volume of voice-over chanting with music, the delighted facial expressions of all characters and a close-up shot of the Buddha's gently smiling face.

It is important to note that the religious teachings dialogue has a self-contained pattern – it begins and concludes in the same scene. Delivering religious dogma leaves no ambiguity for another episode. The dialogue construction reflects the producer's strategy to make the series a propagating tool for the religion, displaying the creed in episodic routine similar to a mini film ('Buddha Is a Global Subject: B.K. Modi' 2013). Essentially, the series follows the Buddhist scripture and historical characters to construct doctrinal scenes and dialogue. According to the series' substantial doctrines and the targeted youth audience, the use of simple language is another fundamental strategy to help the audience understand the teachings.

The findings suggest that despite the intensive weight of the religious messages, the series challenges the conventional forms of religious mediation on popular television and appeals to audiences. Each part of the text is threaded with Buddhist structures of practice and elucidates its details. The Buddhist principles, which are the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, are simplified and applied firmly throughout the whole text in a range of techniques. Therefore, this uniqueness of the narrative and the level of dharma illustration are crucially distinctive features of this series and its religious values for pro-Buddhism audience.

The intertextual allusion for reconstructing the belief-oriented text in a newer long-form television drama series requires richer plots and unique details than documentaries and films. The richer text may attract and maintain the audience's interest throughout the series' length and periodic broadcasting. Such a requirement generally leads to reorganization of the existing and newly created materials that could be easily sensitive to criticism. For ideologies convey value judgment of various kinds that link between identity and aspiration. Besides, it seeks to convince audiences to a particular worldview and pursue that state (Madan 1998).

Nevertheless, texts constructed by producers within specific cultural and structural settings may play a crucial role in establishing, maintaining, and challenging the understanding of a subject (Pickering 1984, 279-281; Rothenbuhler 1993, 159 in Hoover and Lundby 1997, 146). The discourse can circulate only to the extent that the audiences subscribe to the symbolic constructions, and to the extent that the producers can adjust to the audience's interpretations (Hoover and Lundby 1997, 147). The Thai producer was

aware that the original representation of the Buddhist message would not appeal to the Thai audience and generate marked impacts in Thai and mainland Southeast Asian communities without localisation. The following section will discuss the localisation of the series that played a vital role in the local reception.

Textual localisation of *Buddha* (2013) in Thailand

When a foreign production distributes a television series in international countries, it often employs some textual localisation. In the case of Thailand, the textual localisation broadly depends on a few principal criteria. The first criterion is the local textual access, which refers to the distribution platform: mainstream/non-mainstream television channels or online streaming services. Another influential factor for textual localisation is socio-cultural relevance for the local audience. The relevance may include the language and socio-cultural sensitivity of the text, in the case of *Buddha* to the Thai audience. Content distribution requirements such as the airing duration per break per episode also determines the format of the television show.

The localisation of *Buddha* followed the conditions above. Panya Nirunkul and Prapas Chonsaranon, the local distributors, also aimed to reinforce the text's religious mood and meaning further.³⁷ The following analysis will pay attention to the localisation's key elements, including language translation, dubbing, audio-visual alteration, the addition of a Thai title song, and the transmedia capacities which resulted in the local acclaimed reception.

In general, translation and dubbing practices consider the maintenance of meaning, the level of language, word choices, the age and personality of the characters, and the characters' speaking movements. Ensuring the high quality of translation and dubbing is crucial to the audience's relationship to the text. However, some translation gaps tend to occur, either due to misunderstanding in meaning or deliberation.

The study compares the text by watching each episode repeatedly - once in Indian and once in Thai. The comparative analysis found that the dialogues of Indian and the Thai-dubbed versions mostly contain the same meaning. Some dialogue in the Thai

³⁷ 'มหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก | ตอนจบ (English: Phenomenal Buddha - the King of Kings | the last episode)' 2015.

version reveals significant variations from the original text. Even though the change is small in the series' overall content, it shows that the translators and voice actors were aware of the importance of these changes. The textual alteration suggests differences between the religious understandings of the Indian producer, the local translators and dubbing actors. However, in the overall picture, the Thai translation and Thai-dubbing fundamentally benefit the local audience's access to the series.

In relation to visual alterations, the allotted broadcast time in the Thai channel required a different duration of the content per episode from the original Indian version. As a result, the content was trimmed down to fit each break. Identifying the criteria of what was trimmed is key for understanding the specific ideological paradigm of the local distributor and audiences, because it markedly impacts the narrative and the mood of the text. The religious values of a local site influenced the edition, causing the following scenes to be cut: a) transitional shots/scenes; b) sensitive shots; c) cultural shots/scenes; and d) musical scenes.

Cutting transition shots or scenes that are not crucial to the plot keeps the pace concise and adjustable to the allotted broadcast time. Some of the scenes cut include vision of attendants walking, characters doing insignificant household activities, the dialogue of a supporting character, and each episode's moral synthesis. However, the deletions also include shots that were deemed to be sensitive for Thai audiences and their social values, such as a dancing shot of under-aged courtesans and the Buddha vomiting. Moreover, the omission of Brahman tradition, ritual activities, and traditional Indian musical scenes underlines a political view on Thai nationalist control of foreign influence in their media domain. Cultural judgment is conducted to reduce the other's cultural exposition and possible influence. The musical sections' omission could be due to the Thai distributor's desire to concentrate the Thai audience solely on the text through the religious mood and without distraction. It could also suggest a cultural prejudice, or a mix of both. The practice and policy behind the specific manner of textual alteration and media operation centralise the media organisations' political or cultural criteria of which the community's general members may be unaware.

In the original version of the series, the strategy of musical interludes performs four functions. Firstly, it shows an Indian cultural expression of celebrating significant

moments in the series. Secondly, it narrates coexisting incidents, such as when everyone is hailing the new-born prince, Prince Siddhartha, Mangala (his aunt-in-law) is shown enraged with envy in her room. Thirdly, it softens scenes of violence. In the scene where soldiers remove people from their families by using physical force, the musical reduces the tension by replacing the actual audio with singing over a montage of fragmented moving images. Fourthly, it narrates a time transition from one period to another in the future. However, the musical technique is also an important supporting tool for making meaning in the melodramatic story. Cutting those scenes in the Thai version changes the mood, emotions and potential interpretations. However, the local audience proved to be competent in making sense of the narrative despite these omissions.



Screen caption from episode 3



Screen caption from episode 6

Fig. 1.3-1.4: Example scenes of musical narration that were omitted in the Thai version of *Buddha* (accessed in June 2019)

There are three further localisation strategies employed by *Buddha*. Firstly, on-screen titles of the characters' names and their relationship to the Buddha are added when they first appear in each episode.



Original version on Netflix.com



Thai version on SeesanTV.com

Fig. 1.5-1.6: Comparison examples of character labelling of *Buddha*

(Accessed in June 2019)

Secondly, there was an increase of the Buddha's halo radiance in the first distribution after his enlightenment to enhance his special status.



Original version on Netflix.com



Thai version on SeesanTV.com

Fig. 1.7-1.8: Comparison examples of visual enhancement of *Buddha*

(Accessed in June 2019)

Thirdly, in the Thai-dubbed version, some scene transitions are cut with a fade-in and fade-out effect, unlike the original version, in which all scenes are woven together with a minimal level of scene-breaking. Subsequently, the frequent pauses reduce the original storytelling tension and alienate the audience from the continuous flow of events and characters' emotion. The regular gaps with serene music alter the mood and tone of the series to become less secular.

The original Hindi songs with vocals were not aired with the Thai version due to their upbeat inflection.³⁸ Hence, a new Thai song was specially composed to play at the end of each episode over the credits. The new song's slow and melodic qualities played an essential role in creating a soothing religious mood that Thai audiences would relate to. The serene female vocal attracts the audience to the lyrics that summarises the spiritual journey of the prince Siddhartha until he becomes the Buddha. Similar to the Thai dubbing's audio effects, the Thai song is another crucial tool to bridge the relationship between the international text and the Thai reception. The song represents the whole text in a short and popular form, allowing the audience's participation by singing, commenting and sharing. It is also flexible for marketing activities and media extensions, such as singing, game shows, and talk shows, for instance.³⁹

Transmedia and Cross-media

In order to suitably adapt the series for the Thai market, the Thai audience required more than just translation and dubbing to make sense of the series, given the different perspectives about Buddhism and the series' fictionalisation in India and Thailand. Local viewers demanded supporting information to interpret the meaning of the series and to be able to recognise which elements of the series were fictionalised elements.

The thesis cannot claim that the Thai audience has watched the series entirely for a religious purpose. The audience has varied interests in the series including the desire to investigate if the Indian-made television series matches their existing understanding of the Buddha's biography. Many audiences also note that non-religious features of the series such as visual representation, the cast, and their performance are part of the entertainment. However, the thesis pays more attention to YouTube comments concerning doctrinal interpretation rather than entertainment-oriented views. Therefore, the reader should be aware of the choice of the religion-oriented data selection and analysis of the thesis.

³⁸ 'มหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาดโลก | ตอนจบ (English: Phenomenal Buddha - the King of Kings | the last episode)' 2015.

³⁹ 'พบแล้ว!!คนที่ร้องเพลงประกอบมหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาดโลก' 2017; 'เพลง พระพุทธเจ้า | ปาน ชนพร | We Kid Thailand เด็กร้องท้อโลก' 2017.

According to Henry Jenkins, transmedia storytelling refers to stories that stretch out across multiple media platforms. Each medium uniquely contributes to media users' understanding of the subject (Jenkins 2006, 334). Meanwhile, cross-media is the media operation of exhibiting the text via different media types to maximise the audience's media access and to fulfil the media function that cannot be achieved through one approach (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017). In the case of reading the series *Buddha*, the study found that the local participants utilised both transmedia and cross-media to gain understanding about the Buddha and the credo of Buddhism.

Panya, the executive of Workpoint TV noted in his talk in 2015 that repeated viewing is central to gaining a deeper understanding of the Buddha's life journey and his teachings ('มหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาดาลโลก | ตอนแรก (English: Phenomenal Buddha - the King of Kings | the first episode)' 2015). He stressed further that watching the series can be a primary medium to introduce the audience to have some sense of the Buddha's biography and embedded teaching, but it should not limit only to the text. Instead, the reader is encouraged to extend their search for meaning by reading relevant books and discussing with religious learners, for example.

Therefore, during the first telecast, Workpoint Entertainment Co., Ltd., the producer of Workpoint TV, created several transmedia programs including interviews with learned and well-known specialists such as the distributor, monks, celebrities and religious book authors. These people helped audiences to interpret the content from different perspectives and overcome any cross-cultural textual hindrance.⁴⁰ Together with the interviews, the producers shared short interview clips of fans and showed fans' comments on social media, which also promoted collective awareness of the series.

In addition to this, Workpoint Entertainment has been a long-term player in the Thai television game show and singing contest market. Therefore, the channel was able to competently embed related information about the series and Buddhism in multiple television programs, including special talk shows, quiz game shows and singing events aired on television and posted on YouTube. The television channel's transmedia helped

⁴⁰ 'ประมวลเหตุการณ์สำคัญ | พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาดาลโลก | 19 ก.ย. 58 | ตอนแรก (English: Key events compilation | Buddha: The King of Kings | 19/9/2015 | the first episode)' 2015; 'ประมวลเหตุการณ์สำคัญ | พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาดาลโลก | 20 ก.ย. 58 | ตอนจบ (English: Key events compilation | Buddha: The King of Kings | 20/9/2015 | the last episode)' 2015.

to expand the audience’s knowledge and enthusiasm about the series and its Buddhist discourse to a certain degree – especially the analysis interviews and the quiz game shows.



Fig. 1.9-1.12: Cross media examples of the series *Buddha*: singing events⁴¹
(Accessed in June 2019)

The quiz game shows promoted the series’ content and encouraged the show’s viewers to research the Buddha’s biography and the series. Simultaneously, the audience of those shows also took this opportunity to better their understanding the subjects featured in the series (WorkpointOfficial 2015c).



Fig. 1.13-1.18: Cross media examples of the series *Buddha*: quiz games⁴²
(Accessed in June 2019)

The widespread enthusiasm for the series led to some other television channels producing documentaries on the Buddha and Buddhism broadcast on their platforms.⁴³

⁴¹ ‘มหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาสดาโลก | ตอนจบ (English: Phenomenal Buddha - the King of Kings | the last episode)’ 2015; ‘คุณพระช่วย 2019’; ‘เพลง พระพุทธเจ้า | ปาน ธนพร | We Kid Thailand เด็กร้องก้องโลก’ 2017; ‘พบแล้ว!! คนที่ร้องเพลงประกอบมหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศตาสดาโลก’ 2017.

⁴² WorkpointOfficial 2015c; 2015a; 2015b.

⁴³ ‘อริยหัตถ์ อินเดีย: พุทธกิจของพระศาสดา’ 2016; ‘ตามรอยพระพุทธเจ้า 2: ไตรปิฎก คำสอนมีชีวิต’ (English: Follow the steps of the Buddha 2: Tipitaka, the Living Messages)’ 2019.

Simultaneously, the audience also watched older documentaries that were archived on Internet-based streaming services and YouTube. With both existing and new professionally made documentaries presented to the audience, audiences were able to consume related information in the way they preferred.

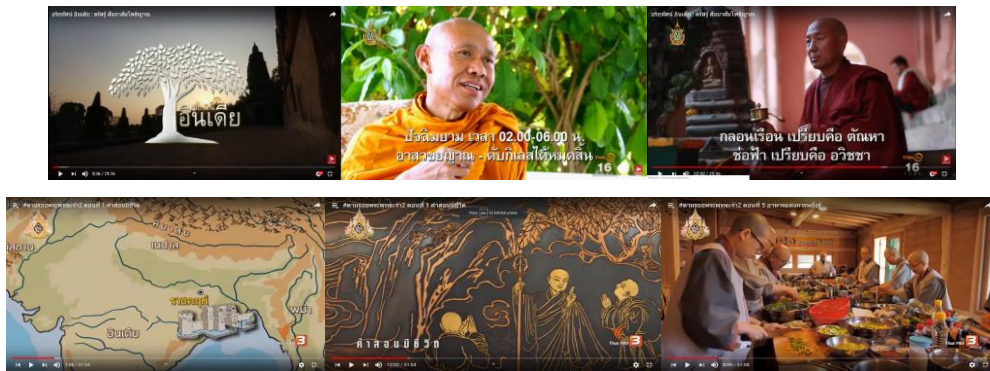


Fig. 1.19-1.24: Cross media examples of the series *Buddha*: professional documentary productions⁴⁴ (accessed in June 2019)

In addition to the documentaries, there were also offline and online religious activities hosted officially by the television channels and temples and privately by Thai Buddhist practitioners. Samples of the offline activities included pilgrimages to the holy sites in India and Nepal (Im-Arom 2017). Although those activities were already exercised routinely, the series helped increase the activeness and the volume of the practices.

The discussion above shows that the local transmedia broadcast on mainstream television channels operated in different television formats and content, such as documentaries, interview shows, quiz game shows, special talk shows, and news reports. Simultaneously, the domestic enthusiasm involved cross-media productions from television to other media domains, such as social media and offline activities. However, unlike the transmedia/cross-media acts, which are generally commerce-driven (Jenkins 2006; Hills 2015), Thai producers and viewers took part in this cross-media and transmedia television drama event as part of religious practices, following the belief that sharing dharma outplays all imparting acts. How local cross-media played a crucial role

⁴⁴ 'อริยหัตถ์ อินเตีย: ตรัสรู้ สัมมาสัมโพธิญาณ' 2016; '#ตามรอยพระพุทธเจ้า2 ตอนที่ 5 อาหารแห่งการหยั่งรู้ (English: Follow the Buddha's footsteps 2: Episode 5, Food of enlightening)' 2019.

in the process of collective mediation of the religion will be discussed further in the audience analysis part of the chapter.

In summary, the textual analysis in this chapter has looked at the mediation process of Buddhism from two perspectives. Firstly, the analysis finds that the television series *Buddha* is a negotiated product, as evident in the series' claim of Buddha's avatar-hood of a Brahman god. While this was suitable to air in India, where the most prominent religion is Hinduism, this portrayal caused controversy for some Buddhists in various countries, including India and Thailand. Nonetheless, this study finds that scarcity of explicit Buddhism-related television dramas in Thailand that resulted in the local audience's excitement for the Indian television series about this subject matter.

Secondly, the textual analysis investigated the representation of Buddhist teachings via the case study's specific use of narrative form and content. The series *Buddha* is an example of explicit mediation of Buddhism represented in television drama in the digital era that applies a range of narrative strategies to relate the teachings of Buddhism to the contemporary audience. Looking at the series' transcultural distribution, textual analysis of the series consists of two processes. The first process is examining how the series' textual construction delivered the substantial doctrines of Buddhism to local Indian and international audiences. The second process involves identifying the localisation practiced in Thailand to mediate the original text for local Thai viewers as per cultural proximity. The two processes are inseparable for transcultural trade where the socio-cultural background of the production's country of origin differs from the receiving country.

Looking at the implementation of form and content, the case study series *Buddha* differentiates itself from other reproductions of the Buddha's biography by using the long-form television drama series form and biographical drama genre. The episodic form allows the producer to gradually and progressively convey an extensive range of the teachings of the Buddha throughout the 54 episodes. Also, structuring the content based on the Buddhist scripture and relevant historical references helps to strengthen the series' discourse. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the series' misleading claim of the

Buddha's avatar-hood from the Hinduist deity and fictionalisation of some of the leading characters' relationship significantly discredited the historical accuracy of the series.

Due to the producer's religious and political objectives to propagate the religion as a peace-making apparatus, the series explicitly inserts notions of Buddhism's principal religious practice (the Eightfold Path), self-made spiritual freedom, peace, good governance and equality into the plot. The plot-driven television series is enhanced by subplots, the creation of political characters and events designed to create debate about socio-political conflicts and the application of Buddhism to solve those problems. Unlike other previous fictional productions about the Buddha in both the local and global markets, the television series *Buddha* covers the whole life of the founder of Buddhism and articulates the greatest range of Buddhist teachings in popular culture. Furthermore, the series represents the broad and profound dogma of Buddhism using everyday language to help the mass and international audiences comprehend the religious principles. Essentially, the religious teaching dialogue is strictly constructed using a progressive and closed pattern to propagate the efficiency of the religion in solving characters' problems. Likewise, the series' characterisation is a mixture of realistic and symbolised construction of characters to make clear to the audience the differences between the virtuous and the evil without ambiguity. Melodramatic expression is another tool used to display the characters' emotional transition throughout the story, covering the spectrum from dramatic suffering to spiritual delight. In addition to this, at the end of each episode and during one special episode that features the producer making a speech there is discussion that emphasises the themes and the meaning of the production to the audience. The multiple mediation approaches employed by the producer summarised above underline the didactic form and content of the series to directly communicate the doctrine with the audience.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the reception to the series in India differed from its reception in Thailand. In Thailand, the series was enthusiastically received and generated social and spiritual impacts for local viewers. The study finds that this reception is the result of localisation and para-textual productions that helped the audience to access and make sense of the series, with limited language and cultural barriers. As a

result, the local viewer can access the series' narrative and its explicit exposure of the creed, which offer the viewer ideological connectedness and expanded spiritual learning.

The following part of the chapter will focus on the audience analysis. The study will explore the audience's consumption of and participation in the series and its para-texts as evidenced on social media.

PART II: Analysis of Thai audience reception and mediation

This part will investigate the audience-made mediation of the religious understanding gained from the series. Essentially, the analysis aims to understand the Thai audience's meaning-making of the series and their circulation of religious discourse from their perspective via their social media networks. The analysis of the section will answer the thesis questions as follows.

RQ2: How do Thai audiences negotiate Buddhism's meanings in new digitally distributed texts into their religious awareness through online practices of participatory culture and social media?

RQ3: What role does Buddhism in Thai television drama play in reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia in the era of regional cultural trade?

The study will contend that not only is the substantial representation of the series fundamental to the Thai audience reception, the participatory practices conducted by multiple parties including Thai distributors, other professional producers, local and international audiences all play their roles actively.

The thesis focuses on the online audience's sense making of the series and the depicted teachings, and how the audience mediates their spiritual identity. In addition, the study pays attention to the audience-made para-texts inspired by the series as part of their religious contribution to the Buddhist community. The para-texts consist of interviews, the series' analyses of learned practitioners, newly made documentaries, existing documentaries, audience-made documentaries and YouTube clips of their offline religion-based activities, and online forums that allow the user-generated contents to be shared across virtual platforms. Essentially, fan-cut YouTube clips that collate the series' didactic teaching scenes are popular with Thai and mainland Southeast Asian fans.

Throughout the period 2015 to early 2021, a section of Thai media practitioners has continually produced and shared their YouTube clips with other audiences. Some of those clips are shared in other social media platforms, such as Facebook, too.

In juxtaposition to those professional-made and audience-generated para-texts, online participants' comments are valuable data for the study. The digital ethnographic data represents a range of the audience's religious meaning-making and debates that are worthwhile investigating carefully. In this section, the study demonstrates how these online engagements with the series' narrative can be understood as applying important Buddhist principles. The aim is to test if the local viewers have any marked shift in their reading of the narrative from conventional narratives of the Buddha's life to a re-mediated production with simplified Buddhist teachings.

The study conducted data collection appropriate the particular forms of audience activities and discourse YouTube and Pantip.com afford. It is crucial to clarify here that during the period of the data collection (mid 2019), there was no capacity for audience comments on official clips of the Thai version of the series on social media platforms. Therefore, the study's data source is that of the producer-made talk show transmedia posted on YouTube and the audience-made YouTube clips that reused the series' teachings in an audio form with still images. These materials contain valuable online audience's expression of their religious interpretation and engagement to examine. The procedure of the audience data collection and analysis is as shown below.

1. An identification of three producer-made talk show clips related to the series with which the audience participated actively shared on YouTube. The clips possess interviews with learned monks and practitioners interpreting the meaning of significant events in the Buddha's life.
2. A selection of eleven audience-made YouTube clips that compile doctrinal dialogues of the Buddha character.
3. Caption of the audience's comments on those fourteen clips by the NVivo software.
4. Importing the comments from the clips into the NVivo program and coding the comments into categories following the audience reception framework developed by Carolyn Michelle (2007).

5. Conversion of the categorised data into percentages to reveal the data clusters of the audience's participation for analysis.

6. Analysis of the YouTube audience's reception and note-taking of the findings.

The section below will discuss the findings of the online audience's interaction. The analysis will begin with the findings from YouTube platform, followed by web blogs.

II. YouTube: A popular space for the audience-made religious mediation

During the original telecast, the Thai audience enjoyed free-to-watch official materials associated with the Thai dubbed version as well as supporting para-texts produced by the first local distributor (Workpoint TV channel). Later, those official series' clips posted by the first distributor were withdrawn from YouTube. In response to this media disconnection, while the value of the consumption was still active, the process of user-generated contents practiced by the fans rose to a much higher degree in order to meet audience demand (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017; Jenkins 2004; Hills 2002). Audience-made para-texts included moving images with audio, audio with stills, a summary of the teachings of particular episodes, collections of marked events in the series, quoted text on still images and online discussions. Fan-made materials on YouTube were especially well consumed, with high participation rates.

Table 1.4 below is the list of the YouTube clips this study examined. Clips 1, 2 and 3 are producer-made transmedia where the producer compiled known historical events in the Buddha's life with interviewees' analysis. The clips also include interviews with the local distributor employees who played essential roles in the process of localisation. Clips 4–14 are fan-made YouTube productions that assemble the dharma teachings of the Buddha character.

Table 1.4: List of producer-generated and audience-made transmedia related to the series *Buddha* on YouTube

No.	Post titles
1	'ประมวลเหตุการณ์สำคัญ พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก 19 ก.ย. 58 ตอนแรก (English: Key events compilation Buddha: The King of Kings 19/9/2015 the first episode)' 2015.
2	'ประมวลเหตุการณ์สำคัญ พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก 20 ก.ย. 58 ตอนจบ (English: Key events compilation Buddha: The King of Kings 20/9/2015 the last episode)' 2015.
3	'มหัศจรรย์พระพุทธเจ้า มหาศาสดาโลก ตอนจบ (English: Phenomenal Buddha - the King of Kings the last episode)' 2015.
4	'2 หยุดโหยหาอดีต อย่าวิตกกังอนาคต ความเกลียดเอาชนะความเกลียดไม่ได้ ตั้งสติอยู่กับปัจจุบัน (English: 2 Stop yearning for the past; Do not worry about the future; Hatred cannot overcome hatred; Stay in the present)' 2015.
5	คำสอน EP. 1 (English: Teachings, Episode 1) 2018, 1.
6	คำสอน EP. 2 (English: Teachings, Episode 2) 2018, 2.
7	คำสอน EP. 3 (English: Teachings, Episode 3) 2018, 3.
8	คำสอน EP. 4 (English: Teachings, Episode 4) 2018, 3.
9	คำสอนพระพุทธเจ้า จากหนึ่งพระพุทธเจ้า (1) (English: Teachings of the Buddha from the series Buddha - 1) 2018.
10	คำสอนพระพุทธเจ้า จากหนึ่งพระพุทธเจ้า (2) (English: Teachings of the Buddha from the series Buddha - 2) 2018.
11	คำสอนพระพุทธเจ้า จากหนึ่งพระพุทธเจ้า (2+1) (English: Teachings of the Buddha from the series Buddha - 2+1) 2018.
12	คำสอนพระพุทธเจ้ามหาศาสดาโลก ฟังเถอะ ฟังธรรมะ (English: Teachings in the series Buddha: Please listen to dharma) 2019.
13	รวมคำสอนพระพุทธเจ้ามหาศาสดาโลก (English: A compilation of teachings in the series Buddha) 2020.
14	หลักธรรมคำสอนพระพุทธเจ้ามหาศาสดาโลก ตอนที่ 2 (English: Teachings in the series Buddha, episode 2) 2018, 2.

Note: All the sources were accessed in June 2019 and the list is not arranged in the order of popularity or posting period.

The study coded the data in Table 1.4 into the NVivo program and categorised it according to the audience reception framework suggested by Carolyn Michelle (2007). The data categorisation reveals a significant relationship between the text and the local consumption in multiple aspects, as shown in Table 1.5 below.

**Table 1.5: Frequency percentages of reception
expressed on selected YouTube clips of *Buddha***

Modes of reception	Percentage of the data coded into the NVivo program (From 14 sources: 3,652 comments)
1. Denotative reception	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expression about scarcity of well-made Thai Buddhism-based productions 	0.08
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expression of related contents to the text 	0.05
A. Transparent mode (text as personal life)	
<i>a) religion-related sensation</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pride and surrendering to Buddhism 	4.71
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gratitude to Buddha and Buddhism 	2.52
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wishing for religious support and success 	1.73
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wishing for help 	0.14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public confess and asking for forgiving 	0.03
<i>b) Personal experience – individual biography</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Results of viewing the content – better understanding of Buddhism 	0.74
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Results of practice – becoming more logical 	0.03
B. Referential mode (text as like-life)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Closed person’s experience – biography 	-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expression on current personal/societal situations 	1.18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wishing the country was in a better state 	0.08
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Suspension: Jokes 	0.14
C. Mediated mode (text as a production)	
<i>i) Mediated-aesthetic receptions (visual or textual aesthetics)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on the overall production 	1.62
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on the content 	1.31
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism of directing 	0.16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on certain scenes 	0.03
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on script 	0.11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism of dialogue 	0.03
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism of the credibility of the series 	0.14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on actors 	0.63
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism of performers 	0.13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliment on translation 	0.49

<p style="text-align: center;">Modes of reception</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Percentage of the data coded into the NVivo program (From 14 sources: 3,652 comments)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compliments on dubbing ● Criticism of dubbing ● Criticism of script that is hard to understand ● Compliment on visual aesthetics ● Criticism of audio-visual details ● Criticism of costume ● Compliments on music ● Compliment on the Thai songs ● Compliments on commentators ● Gratitude to the producer of the series ● Gratitude to the television distributor ● Gratitude to clip makers ● Gratitude to others ● Other production-related notes: Suggestion to invite other performers to have interviews in Thailand, the performer of young Siddhartha, a location in the series, other simplified media of telling the Buddha story, reference to the Thai animation production, etc. <p>ii) Mediated-intention receptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agreement with Buddhist doctrines ● Compliments on dharma ● Compliment of the series' value of supporting Buddhism ● Criticism on key doctrines delivered in the series ● Criticism on the mention of gods 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.99</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.08</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.08</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5.45</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.82</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.52</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1.89</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.82</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2.11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.25</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p>
<p>2. Connotative reception</p>	
<p>i) Analytical identification (comprehension of the message)</p>	
<p>1. Right understanding</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dharma ● Nirvana ● Careful consideration about any subject ● Realism-magic ● Craving ● The mind ● Dukkha (suffering) ● Impermanence 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.85</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.47</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.36</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.36</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.27</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.27</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.25</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.19</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Modes of reception</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Percentage of the data coded into the NVivo program (From 14 sources: 3,652 comments)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Karma ● Advice of considering a doctrine ● Anatta (non-self) ● Compassion ● Katha (story) ● Religion and objectivism ● Sutta(s) ● Prompt acts of good deeds ● Samples of practitioners ● Suicidal <p style="text-align: right;">Total comments on the Right Understanding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">0.19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.14</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.14</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.08</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3.87</p>
<p>2. Right intention</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2.93</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public announcement to pursuit spiritual transcendence 	<p style="text-align: center;">2.93</p>
<p>3. Right speech</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blessing others 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.58</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invitation to Buddhism 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.08</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encouragement on further studies of Buddhism 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.05</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encouragement for religious discussion 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p>
<p>4. Right action</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Undertaking Buddhism as mental refuge 	<p style="text-align: center;">4.44</p>
<p>5. Right livelihood</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Not shown</p>
<p>6. Right effort</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sharing Buddhist knowledge and practice 	<p style="text-align: center;">6.79</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expression of practice difficulties 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.03</p>
<p>7. Right mindfulness</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1.37</p>
<p>8. Right concentration</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">0.16</p>
<p>3. Positional reception</p>	
<p>a. Dominant reception</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sadhu (agreement – thanking – blessing) 	<p style="text-align: center;">24.84</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism on wrongdoers 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.63</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Repeating the dialogue in the content 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.85</p>
<p>b. Negotiated</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Not shown</p>
<p>c. Oppositional responses to the series</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Objection against members who disagree with Buddhism 	<p style="text-align: center;">0.63</p>

Modes of reception	Percentage of the data coded into the NVivo program (From 14 sources: 3,652 comments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Objection to Buddhism ● Objection to those who do not practice ● Objection to key informants in interviews ● Objection to the Buddha ● Objection to Buddhist fans 	0.41 0.30 0.16 0.08 0.03
Consumption and media access	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consumption ● Media access ● Repeated consumption ● Foreign audiences ● Request for content distribution ● Request for more materials (clips) ● Request for subtitles ● Request for mantra translation 	0.30 2.68 1.73 3.29 1.15 0.22 0.14 0.05
Other:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Questions (e.g., nirvana, gods, the Buddha, virtue accumulation, practice, credibility of the production, explanation of teachings in the series, media access, meaning of Buddhism, benefits of practice, historical facts) ● Updating news about the leading performer ● Random comments ● Self-expression that is non-related to the conversation ● Thai King Rama IX 	2.55 2.30 6.02 2.00 0.03
Total	100

The data in Table 1.5 show that the majority of the online participants are pro-Buddhists. The religious involvement leads to the audience's connotative reading, addressing limited distance to the text.

Firstly, let us look at the percentage of the denotative reception. In total, it is only 0.13%. Besides, those comments are based on the lack of locally-made production of the same discourse (0.8%) and noting related contents to the text (0.05). Talks about other aspects of the text are absent on the YouTube platform. Such the limitation of the

denotative reading in the public forum suggests the relationship between the reader, the text, the particular space, and the discussion convention of the local member.

The audience's sharing of their personal experience notes the series' religious value to them. Essentially, the function of the series, the producer-made para-texts and the audience-made productions provided them with a better understanding of the teachings and promoted their religious awareness and practice. The most common responses to the contents expressed on the virtual platforms were agreement and gratitude to the clips' discourse. Other prevalent expressions that revealed their Buddhist membership were announcements of their pride and spiritual surrendering to the religion, gratitude to the prophet and the religion, and specific discourse over their agreement to the teachings of Buddhism (at 4.71%, 2.52%, and 2.11% of the total comments respectively).

Examples of the audiences' public declarations included this statement from user P.R. (2015), who said, "*I will take the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha as my spiritual refuge.*" Similarly, user K.T. publicised their determination that:

Whenever I do merit activities, I pray that it would ground a foundation for my future nirvana [...] because I do not want to be in the life cycle anymore. In my present life, I know that I am full of craving. Yet, no matter what life I could attain nirvana, I will persevere in the conduction of giving, morality, and meditation as much as I can. The only thing I desire for is the nirvana – the ending of rebirth. Nothing will cause me any suffering, forever. I highly respect the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (2018)

User Y.J. noted that:

At every single breath, I will take the dharma as my life torch. I prostrate myself to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha that make me conscious every time I witness the practice and listen to the teachings. (2017)

Such statements were commonly repeated in the forums, influencing other members' structure of feeling. Meanwhile, some other media users also used the media freedom to note their disagreement with the religion, the fans and the key informants in interview materials.

Considering the religious conduct (the Eightfold Path), the data show the participants' religious practice in all the eight elements. Notably, the practices that are most discussed about in social media are 1) the right ways to practice and share their religious experience with others (6.79%); 2) the right action of undertaking Buddhism as their life refuge (4.44%); 3) the right understanding about Buddhism (3.87%); 4) the right intention to pursuit spiritual transcendence (2.93%); and 5) the right mindfulness (1.37%).

For example, A.A. shared their experience after facing a dramatic relationship problem and listening to the teaching for three months:

I listened to the dharma for a couple of times on a daily basis for three months until I felt relieved and understood life better. This is the truth of life – to meet and to depart. It is common. (2019)

After sharing their story, A.A. received support from other media users, with 871 endorsement responses. Similarly, B.T. also noted that:

I have just realised that previously I took the religion for granted. Yet, after watching the series, I had to repeat it over ten times per episode, especially those that contain the teachings of the Buddha. I felt spiritually fulfilled and cried at the scene of the Buddha's death. I meditate and practice Buddhism every day. It makes me very happy, detached, and conscious. (2017)

Other members of the site agreed with this statement, with B.T. receiving 494 positive responses. S.S. (2018) shared their experience where they applied Buddhist teachings to get through their trauma after becoming disabled from a severe car accident. They noted that the religious practice helped them deal with a suicide attempt and adjust themselves to their new state of being. After sharing this experience, S.S. got over 300 boosterish acts from others on the platform. Likewise, among many, T.J. and N.C. (2017) note that the series was the best television drama for them because of its values and ideas they could variedly applied in real life.

The findings show that the space mediates a) the ideology; b) the producer-generated product; c) the audience-made by-product; d) the audience's sharing of personal experience; and e) the community's support generated a powerful religious community. Briefly, the findings underline that a community that contains three fundamental elements of religion – the story sender, the discourse and the practitioner –

facilitates the religion's function. The conversation between the members reveals that when the learned practitioners become the storytellers of their experience, the message generates spiritual impacts for other members. During the circulation of the message, the media and the members stress that the meaning of a religion is based on personal experience. It also shows that the meaning of the religious community is the friendly exchange of the experience and support. However, debates for deeper understanding of religion are part of the communal learning too.

In sharing their life experience online, the comments stress that after consuming the series and its transmedia, the audience required space and time to repeat and search further about related information from other resources. Afterwards, the audience took time to practice until they became confident about the results before sharing.

The audience's preference for viewing-on-demand emphasised that constant media access and repeated consumption were two of the most fundamental criteria in the current product consumption (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017). The access to content and repeated consumption were strongly associated with the audience's reception of religion and religious application. The first and rerun telecasts stimulated the public's interest and registration of the religious message at an elementary level. If no re-consumption occurs, the viewing benefits are limited and will soon fade down with the other media flow, for texts only raise matters in consumption, diffusion and proliferation in lived cultural practice (Mittell 2015). However, the control of media access is not always at the hands of the viewers. When online distribution is under the distributor's management, whose job priority is to maximise their profits, the possibility of any textual blockage or withdrawal is high. However, when this occurred with *Buddha*, the audience responded. In this case, a section of the Thai viewers offered their self-edited clips to the public after the content was deleted from its official YouTube site.

Thus, the findings reveal that media access, repeated consumption, interactivity and religious practice were closely linked. The value of the series and the para-texts became more concrete through the process of repeated consumption that inspired viewers to apply the teachings shown in the series and para-texts into their daily life. Therefore, media convergence and participatory culture supported the religious learning process. However, it is important to note that the local media users tended to cling to a

religious-specific community (Helland 2007) that used the local people's language, familiar Theravada school of Buddhism, and certain practitioners' delivery of the dharma.

Regarding the criticism of the series, the complaints were primarily based on the credibility of the plot, distorted doctrines, scene direction, the non-Buddhism of the actor who played the protagonist, dubbing, and textual comprehensibility. Concerns about the production's religious knowledge and historical accuracy was another significant issue debated in the community as the local audience's perception of their religion and their spiritual hero the Buddha is part of their ideological identity (Campbell 2012). Some audiences also expressed their distrust by questioning the credibility of the local participants who appeared in transmedia programs, such as the interviewees who shared their views about the series. Some dialogue also showed discrimination, with some participants suppressing others people's different levels of spiritual understanding (Gudykunst and Lee 2003). At the same time, in spite of some arguments, many members performed a compromising role by reminding others about the Buddha's teachings such as detachment, understanding of people's differences, karma and consequences, mindfulness, self-training and forgiveness.

Let us look at how the local audience responds to the Brahmanism ideology exhibited in the text to argue the impact of textual localization. The data show that a few readers reject the idea. Some examples are as follows.

Brahmans make the film to trick us into believing them. Make us confused. I have watched it and found it get off the track. We gain nothing. Please do not believe them. (J.U., 2018)

It is false. I get nothing. It is useless. Only pray and become Brahman. It is better to practice and get the result. Do not fall into illusion and craziness. When we die, we will reborn as a beast pulled to slaughter. The crazy psychic leads people to credulity. Deranged meditation results in people to stupidity for a long time. There are no use worshipping animals. (E.K., 2018)

The comments above openly show their disbelief and existing cultural bias to Brahmanism. When find the other ideology intrudes on their territory, the readers alert the notion of otherness with limited credible evidence but personal judgment. Cultural

discrimination restricts subjective reading and cultural tolerance. Then, exaggeration and marginalising others occurs (Wilson 2009, 43).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that such the local people's rejection of the other ideology is only 0.14% of the total comments (please see: Criticism of the credibility of the series: 0.14). The majority of the participants show no objection to the creed, at least not explicitly. The small degree of the rejection implies that, generally, the textual localisation has subsided the original Brahmanism ideologies and has navigated from the audience's serious objection to the series.

Besides, the YouTube comments underline that the YouTube user's reading is not entirely based on the official Thai localised version of the series. To make meaning of the official series and those Thai fan-generated videos, the audience actively uses other sources of religious information, comparative reading of their religion and other ones, personal experience, and more. In fact, reading those religions apart from Buddhism is not foreign to the local people, and the television drama discourse circulated in the Thai television industry. The process of making meaning of the Buddhism-Brahmanism-Animism ideologies operates in Thailand is part of Thai people's faith-based context (Kaewchaiya, Photisan, and Purisuttamo 2011; Assavavirulhakarn 1990; 2003; Ruengsilp 2002).

The findings showed that when media facilities expand from television to other media that allow audience's interaction, transmedia storytelling develops widely among those media users who have media access, from family or small groups of people viewing to a much broader online community. YouTube particularly provided a space where members could read and share their thoughts and opinions in a conversational format (Tham 2009). The interactions include commenting, expressing their thoughts, arguing with texts they disagreed with, or making their own altered version of the original text (Knight and Weedon 2010 in Geraghty 2015). Presently, YouTube performs as a massive archive of audio-visual contents that originate from professional to amateur users. Its open collection has established an "accidental archive" (Burgess and Green 2009 in Geraghty 2015, 20) that merges historical and current contents and related materials that were previously excluded or missed from mainstream spectatorship. Buddhism, popular entertainment and popular online media have merged, adapted and function to actively

serve Thai Buddhists, and the audience's viewing experience, textual expectation and media practice have become more vibrant. The multi-screen media practice increases the reception sphere's size. It also allows diasporic groups and cross-cultural audiences to audit the text (Chalaby 2005; Robins and Aksoy 2005) in addition to its consumption by local audiences.

III. YouTube: a public forum for international audiences' engagement

The discussion in this section will address RQ3 concerning the role that Buddhism in television drama distributed in Thailand plays in reinforcing social, cultural, and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia in the era of regional cultural trade. In answering the research question, the interest lies in contending how the dominant credo in the region represented in popular television drama has an integral function to the peoples with different socio-political contexts.

This section of analysis aims to know more about how those audiences variedly respond to the didactic text on YouTube where they can actively be part of the community if desired. It is because another crucial aspect of online participation in the mediated religion in YouTube para-texts is foreign audiences' involvement. Especially, the viewers from Laos, Myanmar, India and Cambodia are more engaged with the text following their cultural backgrounds in which the Theravada Buddhism has been practiced (Demy and Shaw 2019, 244).

Comments of people from these locations contributed 3.29% of the total comments. All of those expressions from foreign viewers were pro-Buddhism, giving neutral or positive opinions about the text. For example, participants from Laos noted that listening to the text gave them life guidance and firmly reinforced their faith and respect for the Buddha and the religion firmly. Some examples of their comments are as follows.

I bow my head in reverence and worship. I pray to the Buddha, the prophet of the world, with faith. I will take Buddhism forever. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (P.N., Laos, 2019)

When I listen (to the clip), I feel mindful. It gives me the path and the light to my life (B.P., Laos, 2019)

I am determined to follow the Buddhist path. (S.S., Laos, 2018)

In my next life, please let me be with the Buddha and Buddhism. Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu. (N.M., Laos, 2018)

Whereas, some Burmese comments are evidential in the YouTube room too. Some examples are as follows.

I wish you all good health and prosperity by listening to the Maghla Dhamma and doing good deeds. (T.I., Myanmar, 2018)

May all of you be healthy and prosperous, prosperous, prosperous. (M.P., Myanmar, 2018)

We need more than luck to succeed in business. (R.M., Myanmar, 2019)

We wish all of you a prosperous and prosperous life with love, respect, justice, and peace. Goodbye, my employer is Thai and Chinese. (C.N., 2019)

The most prevalent comments written in those international languages above are ‘*Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. Anumotami* (a Buddhist phrase, meaning I am exultant with the act)’, and ‘*Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.*’

The YouTube rooms hosted by Thai media users tend to accommodate those international audiences, especially those who share the geographical borders with Thailand - such as Laotian and some Burmese. The other groups of international audiences include those who use English, Cambodian, Hindi, Telugu, French and Vietnamese. The frequency of their comments in their national languages shows that the shared culture (both in terms of the faith and language) to the Thai viewers play a significant role in linking those neighboring audience to the degree with which they are comfortable to share their original identity to the Thai online community. Some Laotians engage with the Thai media user community by writing in Thai or using online translation services to the Thai language. Their regular consumption and interaction with Thai television dramas expressed on the public online platform underline the close relationship between the audiences of the two countries. However, the findings of the Laotian’s and some Burmese’s regular consumption of television drama shown in Thailand are not new (Jirattikorn 2015; Thanomjittra 2015; Kosai 2002; Kijrungpaisan 2017). What is worth noting is the higher level of interaction of the Laotian and Burmese media users to

the *Buddha* series, compared to other market-oriented television series. The sense of belonging and the urge to interact to the community may result from the status of the state religion in their countries and their shared view about the indiscrimination of a religious room.

Another thing that shows the shared faith between Thais and Lao people in particular is the way they often wish for a better state of next life, reuniting with Buddhism and the next Buddha until they can attain nirvana.

Whatever life I will have in the future, please let me find Buddhism. Let me hold Buddhism forever and follow the teachings of the Buddha, until I can end all the suffering and enter the enlightenment, please. (B.U., Lao, 2017)

Whatever life I will be reborn into, please let me be with the Buddha and Buddhism. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (T.M., Lao, 2018)

We are the luckiest to be born in Buddhism. If I will reborn in the future, please let me reborn in Buddhism again. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (C.K., Lao, 2018)

The power of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha please protect us. So that we do not walk outside the path of the Tathagata and stay on this path until we attain Nirvana. (R.C., Thai, 2018)

If the next life exists, please let me be born with a good father who does not fall into infatuation. (I.A., Thai, 2017)

If I have some merits, please give me a chance to listen to his teachings in person. Let me ordain and be his disciple serving him in some way. No matter how long I have to wait and how many lives I have to be reborn, if I do not attain Nirvana by then, please let my wish be fulfilled. (B.P., Thai, 2018)

The accord of the two countries' members' wish emphasises their shared paradigm of the life cycle and the convention of self-expression to the spiritual objective. In contrast, such a wish is absent in other groups of audiences from other countries. Regarding the notion, some users, however, question the paradigm and urge others to focus on the present rather than hoping for the future.

Additionally, some of those members showed their participatory continuity by reappearing across YouTube posts. The international audience's frequent visits significantly emphasised that a section of Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian communities

were regular cross-cultural consumers of the Thai texts and para-texts. Their repeated interaction suggested a strong sense of cultural membership. Their interactions showed a shared spiritual interest and that different languages were not a barrier to transcultural connection by using their languages in the Thai domain. In fact, the regional audience-centred process of consuming, copying and translating into local viewership has been practised long before the internet era (Jirattikorn 2015; Thanomjittra 2015; Kasemrat 2009; Kosai 2002).

Such practice is not uncommon in the global market. In the official YouTube video of the series featured in English, some Thai and other international readers also write in English to be part of the community without language barriers. At the same time, some Thai and regional audiences prefer to keep their cultural identity by writing in their native languages without much concern about its readability for other members. The freedom to reveal demographical identities and cultural preferences has become common. The multinational participants have increasingly practiced global citizenship, democratic conversation, and cultural tolerance.

Even though the proportion of the international audiences' comments is much smaller than that of the local reader, such expressions indicate the shared religious interest of those readers. Considering RQ3, the international audiences' presence in the Thai-hosted YouTube room and their reading of the paratexts of the *Buddha* series (the audience-made medley of doctrinal scenes and dialogue in the series) note the cultural connection that the Thai version of the series and the Thai fan-made materials can generate to the international enthusiasts.

It is necessary to note that the comments shared by Thai, Laotian, and Burmese YouTube users represent a connotative reading. Almost none of those expressions shows an objective or material-based reading of the text. Only one person (N.F., 2018) observes the necessity of more language translation, including Lao, for a broader range of audiences' access to the text and its discourse.

The series should be translated into Lao and other languages for more than 200 countries. Let the world see the Dhamma too. Buddhism belongs to everyone in the world. People have access to Buddhism, the Dhamma, and possess the religion together. (N.F., 2018)

Sir! I cannot understand this language. Request upload in Hindi. Most humble request. Please. (R.M., Hindi user, 2018)

Buddha episode full in Hindi show, please. (R.P., Hindi user, 2018)

Please upload all episode of the Buddha in Hindi. (V.S., Hindi user, 2017)

If the series is available in Myanmar language, more people would access it.

(T.B., Myanmar, 2018)

Moreover, the comments from neighbouring nationalities reveal their corresponding reception of the creed and the television series. A considerable number of the audiences from the three countries show their overwhelming sensation of reading the text.

The findings accord to the qualitative study of US daytime series conducted by Lowery and DeFleur in 1995 that 'the gratification gained from viewing involves emotional release, wishful thinking and recognized valuable advice' (Lowery and DeFleur 1995, 107-8 in Wilson 2009, 23). The statements of their identity and their ethnographical sharing about their practice indicate the learning model effects of the Buddha series and the fan-made paratexts. The viewers identify with the television and social media roles and learn certain behaviours exhibited in the text (Lowery and DeFleur 1995, X Wilson 2009, 26).

It is interesting to note that the comments of international audiences tend to be individual comments with no replies. Only some say in Lao are interacted with by other members in the same language. Please see the examples below.

Whatever life I will be born in the future, please make me a disciple of Buddhism and follow the teachings. Please make my heart full of the Dhamma, until I can completely cease all sufferings and enter nirvana. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (S.M., 2018)

T.N. responds to S.M.'s comment: *I will take Buddhism forever. Please make me act rightly, never fall into misperception and wrongdoings. Let me practice (Buddhism) well.* (2018)

W.C. responded to S.M.'s comment: *Whatever life I will be born in the future, please make me act well and rightly, leading me to awaken with no evil thoughts.* (2019)

I bow down, sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. No matter how many hundred, thousand, or million reincarnations, please let me find Buddhism. Please support me to do only good deeds in all those lives. Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu. (P.C., 2018)

B.I. reacts to P.C.: *Never judge anyone by guessing. Sadhu.* (2018)

Despite the size of the interaction practiced by international audiences of the same background being relatively small and some replies to other comments may sound irrelevant, it suggests that the Thai online television drama community has become an optional space that a section of international peers attends and connect with their peers regularly.

I am not suggesting that *all* those groups of existing participants obey religious principles. Compared to the size of the audience's comments, viewing in silence is much higher - and it is impossible to know exactly what the silent audience thinks about the text and the existing conversation. Wilson (2009) remarks the silence of online viewers as an effect when the reader positions themselves marginal to media use following insight and identification do not arise under a circumstance (Wilson 2009, 40). Similarly, Morley (1980) describes that those readers' preference to observe and to silence implies their insufficient engagement with the discourse of the program and the existing fans' conversation to redefine it (Morley 1980, 142-3 in Wilson 2009, 40). Those assumptions may apply. However, I would like to argue that, to a certain extent, silence is also part of the Thai and mainland Southeast Asians' speech norms influenced by the suppressing local context. The socio-political regime and local educational systems in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, for example, have established rather dependent characteristics for the people. Even in an informal and entertainment-oriented domain, fear of criticism of their view that lowers their self-esteem discourages the democratic conversation in public. Nonetheless, the capacity of critical thinking and antifragility is under development. The audience's sense-making of content is a structured cognitive

process that takes time (Ang 1990 in Wilson 2009, 1, 3), and the online community is the platform to practice.

It is noticeable that audiences from some origins are more active than others, despite the geographical connections. While the audiences from Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia are more present in the Thai forum, the audience from Vietnam is very seldom in the Buddhism-oriented conversation. No comments suggest the users' Malaysian origin. Following the religious context of those countries discussed in the Introduction Chapter, the differences in the international audiences' engagement to the Buddhism-related television drama lie in the dissimilarity of their religious principles and political context between the countries. The majority of the population in Vietnam and Malaysia identify themselves as folk religion followers and Muslims, respectively. Thus, the didactic Buddhist text may not be their interest. In contrast, those who use English and Hindi tend to be slightly more active attendants in the room. However, after the availability of the series on Netflix subtitled in several languages, the activeness of the international audiences (apart from the Lao) declines.

The findings argue that the Thai-ness embedded through localisation and the online forum hosted by Thai media users have little to do with the international viewers' participation and the regularity of their consumption. Lowery and DeFleur (1995) address that people attend a specific community to read and respond to the content selectively in ways influenced by their group memberships and social ties (Lowery and DeFleur 1995, 399 in Wilson 2009, 27). Essentially, it is about the availability of choices that supply their interest. Provided there are more options to consume the text, those international audiences may prefer to access other media channels that suit their consumption needs better with less reading investment, such as subtitles, dubbing in the local language, local media platforms, for instance. To assert that the television drama industry in Thailand marks its outstanding significance in mainland Southeast Asia following its conventional mediation of Buddhism in various forms and contents seems to be overstated, despite some evidence that proves the assumption. The findings have underlined an option-provider role of the television drama in the regional cultural trade.

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter has investigated the circulation of Buddhism represented in a fictional form distributed across cultures and the local media practices. The television series *Buddha* is examined as a case study of a transcultural product that is circulated from its original source (India) to a receiving country (Thailand) where the religion is differently valued. The chapter's findings show that although the audience generally follows marketing-driven extensions and tends not to undertake engagement with a fictional transmedia extension (Simons 2014), the case of the *Buddha* television series consumed in Thailand and its para-textual convergence proves an exception. The findings reveal that the function and continuity of the religion rely on the three fundamental elements of religion – the founder (teller), the discourse and the practitioner (called the Triple Gems). The essence that links the storyteller and the practitioner is the relatable experience discourse (dharma). The role of Buddhism manifested in Buddhism-based media is a framework to view individuals' experience and suggest relevant practice in various approaches to achieve a spiritual freedom.

The chapter's analysis addressed the thesis research questions in the following ways. Firstly, discussing the series' media form and discourse, the long-form television series format and biographical drama genre allowed the producer to deliver an extensive range of Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist canon and other historical references were vital resources for plotting and characterisation. However, due to the fragmentation of information about the Buddha's life before enlightenment and the media format requirement (episodic television drama series), the producer exercised some fictionalisation to enrich and extend the plot and characterisation.

The series significantly amplified socio-political conflicts in the ancient period through newly created subplots. Meanwhile, the hybridisation of realistic and conventional Asian melodramatic characterisation highlights the easily recognisable moral attributes of characters. Political dialogue generally has both a direct meaning to the story and referential meaning to the prevalent political problems in the present time, such as corruption, the misuse of power and socio-political discrimination. For religious conversation, the protagonist's dialogue features in varied forms following the Buddha's religious communication strategies: preaching, having conversations and gradual

instruction and explanation. The propagating conversation is constructive and progressive, beginning with challenging or questioning the Buddha to debating, following and, finally, surrendering. Importantly, the series simplified and delivered the doctrines in the simple language used in everyday life to help the audience understand the discourse more easily. Other supporting audio-visual elements to complete pedagogical scenes include physical and facial expressions of characters showing their spiritual delight. An increased volume of voice-over chanting and music also boosts the transcendent feelings. Additionally, the series exhibits meditation activities in episodes 27–54 that take up half of the entire story of each episode. The frequent display of meditation prompts the audience to follow. The producer also emphasises the religious discourse to the audience by giving his speech in the special episode (episode 55). Likewise, there is an episodic quote at the end of each episode after episode 34 (when ascetic Siddhartha attained enlightenment).

All of the textual strategies implemented in the series discussed above convey an intensive set of Buddhist teachings offering a substantial range of Buddhist doctrines for the audience to pick up. Such an extensive and related discourse of Buddhism resulted in the online audience's expression of their transparent and referential mode of reception – meaning that they related the series' religious discourse to personal experience. Representing the practicality of the religion led to the audience's further engagement with the series and the exchange of their views and experience with others in offline and online communities. All the dialogues delivered by many players surrounding the series *Buddha* (including the Indian producer, the local distributor and the Thai audience) are products of their religious practitioner role play in the process of discourse circulation.

Long-form television drama and its extended online distribution for worldwide distribution requires to match the conventional expectation in terms of proximal representation of their religion because of the vast number of the audience who can access the text. Since a degree of an additional body, guided religious emotion and cultural allowance play a key role in the audience's acceptance (Thomas 2000; He 2012). While a section of the audience might enjoy the repeated spiritual comfort from their holding reference, another large group may require a spiritual challenge to look at something more closely to make their viewing time worthwhile (Rigby and Ryan 2016).

Inclusion of current global or universal issues that are compatible with the religious text such as peace-making, equality, human rights, feminism, and so on becomes a fundamental strategy to embrace varied groups of the transcultural audiences into the narrative. On the other hand, international production quality and modern appearance of the cast are vital to attract and maintain the audience to the periodic consumption (Kijrungpaisan 2017; Livingstone 1998; Bhamornsatitaya 1985; Chokriensukchai 2006). Likewise, access to textual consumption is fundamental for the audience to perceive the text. Therefore, apart from relatable text, cross-cultural distribution requires more media channels and more language options to broaden the consumption to the desired level too (Chalaby 2005; Chen 2004).

Nonetheless, in spite of the shared religious value between Buddhist Indians and Thais, the originally mediated narrative did not effectively make sense to the Thai audience due to the Hindi language, a different valuation of Buddhism and the Indian-styled entertainment form. Thus, the series went through a process of localisation that mainly involved translation, dubbing and editing. The Thai localised dubbed version diverged from the original text in various aspects. The localisation was another practice of mediation to enhance the value of Buddhism and remove other entertainment-based distractions and foreign socio-cultural sensitivity. Namely, the localised version of the series was the fruit of cultural filtering and discourse reconstruction for the local Thai viewer. Then, the altered series was broadcast in primetime television and became a nationwide success, thereby performing its religion-promoting role in Thailand. On top of that, para-texts, transmedia and cross media productions also supported the local audience's sense-making of the series and its Buddhist pedagogy.

The localisation in Thailand addressed that the viewers may read the constructed texts differently when they are viewed in a specific cultural and structural setting that is a completely different context than that in which the text was created. The representations will be agreeable only to the extent that the audiences endorse the decoded creation, and the producers adjust the content to the preferred reading of the global audiences (Hoover and Lundby 1997, 147). In this case, the local distributor performed this role by tailoring the original text through their religious frame of thought in tune with a wider Thai audience.

The Thai dubbed version includes several new para-texts that helped the local audience to be open to the textual differences of the Indian product.

Secondly, the study results underline that Thai audiences actively negotiate Buddhism's meanings into their religious awareness through multiple online practices of participatory culture and social media. The study discovers several factors that contributed to the success of the series conveying explicit discourse of Buddhism in a popular television drama series and generating social impact. The crucial faculties of the series are a) substantial doctrinal exposure; b) promotion of new spiritual learning; c) ideological relatedness; d) practicability in everyday life; and e) inspiration for participants' religious practitioner role plays. Simultaneously, however, the series could not benefit the audience without creating media access and community contact.

Namely, the audience took the convergence opportunity to collect other information from new and existing religious resources to make sense of the story and expand their comprehension of the religion founder too. This study finds that the extensive doctrine embedment, credo simplification and localisation were the most significant attributes of the series' mediation of Buddhism in television drama. The series *Buddha* and social media mediated the four domains of religion: the discourse, practice, community and institution (Lincoln 2006 in Beyer and Beaman 2007, 23).

On social media platforms, the findings of digital ethnography reveal that the religious fans competently received the religious message. Their conversation showed their practices of all the Eightfold Path components aiming to develop their spiritual understanding, morality, meditation and wisdom. For both new learners and ongoing practitioners, the convergence media has become a fundamental part of the religious institution and community to gather more information to fulfil their understanding and inspiration. Some studies of online religious practices note the firm connection between offline and online activities. Such an operation includes applying the traditional religious ritual into the online contexts in a more-or-less modified form to fit the online practice and culture (Young 2004 and Campbell 2005 in Lundby 2013). Once the media initiates satisfaction that meets human demand, it will operate further to function within the more extensive system of communication choices (Jenkins 2006). Exchanging audience-made products and ideas on social media – both publicised YouTube sites and localised blog

rooms – are evidence of the audience’s online practices of participatory culture and social media to make meaning of their media consumption, the virtual community and online peers.

The converged audience seeks interactivity that embraces playfulness, choices, connectedness, information collection and reciprocal communication (Ha and James 1998 in Grant and Wilkinson 2009). Although the establishment of media literacy in ongoing digital media convergence may be a constant hardship, the learning process is always worthwhile (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017). Also, not all participants are equal, and some individuals in the room may play a more dominant role than others. This type of community may need to accept that the notion of ideology is also partial in itself (Althusser 2006; 1984). Hence, media users may have to tolerate a range of participation (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017; Jenkins 2006). Such a new media practice is also part of the process of today’s social integration (Jenkins, Lashley, and Creech 2017). Likewise, the social media community enables fans to establish what Jason Mittell terms “collective intelligence” (Mittell 2006) for more information, interpretation and discourse over a specific subject (Hills 2015; Mittell 2006), including the beliefs and practices that unite peoples (Stone 1991 in Lundby 2013, 59).

Lastly, the findings emphasise multiple roles that Buddhism explicitly performs in reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that the practices of Buddhism in Southeast Asia take place in the western and the eastern zones, following different schools of Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism (Assavavirulhakarn 1990, 1), those differences have become uninfluential when the regional audiences read the story of the founder of the religion. Crucially, it is because the series includes a range of essential teachings which apply in all extant branches of Buddhism. Evidently, among the audience’s participations with the case study on publicised social media platforms, the series *Buddha* showed its capacity to encourage Thai and mainland Southeast Asian audiences to engage in deeper conversations about how the religion means to their life.

Besides, according to the geographical and the faith-based connection, present Thailand and the neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, have been exchanging genetic identities, beliefs, cultures, art, languages,

myths, agricultural occupations, and socio-political experiences.⁴⁵ Thus, sections of the neighbouring audiences have enjoyed consuming the texts that embed ideologies and cultural proximity they have in common.

Following the modes of media and viewer interrelation observed by Cecilia von Feilitzen (1998) and developed for film viewer's reception analysis by Janet Staiger (Staiger 2005, 21; Marsh 2009, 257–62), the Thai and international audiences use the series and the audience-made transmedia productions for multiple purposes. Firstly, the series, compilations of the series' teachings and the media users' discourse in YouTube are sources of religious education. The content of the series, the audience's true experience sharing and other relevant conversations about the series reinforces the participant's existing faith and religious practice. The audience's conversation in the community is distinctive and inspires further actions such as meditation, sharing dharma, charitable activities, sharing religion-related experience, supporting others and producing texts that benefit spiritual journey of themselves and others. The audience's engagement with the series and the audience-made productions have become borderless since the meaning of the texts connects the viewer's emotional regulations and collective engagement to their spiritual and social impulse. Their responses to the text accord to the extent to which the stimulus belongs (Tan 2011, 22) which refers to the religion, human's common desire to practically deal with life issue and a sense of belonging. That is, the series is a popular source for religious mediation for the audience to explore their moral code and connect with others in social media domain and offline events where possible. Importantly, the audience-made transmedia and cross-media shared online and offline underline the power of the audience to play a role of religious practitioner which is not limited by the absence of the official clips on YouTube and other public social media channels.

The findings of the audience's engagement address that the discourse of the series and lay practitioners' interaction enhances the norm of the global society. Committed audiences use the narratives to support their personal development and norm

⁴⁵ Assavavirulhakarn 1990; Miksic and Geok Yian 2017; Chutintaranond and Baker 2002; Brandon et al. 2019; Lang 2017; Clements 2006; Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964; Ridgley 1978; Russell 1989; Yao 2001.

of conduct (Marsh 2009, 265; Adirekchotikul and Kongton 2002). Despite the temporality of the consumption in popular culture, the engaged audiences choose to make meaning of themselves, their worldview and their religious identity with the didactic narrative and the offline and online religion-related community (Marsh 2009, 266). In spite the use of Thai language, the religious meaning of participation and membership seems to be larger for the international audiences than the local language boundary.

The online participation is not replacing the traditional religious practice but it reinforces individual practitioners' relationship and communication (Campbell 2012, 63). Also, the audience's religion-related participation in online domains is less strict than in offline communities (Campbell 2012, 64). Thus, many people in the contemporary society personalise their online media practices in varied religious networks as per their own participatory preference (Campbell 2012, 66). This is especially the case during the COVID-19 pandemic which may not support offline religious gatherings. Reruns of the series, on-demand access of the series in Internet-based streaming services and the archived online conversations explored in the chapter have become practical tools for the religious enthusiasts to continue and expand their religious interests.

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Chapter 2

Melodramatisation and Audience Reception of Dharma for Householders in Semi-explicit Buddhist Family Drama: *Cage of Karma* (Wachirabunjong 2019)

Chapter One examined the relationship between television drama and the extensive delivery of the Buddhist credo, localisation strategies and the audience's engagement as practitioners through the case study of the explicit Buddhist television drama *Buddha*. Although the findings demonstrated the local audience's positive uses of and appreciation for the text, locally-made didactic television dramas are much less common in the local market than semi-explicit and implicit Buddhism-oriented television dramas. The semi-overt Buddhist television dramas are more regularly produced and their popularity sits in-between the doctrinal and the market-driven Buddhism-related television dramas. This chapter examines the production of semi-explicit Buddhist television dramas and the local audience's interaction with the circulation of the idea of karma.

The discussion of fandom in this chapter will reveal the more varied audience activities exchanged online. The more entertainment-driven television drama will uncover the viewers' values and pleasure they gain from watching the text. In this chapter, the viewers' expression of the producer's text and the audience's conversation will contend that Thai and international audiences consume the text to reinforce their understanding of Buddhist principles and community.

The case study for the chapter is the primetime family drama series *Cage of Karma* (Thai: *กรงกรรม* lit. *Krong Kam*; Wachirabunjong 2019), which was adapted from a novel of the same name written by Nipon Tiangdham under the pen-name Chulamaneer (Chulamaneer 2017). The series is a fictionalised semi-factual story that explores notions of karma, social prejudice, family relationships, modernisation and shamanism. This series has been chosen as a case study of the semi-explicit mediation of Buddhism in popular culture because it addresses significant questions for the thesis, as follows.

SRQ1: What is the socio-historical context of Buddhism, Thai society, Thai television drama, and Thai audiences' reception and uses of Buddhism in Thai television drama in the digital era?

RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?

SRQ2: What are the distinctive features of Buddhist Thai television drama that deliver shared cultural taste and Buddhist values with Thai and regional audiences throughout the period 2014-2021?

Similar to the analytical structure of the previous chapter, this chapter is comprised of two parts: textual analysis and audience analysis. The content of the first part begins with an explanation of the socio-cultural context of the series. Next, the analysis will examine the mediation process, which involves the local interpretation of karma and the symbolisation of Buddhism to encourage laypeople's moral practice in everyday life. Such mediation includes textual alteration in the adaptation from novel to television, such as the intensification and dramatisation of some plots and characterisations and the reduction of other aspects of the narrative.

The audience analysis will look at how the Thai audience interacted with the series on official YouTube platforms hosted by the television channel, Pantip.com forums and Facebook fan pages. The data cluster extracted from the three media platforms will reveal how the viewers make meaning in relation to Buddhism from watching the series and their participation in social media. Finally, the case study will conclude with a discussion of the distinctive characteristics of Thai Buddhism-related television drama that share cultural values with local and international audiences.

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, this study looked at 578 samples of Buddhism-related Thai television dramas released in the period 1968 to 2020. The examination in this chapter focuses on the series that were classified as semi-explicit Buddhist television dramas. Out of the 578 productions surveyed, the survey finds 19 semi-overt Buddhist television dramas were shown in the local market over the period, as shown in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.1: The semi-explicit Buddhist Thai television drama productions and genres throughout 1968 – 2020

Years	Title	Drama fantasy	Horror	Investigation	Social drama	Drama	Family drama	Action
Prime-time long-form television series								
1976, 2009	เสาร์ 5 (Sao 5)	✓						✓
2012	รากบุญ (Rakboon)	✓		✓				
2014	รากบุญ 2 รอยรักแรงมาร (Rakboon 2 Roirak Rangmarn)	✓		✓				
2015	ข้ามกับพระ (Kha Ma Kab Pra)							✓
2019	เพลิงนาคา (Plerng Naga)	✓						
2019	กรงกรรม (Cage of Karma)						✓	
Prime-time television mini-series								
1969	หูนไลกา (Hoon Laika)	✓						
2012–2015	ศีล 5 คนกล้าทำอธรรม (Zeal 5 Khon Kla Tah Atam)	✓		✓				✓
Daytime mini-series								
2007–present	ฟ้ามีตา (Fah Mee Ta)				✓			
2009–2016	บันทึกกรรม (Bantuek Kam)		✓		✓			
2012–2016	ชีวิตไม่สิ้นหวัง (Chivit Mai Sinwang)				✓			
2018–2019	กระจกสะท้อนกรรม (The Mirror)				✓			
2016 – 2019	เรื่องดีดี โดย บันทึกกรรม (Rueng Deedee Doei Bantuek Kam)				✓	✓		
2002 – 2003	คนส่งกรรม (Khon Song Kam)	✓			✓			

Years	Title	Drama fantasy	Horror	Investigation	Social drama	Drama	Family drama	Action
2009 – 2012	ละครชีวิตจริง ชุด 84,000 (<i>Lakorn Chivit Jing Shude 84,000</i>)				✓			
2010	กรรมลิขิต (<i>Kam Likhit</i>)				✓			
2013	ยมบาลเจ้าขา (<i>Yomaban Chaokha</i>)	✓						
2014	เสาร์ ๕ คนทำกรรม (<i>Sao 5 Khon Tah Kam</i>)	✓			✓	✓		
2020	แรงกรรม เรื่องเล่าชาวบ้าน โดยอาจารย์ยอด (<i>Raengkam Ruenglao Chaoban Doei Ajarn Yod</i>)	✓			✓			

Table 2.2: Change agents of leading characters' realisation of Buddhist teachings in the semi-explicit Buddhist Thai television drama productions

Change agents	Productions
Self-learned suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ข้ามากับพระ (<i>Kha Ma Kab Pra</i>) (drama action) (Thongkon Sritabtim 2015) • กรงกรรม (<i>Cage of Karma</i>) (family drama) (Pongpat Wachirabunjong 2019a)
Supernatural power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • หุ่นไล่กา (<i>Hoon Laika</i>) (fantasy) (Ruchfilm TV 1969-1979) • เสาร์ 5 (<i>Sao 5</i>) (drama action-fantasy) (Winij Pakdeewichit 1976; Chalong Pakdeewichit 2009) • รากบุญ (<i>Rakboon</i>) (drama fantasy, investigation) (Torathron Siripanwaraporn 2012) • รากบุญ 2 รอยรักแรงมาร (<i>Rakboon 2 Roirak Rangmarn</i>) (drama fantasy, investigation) (Torathron Siripanwaraporn 2014) • ศีล 5 คนกล้าท้าอธรรม (<i>Zeal 5 Khon Kla Tah Atam</i>) (drama action-fantasy) (Polyplus Entertainment 2012-2015)
Characters' direct talk about the Buddha's teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • เพลิงนาคา (<i>Pleeng Naga</i>) (drama fantasy) (Yuttana Lorpanpaiboon 2019)

The data in Table 2.1 shows that over the years 1968 to 2020, the local television drama industry offered a moderate number of semi-explicit Buddhist television series and mini-series. However, the majority of these shows were daytime mini-series, which generally run for many years. These productions centralise the main theme of the notion of karma, stressing the cyclical relationship between actions and repercussions. Some television programs include a viewing guide for the audience to prevent misleading interpretations. The programs embed ideological guidance in the form of moral characters' dialogue, the inclusion of Buddhist quotations or ethical teachings at the end of each episode, as well as other audio-visual symbolisations. Meanwhile, in the case of mini-series, Buddhist guidance is performed in a broad range of fashions. The most direct approaches are using non-fictional characters such as the program moderator and the story sharer to guide the audience to the series' religious messages. Also, noting the relevant Buddha's teaching on screen to instruct the audience on the proper reading is also common.⁴⁶

Notably, productions that contain a similar ideology have trained the local viewer with the ability to decode and understand the meaning of the religious programs, genres, and messages (Wilson 2009, 42; Morley 1992, 127). Additionally, the frequent embedment of an idea of supernatural power in Thai semi-explicit Buddhist television dramas alludes to the local audience's use of mysticism and supernaturalism to make sense of Buddhist teachings.

The data in Table 2.1 shows that semi-factual social drama and drama fantasy are the most common genres to mediate the karmic belief and Buddhist teachings in daytime mini-series. Primetime television drama productions tend to combine a wider range of genres, including investigation and action. Nonetheless, the producer is able to flexibly

⁴⁶ For instance, programs such as *Fah Mee Ta* (ฟ้ามีตา; ('Fah Mee Ta' 2007), *Chivit Mai Sinwang* ('ชีวิตไม่สิ้นหวัง' 2016), *Lakorn Chivit Jing Shude 84,000* ('ละครชีวิตจริง ชุด 84,000' 2009) feature the program moderator addressing the topic of each episode at the beginning of the show. Afterwards, they summarise the ideological lesson of the leading characters at the end of the series. Other shows, such as *Kam Likhit* ('กรรมลิขิต' Kantana Group 2011), *Sao 5 Khon Tah Kam* ('เสาร์ 5 คน ทำ กรรม' 2014), and *Raengkam Ruenglao Chaoban Doei Ajarn Yod* ('แรงกรรมเรื่องเล่าชาวบ้านโดยอาจารย์ยอด' 2020), also include the original story sharers in the programs. The speech of the sharer enhances the credibility of the story and emphasises their lesson-learned karmic experience to the audience.

employ any compatible genre in both daytime and primetime productions. The case study in this chapter is another example of this practice.

Cage of Karma is a long-form family drama that aired in primetime. It centres on three family-based conflicts that are commonly represented in the local television drama industry: 1) mother-in-law and daughter-in-law prejudice, 2) characters adjusting to change in their family role, and 3) social discrimination. The long-form television series ran for 19 episodes, with each episode running for between 105 and 110 minutes. The original telecast of the series was in primetime on Channel 3, from 26 February to 30 April 2019. The viewing data surveyed by AGB Nielsen Thailand showed the series' highest television rating was over 11.1 nationwide (Phakdeemuanchon and Rattanasimakul 2019). The success of the series prompts a study to investigate the mediation of Buddhist teachings in Thailand through semi-factual representation and melodramatisation using *Cage of Karma* as a case study (Fig. 2.1).



Fig. 2.1: A poster for *Cage of Karma*

Source: <https://www.ch3thailand.com/news/scoop/17368> (accessed on 14/8/2020)

While the western melodramas feature individuals' quests for the meaning of everyday life in the absence of religion (Brooks 1976), Thai melodramas, in contrast, illustrate the means for solving life's problems through the presence of religion. Therefore, the ideological discourses of *Cage of Karma* will be based on the frameworks of Buddhist teachings and melodramatisation for moral enhancement operating within a particular socio-cultural context (Brooks 1976).

This study regards *Cage of Karma* as a semi-explicit Buddhist television drama as it does not feature official Buddhist characters or didactic teachings to a significant degree but implements other means to deliver the dharma teachings. Some of the most frequent approaches include realistic plots, intensified characterisation, heightened emotional expression, straightforward dialogue and realistic performances. Furthermore, the series addresses the viewer's religious awareness by showing an ethical quote from a character's dialogue at the end of each episode before the end credits. Members of the production, including the producer, director, scriptwriter, author and cast, also emphasise the show's dharma message in all press interviews, adding ideological value to the series. As such, the specific features of the series sit in-between didactic and implicit mediation of Buddhism.

PART I: Textual analysis

This part of the chapter will discuss the various socio-cultural contexts of the story to analyse the ideological mediation and audio-visual representation of the series. It will begin by exploring the general socio-cultural context and the local understanding of karma and related Buddhist teachings. Next, the analysis will focus on the producer's strategies for television adaptations that articulate an ideological message, using granular close analysis.



Fig. 2.2-2.5: Screen captures of *Cage of Karma*

Sources: <https://www.SeesanTV.com> (accessed on 14/9/2020)

The socio-cultural context of the series

The original plot of the novel was developed from a true story written to the author by a fan. However, due to legal sensitivities and possible ethical issues, the author applied a certain level of fictionalisation and shifted the location of the original story to his hometown, Nakhon Sawan Province, in the 1960s where socio-cultural tensions existed between the early years of national modernisation and the Vietnam War.⁴⁷

Cage of Karma illustrates the karmic causation between actions and consequences for multiple female characters who want to be accepted as daughters-in-law in an extended Thai-Chinese bourgeois family, called Bae in Chinese (or Asawaruengruengkij in Thai), who settled in Nakhon Sawan Province. As their mother-in-law has a strong prejudice against women who came from a “low” background, those daughters-in-law take vicious actions to secure their status.

The story begins in 1967, which was the beginning of the Second Phase of the National Economic Development Plan (1967–1971). During the period of the First Plan (1961–1967) and the Second Plan (1967–1971), the government policies were under the close supervision of the World Bank experts who regarded Thailand as an underdeveloped country. Hence, the plans prioritised economic reinforcement of transportation and agricultural infrastructure as well as education with the aim of increasing the gross national product and income of citizens. The national development strategies focused on the diffusion of technology, westernisation and modernisation; however, there were no concrete plans for cultural and social development (Pongsapit 2006, 212).

The story is set in Nakhon Sawan, a province that is a centre of local and international transportation between the central and northern regions of Thailand. Within this province, the Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base was used by the United States Air Force as a base during the Vietnam War (1955-1975), in conjunction with other national airports (Chulamane 2017). The active interaction between agriculture and early modernisation resulted in growing opportunities for agricultural and related commerce. Such growth made Nakhon Sawan, Bangkok and many other surrounding areas hubs for Chinese traders and sites of acculturation between the Thai and Chinese (Pongsapit

⁴⁷ Chulamane 2017; ‘เปิดโต๊ะคุยกับผู้จัดผู้กำกับ มีบี เอกนรี และผู้ประพันธ์ละครกรรม คุณเฟื่อง นิพนธ์’ 2019; ‘ชีวิตเบื้องหลังนักเขียน จุฬามณี ผู้แต่งนวนิยาย กรรมกรรม | Talk’ 2019.

2006). The assimilation resulted in many people having a Thai-Chinese double ethnic identity, of which Yoi and her family members in the series are examples.

The economic activity in Takhli prompted many low-income families to send their young daughters into the sexual service industry to financially support their family (Louiyapong 2013, 178; Pongsapit 2006, 60) as part of historical family practices in the northern region of Thailand (Pongsapit 2006, 60). In the series, this happens to Renu, the protagonist of the story (Chulamaneer 2017). Despite the sacrifice they made for their family, sex workers often encountered severe social discrimination throughout their working life and after retirement (Louiyapong 2013, 178–79).

The capitalist ideology that was used to promote national development increased the socio-cultural gaps between groups of people and shifted the local values, materialist worldviews and ideologies of the local people (Pongsapit 2006, 93). *Cage of Karma* is an example of a novel that exhibits social conflicts during the modernisation period. The policies of modernisation and the new set of materialist values encouraged the local people to aim for a higher level of financial prosperity and improve their socio-political status, gain education and income and work in non-agricultural occupations. However, during the swift transition from traditional agriculture to modernisation, farmers and rural people were saddled with household debt from consumer debt, home and properties mortgage loans, resulting in a lower standard of living. With a low capability to repay loans, a large number of farmers lost parcels of lands to investors and creditors (Pongsapit 2006, 114). Additionally, despite the author Chulamaneer's representation of the local socio-political conflicts at the macro level (Chulamaneer 2019), the series shares the melodramatic features with that of the western melodrama concerning ideological discourses about gender, race, ethnicity and ethnic minority cultures and struggles during a period of socio-political transition (Gledhill 1987, 2).

In terms of acculturation, there was cultural bias held by both the Thai and Chinese against each other that affected relationships between members of cross-cultural marriages, and this is evident in *Cage of Karma*. The traditional Chinese conventions that generate the most dramatic conflict in the novel are the practice of marriage and the management of the family business. Traditionally, the eldest son becomes the primary manager of the family business following his parents' retirement. In return, the parents

plan to live with the family of the first son (or the one that replaces him) until their deaths. In the case that the first son is unable to satisfy his parents' expectation (for example, if they disapprove of his marriage, he departs from the family or refuses to undertake the role as manager of the family business), he and his family are excluded from the family's legacy, although in some cases, generous parents might consider granting him and his family some share of the business. In this tradition, the wife of the first son plays a crucial role in supporting the family business and taking care of her husband's aged parents. As a result, they may become the target of expectation and, sometimes, emotional victims of mothers-in-law (Glynn 2014; Ma 1993).

Local interpretation of karma

According to Buddhism, *Pratītyasamutpāda* (Pali: paṭiccasamuppāda), which is commonly translated as dependent origination or interdependent co-arising,⁴⁸ is the principal concept through which humans can ultimately comprehend the whole phenomenon of life (Harris 1998, 41). Understanding this concept will lead to Buddhist realisation (Payutto 2012, 234).⁴⁹ Despite its importance, *Pratītyasamutpāda* is a highly subtle dharma that is challenging to describe completely. This has resulted in the scarcity of a single religious source material that thoroughly explains or debates the subject. Generally, it is available in sub-sections, and the most common sub-set of the *Pratītyasamutpāda* dharma is the law of karma (meaning the law of action; Payutto 2012, 234).

Karma is a neutral term, meaning action. Karma may be defined according to various criteria. One way of considering karma is through its three types of action according to its consequences: positive, negative and neutral actions. Therefore, it is essential to note that karma (action) is only a section of the *Pratītyasamutpāda* process of life that consists of three cycles, which are desire, action and consequence (Thai: กิเลส กรรม

⁴⁸ *Pratītyasamutpāda* consists of twelve factors linked through the interdependent co-arising. Firstly, ignorance is usually the beginning element that leads to volitional actions. Through volitional actions, consciousness arises. When consciousness arises, name-and-form follows. Through name-and-form, the six kinds of sensory (five types of physical sensory and the mind) arise. Through the six kinds of sensory, contact arises. Through contact, sensation arises. Sensation then gives rise to craving. Craving encourages attachment. Attachment leads to becoming. Becoming arises rebirth, which leads to ignorance and furthering the cycle as birth will follow with age, suffering and death. However, according to Buddhism, death with attachment continues in another form of life and its causation cycle (Harris 1998, 44).

⁴⁹ จ.ญ.๑๒/๓๔๖/๓๕๗ (Payutto 2012, 234).

และวิบาก; Payutto 2012, 235). However, discussion about action is more prevalent. This is because, actions are more explicitly noticeable for laypeople than volition and consequence. Also, the karmic explanation may be achieved via multiple means. For example, it may range from an audio-visual representation of karmic causation, of which ordinary laypeople can make sense, to storytelling in a written form or mere discussion (Payutto 2012, 235).

Although Buddhism addresses five laws of nature (the law of physical phenomena, the law of heredity, the psychological law, the law of karma and the dharma law), the law of karma is the one that describes the human processes of action and repercussion (Payutto 2012, 236). The essence of the law is based on the notion that wholesome actions have wholesome results. Vice versa, unwholesome actions lead to unwholesome results (Harris 1998, 50). Ultimately, individuals are responsible for their salvation and must receive the consequences of their karmic choices (Russell 1989, 4). The volition, however, is what Buddhism considers to be the root cause of karma. Through intention, an individual's physical, verbal and mental actions follow (Payutto 2012, 240). Such proactive principles encourage practitioners to determine their own life. The notion of karma gives individuals the freedom of choice to change themselves and society according to their meaning-making of the doctrine and harvest the outcomes (Harris 1998, 107).

In Thailand, laypeople often misunderstand the karmic law. The deception of karma may be categorised into three groups of thought. Firstly, past-action determinism (*Pubbekatahetuvada*, Thai: ปุพเพกตเหตุวาท) believes that any happiness or trauma that has happened in life is the result of their past actions. Secondly, theistic determinism (*Issaranimmanahetuvada*, Thai: อิสสรนิมมานเหตุวาท) suggests that a powerful god determines the fate of life. Lastly, indeterminism or accidentalism (*Ahetu-appaccaya-vaada*, Thai: อเหตุอปัจจยวาท) assumes that joy and suffering in life occur without causes and factors (Payutto 2012, 286). As suggested by the name of the novel/show, one of *Cage of Karma*'s central themes is karma. The series, however, does not primarily address the last two types of karmic beliefs. Only the idea of past-action determinism is discussed in some scenes to invite the viewer to reconsider the subject and response to the conflict accordingly.

Cage of Karma underlines that despite the coexistence of multiple faiths, ultimately the quality of each person's presence and future depends on their volition and actions in the present time. The use of sorcery and love potions shows the audience the impermanence and negative consequences of exerting supernatural control against the will of the victim. The main objectives of the leading characters, which are attaining social opportunities, social acceptance and a decent livelihood, cannot be achieved by force or misdeeds but by simultaneous practices of morality and an innocuous livelihood. The plot demonstrates that despite a flawed past, everyone can change and attain the rewards of their efforts. The story emphasises that the real villain is not a person but the actions committed from delusions developed from a misunderstanding of their life meaning and controlling power. No characters are innately vicious and unchangeable.

Narrative analysis

After understanding the local socio-cultural context and ideologies discussed above, the following section will examine how the television production of *Cage of Karma* articulates Buddhist teachings and the social context through genre and melodramatic mode, plotting, characterisation, dialogue and other audio-visual strategies.

i. Family drama genre and melodramatisation

The novel *Cage of Karma* involves typical melodramatic conflicts such as social inequality, adjusting to bourgeois ideology, and the quest of morality (Zarzosa 2013). The dominant genre of the novel is the realistic family drama, a genre that is attractive to a large number of people (Kaplan 1993, 11), for any audience can relate to family-based experiences (Chulamane 2019). Nonetheless, the television series markedly altered the original characterisations from the novel to be more morally recognisable in the style of traditional melodrama. The series also exaggerates sensational expressions of characters to attract the audience's emotional engagement.

In this case, melodrama lies in-between realism, which tries to comprehend the suffering life phenomenology (Turim 1993; Dermody 1993) and modernism, which helps interpret complex experiences that cannot be simply achieved according to the inadequacy of language to decode them (Zarzosa 2013; Turim 1993; Gledhill 1987; Brooks 1976). The meaning of melodrama for the case study is complex as it does not

correspond purely to the genre and style of representation. Rather, the series is a hybrid of family drama and melodrama in terms of its genre and representation style.

Cage of Karma utilises specific characteristics of western melodrama to construct morality-based entertainment. Conventionally, western melodrama expresses the Romanticist desires and confirmation of pleasure to re-secure the homogeneous identity of working-class and mass audiences. This genre involves happy-ending fictions that exhibit the triumphs of virtues after the characters have experienced suffering due to their class identity, obsessive love, imbalanced familial relationships, powerful villains and the process of proving one's self are predictable but engaging plots. Such narrative attributes encourage the viewer's ethical practice with perseverance (Williams 2018; Gledhill 1987; Brooks 1976). In this sense, *Cage of Karma's* melodramatic mode suggests that local Thai-Chinese people's experiences of suffering are similar to westerners during periods of rapid socio-political transition and use similar communication strategies to express their pain and desires via mass fictions.

However, while discourses of western melodrama involve a high level of politics, corruption and personal trials, these topics may be too controversial for Thai melodrama. The high degree of political influence on censorship resulting in the media producer's self-censorship. Most local media content remain firmly within the boundaries of the non-political such as love, family, morality, and a relatively limited degree of socio-political problems.

The conflicts in *Cage of Karma* are socio-cultural prejudice, domestic chicanery and black magic, all topics to which local people consider that civil laws and regulations cannot apply. Even though there are physical fight scenes in the series, leading characters choose not to get the police involved, claiming that raising a police case will not solve the problem but will instead shame the family. When local Thai people find legal trials and implementation a challenge to solve socio-political gaps and injustice, religions and folk beliefs become their tools to tackle their sufferings and communal order.

According to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, the domestic melodrama may be understood as the conjunction of three sets of determinations: social definition, psychic determination and formal history (Nowell-Smith 1977). From a social determination perspective, *Cage of Karma* features the story of an extended Thai-Chinese bourgeois family, revealing how

social relations emerged as a new social norm in the early modernisation period. Such a situation defines the story with a set of psychic determinations that the characters struggle with their current identities and the new social norm. However, the production also marks a formal history of the developed form of semi-factual television series which mediates desires of Buddhism and postmodern Thai bourgeois ideologies in the local prime-time television drama industry.

It is essential to note that despite the fact that the story was set in the 1960s, it was written in the 2010s. The social ideologies embedded in the series differ from that of novels written about the socio-political conflicts of local Thai people during the Cold War, such as *Manee Din* (Thai: มณีดีดิน, Krisna Asoksin 1970), *Khao Nok Na* (Thai: ข้าวนอกนา, Sifah 1973) and *Phu Ying Kon Nan Cheu Boonrod* (Thai: ผู้หญิงคนนั้นชื่อบุญรอด, Botan 1981). These novels follow the western melodramatic norms in the late 1820s that pay attention to strong nationalism, patriarchy, racism, conventional gender roles and bourgeois Romanticism during the period of emerging new social order (Williams 2018, 201–2). *Cage of Karma*, however, focuses more on the notion of karma and household morality with the socio-cultural conflicts as a background. Separate from the notion of karma, the story exposes a mixture of new and conventional desires of the local people; for example, the changing definitions of a good woman, marriage, self-reliance, wifehood, husbandhood and family.

For instance, consider the stereotypical heroine. Thai melodramatic conventions associate heroines with virginity, femininity, and consistent virtue. Yoi, and Renu are examples that break this standard. Yoi (Renu's mother-in-law) secretly murdered her mother-in-law, Lim, by anger because of Lim's curse on her as a filthy prostitute regardless of her best efforts to prove her value. Thus, Yoi does her best to make sure that her bad karma and Lim's curse will not happen to her. Subsequently, Yoi initially hates Renu, a former sex worker, as she prefers a daughter-in-law who can support her son's prosperity. Whereas, Renu is a girl from a poor farmer family who has a son with her brother-in-law since she was a teenager. Later, Renu decided to become a sex worker to financially support her family but finally quits her job to begin her new life with her lover, Chai, the first son of Yoi. The heroines in *Cage of Karma* are fighters who are tough, rough and full of flaws. However, they are skilful and have diligence, self-discipline and

self-reliance. Their shared problems are their previous misdeeds and an attachment to familial problems, which lead to emotional restlessness.

In terms of local entertainment, a dramatic relationship between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law offers plot- and character-driving energy and sensational engagement to the female viewer who makes up the majority of the local audience (Nhongpon 2019). Meanwhile, leading male characters play the roles of moral supporters. The appearance and speeches of those who are more righteous regularly help to lower the tension between Yoi, Renu and Philai (the second daughter-in-law of the family) and allow the suitable moments to address relevant moral principles. The calm interactions between female and male characters in the chaotic story gives the emotional balance and moral space to the viewer.⁵⁰

The gender-related ideology shown in the story emphasises the current popular character type of smart and multi-tasking characters in Thai television. For instance, after losing her lover when her sorcery spell is withdrawn, Renu experiences mental exhaustion and shifts her focus to work and strengthening her financial security. Although Renu's lasting love may fall into a type of obsessive love common in conventional melodrama (Turim 1993, 165), after years of suffering self-reliance, Renu does not particularly value the marriage certificate of which she initially dreamed. Instead, her lover becomes a burden after he experiences a severe brain injury. At the end of the story, Renu becomes the leader of the family and well respected by the whole community. That is, even though the notion of marriage does not disappear, its value shifts not to an ultimate reward but the *choice* of a leading female character.

Despite this portrayal of female characters, it is important to note that the story does not project a feminist ideology against patriarchy. Instead, it addresses the notion of supportive partnership and flexible roleplay. In *Cage of Karma*, an unequal relationship in which either the husband or the wife regards themselves socio-economically (or intellectually) superior (such as that of Philai and Ornpannee), results in unhappiness and divorce.

Concerning the institution of justice, while justice in western melodrama may be achieved by the revelation of empirical evidence in a trial scene (Williams 2018, 202), the

⁵⁰ 'ชีวิตเบื้องหลังนักเขียน จุฬามณี ผู้แต่งนวนิยาย วรรณกรรม | Talk' 2019.

local community regards self-confession and fear of karma as the more practical tools for social order than official authorities. The plot of social recognition of the characters' crime in *Cage of Karma* is resolved through self-admittance in the presence of the moral shaman and the crowd. The diegesis of *Cage of Karma* underlines those individuals cannot attain social acceptance due to familial background, black magic, education or aggression. Instead, they can achieve success through their work performance, morality and financial success.

Notably, the melodramatisation discussed above helps to establish the audiences' engagement with the surprising plots, situation complications, tearful sensation and satisfying resolutions of the television series (Williams 2018, 193–94). Importantly, the melodramatisation plays a key role in the semi-explicit mediation of Buddhism as it draws attention to the contrast between the restlessness of lay life and the mental balance that results from ethical understanding and detachment.

ii. Karma-oriented plotting

Generally, in the Thai television drama industry, there are two sub-styles of the semi-factual plotting that occur following involvement between the audience and the producer: one-off plot inspiration and interactive co-plot-making. The one-off plot-sharing often originates from a fan telling a factual story, either by volunteering or by participating for remuneration. Previously, the contact between the story sharer and the producer was generally offline, often by letters and face-to-face conversation. Currently, the interaction can be done both offline and online. Thereafter, the producer is likely to fictionalise the plot and characters further to avoid causing possible legal and ethical issues for the story sharer. Meanwhile, the interactive co-plotting between the producer and the audience is more preferred for ongoing and self-contained mini-series, as it helps to increase the plot variety and therefore interest the audience.

The author of the novel *Cage of Karma*, Chulamane, developed the plot using both of the two methods described above. That is, firstly, one of his Facebook fans shared a true story via a written document. After structuring the main plot around his fan's story, he posted the unfinished novel sections in his Facebook page to observe how fans responded to the narrative. Then, he adjusted the plot according to the readers' views so

that he could both surprise and satisfy the audience's expectation. Another case of online fans' involvement is when Rompaeng, the author of the novel *Love Destiny* (Rompaeng 2009), used an interactive online game and virtual fans to help her develop her writing skills. More discussion about her social network interaction with fans in relation to television drama production-making will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The plot of *Cage of Karma*

Cage of Karma is a character-driven story. The narrative involves multiple characters in the Bae family over four generations. The conflicts of the story centralise on a karmic link from one generation to another. Due to cultural aversion, Lim mistreats her Thai daughter-in-law Yoi, who is from a Thai farming family. Despite Yoi's diligence, Lim regularly calls Yoi a foul prostitute and curses her daily, with the aim of making Yoi leave her son. After years of tolerating Lim's ill-treatment, one day, Yoi murders the disabled Lim with uncontrolled anger. Yoi keeps the crime a secret and tries her hardest to prove her value as a worthwhile member of the family. After years of working hard, Yoi and her husband own the biggest grocery shop and rice mill business in the town. The haunting malediction from Yoi's crime results in Yoi's determination to prevent her four sons from marrying any girl who has a lower-class background and the tendency to reverse Yoi's criminal karma back to her.

Despite Yoi's wishes, her eldest son brings Renu, a former prostitute, home, claiming that she is pregnant with his child. Having a poor prostitute as her eldest daughter-in-law dashes Yoi's hope for her son's promising future. It also reanimates her dread about Lim's curse. Urgently, Yoi reorganises her plan by arranging the marriage of her second and third sons to wealthy women and rejecting a pregnant young girl who claims to be her youngest son's wife. However, the dramatic losses throughout the whole story teach Yoi traumatic lessons and change her prejudice towards her sons and their families. Similarly, Renu and Philai, who are Yoi's daughters-in-law, also learn the agony of mental restlessness and suffering consequences according to their misdeeds, such as the use of black magic, lying, incrimination, pillage, burglary and peculation.

Throughout the 19 episodes of the karma-driven plot and the dramatic illustration of characters' suffering, I observe that the series suggests karma begins at the view or

the perception, which is the first principle of the Buddhist Eightfold Path to cease suffering. According to Buddhism, the ultimate knowledge is the Four Noble Truths, which consists of awareness of suffering (dukkha); causes and factors of the agony (samudaya); cessation of the causes and factors (detachment or nirvana) (nirodha); and the means to cease the problems (makka). The series demonstrates that leading characters suffer according to a misperception of themselves, the value of other people and their (in)ability to control others' lives according to their wishes. This understanding then leads individuals to a specific intention, speech, action, effort, livelihood, concentration and mindfulness. However, if practitioners understand the nature of impermanence and results of attachment to such life impermanence, agony tends to decline, and self-training with mindfulness develops.

Regarding Buddhist mediation, the series represents laypeople's religious conduct in resonance with the Buddhist Eightfold Path, the essential guide to Buddhists. The notion of the Eightfold Path has been discussed in detail in Chapter One. Hence, this section will pay more attention to the notion of the Highest Blessings (see Appendix) for wholesome living through which the series expands the interpretation of the right action. The Highest Blessings are a broad set of teachings consisting of thirty-eight notions. With its large cast of characters and a 19-episode season, *Cage of Karma* illustrates several ideas from the Blessings. The content analysis reveals that the series covers four groups of conducts. These are identified in the following paragraph.

Firstly, the series addresses the practice of the Blessings in characters' self-conduct, which involves high self-discipline, righteous conduct, abstinence from evil, perseverance in virtuous acts, gratitude, tolerance, amenability to correction, self-control and a sorrow-free mind. Secondly, the plot underlines the importance of having a decent livelihood through an exhibition of dissociation with the wicked, association with the wise, setting oneself on the right course, accumulation of working skillsets, a complication-free livelihood, blameless actions, intoxicant exemption and life-sufficiency contentment. Thirdly, family roleplay is a fundamental part of the series. It includes the notions of parents' support of children, cherishing children, cherishing wives, and rendering aid to relations. Finally, community practices, such as charity, respect and humility feature in the series as well.

Following the plot development of *Cage of Karma*, the narrative demonstrates the interpretation of karma in two ways: reflecting actions and a state of mental health. Firstly, the reflecting actions are generally performed through coherent behaviours of two (or more) related characters, coincidental happenings, and revenge. For example, Yoi takes advantage of poor people by lowering the prices she will pay for their goods and rice fields. Later, Yoi becomes speechless when Philai mimics and exaggerates such behaviours, claiming her faultlessness in following her mother-in-law's business.

Secondly, the series stresses an understanding of karma through a representation of the characters' state of mental health throughout the narrative. According to Buddhism, wholesomeness alludes to a practitioner's mental activeness, flawlessness, wisdom and joyfulness during and after the volitional act of the mind (Payutto 2012, 247). That is, those who commit a vicious thought attain immediate mental disturbance and constant anxiety, while those who are mindful and aware of the consequences of their conduct have a peaceful state of mind. For example, despite the wrongdoing that Yoi commits with uncontrolled anger, the guilt of the murder and the curse haunt her deeply. The revelation of her crime and being accountable for it free her mind. Renu is always anxious with her lies and the use of black magic. Philai's greed and inferiority complex lead to a slight mental disorder. In contrast, calmer characters such as Lakseng (Yoi's husband), Tong and Sa (Yoi's second and third son) have fewer mental disturbances, despite encountering the same situations. Additionally, the right view directs their decisions on how to respond to problems.

The series shows how rural people with little socio-economic power and limited understanding of karmic law might rely on shamanism and black magic to gain supernatural control over targeted people (Chulamane 2017). However, all characters, including shamans, stress that shamanism is a low practice when compared to the teachings of Buddhism. That is, while black magic might stop the suffering of users for a short time, such magic is incapable of ceasing sufferings entirely. Also, the black magic will cause serial life disorders if users do not solve their problems appropriately and strengthen their mind with consciousness and morality (Wachirabunjong 2019).

An example of this occurs in episode 18, when Sa asks Tong if sorcery is real. Tong replies: "*The Buddha taught that it is not the life essence. It is not a path to end*

suffering.”⁵¹ Another example is when local vendors request amulets from shaman Somdee to help them become more affluent, he asks everyone to repeat this saying:

*Practice goodness, restrain from evil acts and purify the mind. That is all. Just doing this, our life will have only happiness and prosperity.*⁵² (Episode 17)

Then, another shopkeeper denies that he misunderstands them. She emphasises that what they want are magical objects or lottery numbers. Somdee notes that they should follow the ideas that:

*Firstly, gambling is one of the negative allurements. It is one of the precepts that they should avoid. Secondly, focus on working. That is all. Joy and life progress will happen to you.*⁵³

Ultimately, the story of Renu who tries several means to change her social status and succeed in love proves to the audience that neither black magic nor aggressive confrontation will result in her attaining one’s desires. Instead, true but non-obsessive love and a proper focus on lay Buddhist conducts, work skillsets and ethics through years of perseverance are essential to self-made work and love success.

In sum, the plotting shows that moral conduct with an understanding of the karmic law, supportive partnerships, an understanding family and prolific entrepreneurship are the ideological tools that can tackle the problems of socio-political inequality, family life, occupations, and self-value in the capitalist regime.

iii. Altered characterisation

Altering the characterisations in the television series from the novel allows more opportunities for characters to deliver dharma teachings and ideas about working hard from different viewpoints. In the series, altered characterisation is a crucial tool for promoting the reconsideration of prejudice and people’s double ethical identities.

Culturally, the ideas of what a layperson should (and should not) do closely tie into social practices and current values, which may not necessarily be compatible with the wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (akusala) karma in the Buddhist perspective

⁵¹ Thai script: พระพุทธเจ้าท่านสอนเอาไว้ว่า มันไม่ใช่สาระสำคัญของชีวิต ไม่ใช่หนทางแห่งการดับทุกข์ (Tong, episode 18).

⁵² Thai script: ทำความดี ละเว้นความชั่ว ทำจิตใจให้ผ่องใส แค่นี้ล่ะครับ แค่นี้ชีวิตก็มีแต่ความสุขความเจริญ (Somdee, episode 17).

⁵³ Thai script: ข้อหนึ่ง การพนันเป็นอบายมุข เป็นศีลข้อหนึ่งที่ควรละเว้น ข้อสอง ตั้งใจทำมาหากิน แค่นี้แหละ ความสุขความเจริญก็จะบังเกิดขึ้นได้เอง (Somdee, episode 17).

(Payutto 2012). Therefore, the scriptwriter, Yingyot Panya, altered the characteristics and reorganised the roles of all characters to promote their moral identifiability.

For instance, in the novel, some faith-based practitioners perform conflicting roles that obstruct the reader from seeing the Buddhism-oriented encouragement, for example when some monks read astrology and train students in black magic. Additionally, all shamans in the novel hold a mixture of greedy volitions and egoism and show willingness to commit crimes for a living. However, those monks and shamans also preach the dharma. In order to promote religious awareness, the television series applies a more consistent characterisation to strengthen the religious roles of the monks and shamans. Likewise, the television series alters the role of Yoi's husband, Lakseng, from a person who has no faith in Buddhism to the core character who maturely delivers the notions of karma and compassion.

One significant change between the novel and the television series is that the scriptwriter slightly adjusted Renu's sexual relationships. In the novel, young Renu frequently commits adultery with her brother-in-law until she becomes pregnant. In Thai culture, such intentional immorality in the protagonist's behaviour would be unsympathetically received by the viewer. Hence, the series alters the relationship between Renu and her brother-in-law to be a result of rape, to suggest that Renu is a victim and sexual misconduct is against her will.

Another example is that, in the novel, Philai exhibits both positive and negative behaviours. However, in the television adaptation, her undesirable qualities become more emphasised. For instance, in the novel, despite jealousy to Renu, Philai tends to restrain herself sufficiently. She treats her husband and her employees well to keep them her allies. However, in the television version, Philai is a snob who is extremely lazy, denying all house chores. She badly illtreats her employees and ignores sexual relationship with her husband unless when she would like to have a child for the family's legacy. Such a character alteration applies to most of the characters to identify their morality with less ambiguity than in the novel - to highlight their ethical function to the karmic theme. Essentially, the narrative aims to invite the audience to closely look at persons' intention before making prejudice based on the prevalent stereotypes. One example of Yoi's realisation of this lesson occurs when she talks with her younger sister, Yam.

*What we see is not as what we previously thought. What we viewed as good turns to be full of defects. Many of what we thought horrible, instead, turns out to be genuine. Life is full of illusion, just because of bias, only. It would be my own previous karma. Whatever karma I did, no matter how hard I try to conceal or erase, it cannot disappear. Just wait for the day that it returns to me. That is all.*⁵⁴ (Episode 12)

Many characters in the story reveal that bias about others may have undesirable consequences. That is, the wealth, socio-political status, level of education, occupation and age of an individual may not indicate their trustworthiness and decency. Instead, each character's value depends more on their self-control and their conduct in benefit of others.

For instance, in the local society, prostitutes and sorcerers are marginalised as people who have a limited degree of conscience (Kanchanapan 2010, 75). However, throughout the story, Renu and her prostitute colleagues prove that their ultimate objectives are to live a decent life and gain social acceptance. Additionally, the leading sorcerers in the series do not only perform their magical skills but also deliver Buddhist teachings (Chulamane 2017; Wachirabunjong 2019). It is important to note that the series is not trying to one-sidedly promote the decency of shamanism; for example, in other sequences, there is also a display of a sorcerer who fakes a medium role with spirits to ask for a high payment.

Some characters in the story who may be considered higher class than other rural people conduct misdeeds by taking advantages of the socio-political status of others. That is, the series shows that in each group of people, there is a mixture of characters to whom the viewer should pay close attention before passing judgement on their character. Significantly, the consideration should not be based on the past of others nor that of themselves. Repentance and forgiving oneself and others are the messages on which the series is mainly oriented.

⁵⁴ Thai script: *“ไอ้อย่างที่เรารู้เห็นก็ไม่ได้เป็นอย่างที่เราคิดนะ ไอ้ที่มองว่าดีกลับมีแต่ตำหนิ ไอ้ที่คิดว่าแย่กลับเป็นของแท้ก็มีมาก ชีวิตมันก็มีแต่ภาพลวงตา เพราะไอ้อดีตตัวเดียวนี้แหละ ที่มันคงเป็นกรรมเก่าของตัวเอง ทำกรรมอะไรเอาไว้ ต่อให้คิดจะปกปิดหรือลบทิ้งมันยังไงก็ไม่มีการลบได้หรอก ก็ได้แต่รอวันให้มันย้อนคืนสนองกลับมา ก็เท่านั้นเอง (Yoi, episode 12).*

iv. Melodramatisation

The section will discuss the series' melodramatisation as exercised in the process of television adaptation. The analysis will reveal the producer's approaches to delivering the Buddhist ideology to the mass audience.

The findings of a comparative reading of the novel and television series reveal several narrative strategies that play crucial roles in heightening the suffering of characters and, subsequently, reinforcing Buddhist teachings. Those strategies are reduction, increase and intensification, dramatisation, extension, and other religious symbolisations. These are discussed in the following subsections.

a. Reduction of subplots, event details and non-central characters

In order to enhance the dharma theme, the television series replaces some subplots, event details and non-central characters with minor plot-driven functions. In terms of characters, the omissions include characters' complexities, details about leading characters' backgrounds, extended stories of some in-law characters, characters' sexual interests, conflicting speech and the actions of key characters. Meanwhile, the series minimises or removes other supporting details like sorcery ceremonies, minor events, and socio-political details about western soldiers, such as their relationships with local women and the American military retreat. Such exclusions show that the series prioritises the creation of a stronger karma-based storyline. Meanwhile, socio-political conflicts over the modernisation period of the country are minimised and mentioned vaguely as a background.

b. Increase and intensification of characters' functions

While the series lessens non-Buddhist details, it increases characters' roles to articulate Buddhist and Confucian ethics about household life and work. To do this, the series adds scenes that discuss practices of entrepreneurship, the roles of employers and employees, effective work plans, self-reliance, and hard work. Simultaneously, there are scenes that debate topics such as family management, family shares for children, self-development, maturity, including friendships, from which the viewer can benefit. Moreover, the television series intensifies the binary accumulation of characters' goodness and viciousness by rearranging the sequence order of the novel and grouping events to make the idea of actions and consequences obvious to the audience.

c. Dramatisation: The sensation enhancer for primetime viewership

Compared to the novel's more generalised depiction of leading characters' relationships and life routines, the television adaptation dramatises the characters' interaction to create tension. Moreover, since the characterisation of bossy Yoi is strong, approaches to make her recognise the negative consequences that have happened to her and her loved ones need to be vigorous too.

An example is when divorced Sa has to decide whether to be with Chanta despite his mother's disagreement. In the novel, Sa only asks Yoi for an engagement ring so he can get engaged to Chanta but he still stays with Yoi until his fiancé finishes her beautification studies. In contrast, in the series, Sa tearfully begs his mother for his life. Heartbroken Yoi surrenders and gives Sa some pocket money and gold. She challenges the couple to prove their genuine love by not returning if they fail to establish their own business successfully. Afterwards, following sequences illustrate how Sa and his lover settle in Chiangmai and work hard to make their business succeed. Those additional sequences offer more opportunities for the series to embed the Confucian notions of partnership, hard work, money management and working strategies to generate regular customers and income. The rebelliousness of Sa leads to the reveal of their mother's downfall and liberates the children.

In most cases, the relationship between mothers and sons in western melodrama tends to be more positive than that of the bond between mother and daughter (Gledhill 1987, 117). *Cage of Karma* shares such this feature also. For example, after the death of her husband, the sudden death of her last son and Sa's departure, Yoi becomes lonely and less temperamental. Soon, when she realises that Renu has cast black magic on her, despite feeling agony, Yoi realises that her compassion for Renu is not due to the magic but because of Renu's genuine care for her. Afterwards, when Philai admits her crime in public, the exhausted Yoi can accept all happenings and forgive the people surrounding her.

d. Extension: Representation of self-change process and achievement

What *Cage of Karma* proposes to the audience is the idea that no one should be trapped in a past which cages them. One example of this idea is represented in Lakseng's speech to Yoi in episode 12:

*Our life has only three days, Yoi. We have yesterday, today and tomorrow. Yesterday, we spent it up – cannot use it anymore. Today, we are dealing with it and can apply it only once. Yet, for tomorrow, we do not know whether we will have a chance to use it or not. Do not be inattentive with time, Yoi. You had better spend the time we have with true happiness.*⁵⁵

This idea is also repeated in other later episodes. The most apparent representations of this idea are the stories of Yoi, Renu and Philai. Despite the episodic display of their hostile speeches and acts to others from episodes 1–17, when Yoi, Renu and Philai reveal the root causes of their malicious actions, the following sequences in episode 17–19 illustrate their moments of recovery in a calm and private space. Demonstrating that Yoi, Renu and Philai can regain their life balance is a strategy to encourage the audience to see that people generally desire inner peace and self-satisfaction. Importantly, family members, friends and other people who provide guidance also play a fundamental role in supporting the self-change process.

e. Other audio-visual symbolisation of Buddhism

In addition to the narrative mediation techniques discussed above, *Cage of Karma* also promotes its religious meaning with audio-visual symbolism. In terms of visual symbols, there are two types of expression of the following references: Buddhist and general symbolism. Samples of Buddhist symbols include the lotus theme in the opening and end credits (four groups of Buddhist audience; fig. 2.6); a character walking past a mud pond (holy transcendence; fig. 2.7); the last recall before death (accumulated karma and tendency for the next reincarnation); releasing fish to the lake (freeing the karmic bond); and speech quotes in the end credit at the end of each episode.

⁵⁵ Thai script: ชีวิตคนเราเนี่ยมีเวลาอยู่แค่สามวันเองนะอาย้อย มีวานนี้ วันนี้ และก็พรุ่งนี้ วานนี้เนี่ยเราได้ใช้เวลาไปหมดแล้ว เอามาใช้อีกไม่ได้แล้ว วันนี้เรา กำลังใช้เวลากันอยู่และใช้เวลาได้แค่ครั้งเดียว ส่วนพรุ่งนี้ไม่รู้ว่าจะมีโอกาสได้ใช้ใหม่ ลืออย่าประมาทเวลาเนาะอาย้อย ใช้เวลาที่เหลือของเราอยู่กับความสุขจริงๆ ดีกว่า นะ (Lakseng, episode 12).



Fig. 2.6: A screen capture of *Cage of Karma*'s lotus symbol of Buddhism and wisdom
 Source: <https://www.SeesanTV.com> (accessed on 14/9/2020)



Fig. 2.7: A screen capture of *Cage of Karma*'s transcendence symbolization
 (Walking pass a mud pond)
 Source: <https://www.SeesanTV.com>, Episode 12 (accessed on 14/9/2020)

Meanwhile, other visual symbols do not require readers have any Buddhist background to make sense of the narrative's meaning. Examples of the non-Buddhist symbols include curtains (oppositeness); a metal window frame (cage); an accounting desk's key (power access and authority); rope untangling (persistent problem-solving); and nightmares (harbinger).

Songs also play a significant role in melodrama as an inspirational and textual guide to the reader (Brooks 1976; Williams 2018), and this series is no exception. The theme songs and a variety of instrumental music accompany the rhythm of live action, dialogue and verbal pauses (Williams 2018) throughout the story. Notably, the final scene (Fig. 2.8-2.10) that shows the impermanence of life completes with a brief Buddhist chanting that pays respect to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha Order. The chanting is soon followed by the Buddha's teaching in Thai: “กัมมมุนา วัตตติ โลโก

สัตว์โลกทั้งหลายย่อมเป็นไปตามกรรม” (Lit. *Kammuna Vattati Loko*, meaning all sentient beings are determined by their karma).



Fig. 2.8-2.10 Screen captures of *Cage of Karma*'s dissolving moving images

Source: <https://www.SeesanTV.com>, Episode 19 (Accessed on 14/9/2020)

Figures 2.8-2.10 and the audio suggest Yoi's struggling life accords to her karma. Nonetheless, no matter how one copes with their life, eventually, one dies with nothing but their virtue or bad karma they have conducted throughout their life. Such an obvious emphasis on karmic law leaves the audience no ambiguity about the clear Buddhist message.

The context and textual analysis of *Cage of Karma* reveals the local producer's articulation of the Buddhist belief of karma through a semi-factual fiction developed from the true experience of ordinary people. The function of the series is to encourage the audience to incorporate basic Buddhist precepts and Confucian ideas into their everyday conduct to achieve a balanced and successful secular life. Regarding ideological mediation, the case study is one of many cultural products that represents the ongoing family conflicts, prejudice and socio-economic inequality that Thai people have encountered.

In summary, the study finds that a section of Thais who struggle with capitalism may practice Buddhism with other multiple spiritualities to fulfil their spiritual insecurity (Kanchanapan 2010; Pongsapit 2006). The prevalent Buddhist notions debated in Thai television drama include the notions of karma, samsara and reincarnation, and the law of impermanence (Poonnotok 1990 in Intakanok 2007, 17). Ultimately, Thai television

dramas tend to promote the triumph of dharma over unrighteousness (Kaewthep and Eiamrerai 2011).

The religious and ethical messages circulated in the society serve as a social tool to keep the fragmented community unified (Grelle 2016, 69). Describing individuals' life struggles through the notion of karma encourages the reader to adjust themselves to the operating norms, rather than considering the ethical problems operating in society through information and critical debate. Consequently, the mass media and a majority of social members tend to leave the social order unchanged.

Semi-overt Buddhist sitcoms, primetime television series and primetime mini-series can all be found in the market. However, daytime mini-series are the most prevalent form the producer employs to deliver the semi-dharmic stories. Often, daytime mini-series are plotted from true stories and told through the genres of social drama and drama, whereas productions aired in primetime tend to exercise fictionalisation in a wider range of genres, including drama horror, drama fantasy and investigation drama. Despite these broad tendencies, there is no fixed format. Producers may differentiate their productions through a hybridisation of genre and format. *Cage of Karma* is a primetime series that employs a family drama and melodramatisation mode to strengthen the Buddhist ideology and heighten emotion.

The original story of *Cage of Karma* contains melodramatic features such as female characters' experiencing agony, religious worldviews, emotional intensity, hyperbole, vigorous action, bourgeois ideology, the desires of working people from different social classes and especially the triumph of virtue (Williams 2018; Dissanayake 1993; Gledhill 1987; Brooks 1976). The retelling of the story, as a consequence, requires melodrama as a recognisable body that is capable of distributing the religious discourse in popular culture (Zarzosa 2013; Brooks 1976).

In the modern period, although melodrama remains a popular mode of sensational entertainment for local viewers, with its moral discourse and local values, its conventional form and content has also been loosened. This is because the working-class individuals who make up the majority of the audience desire flexible media that values and reflects their institutional modes in natural and non-ideological forms and styles (Kaplan 1993, 12). While the reproduction of typical melodrama continues in the television industry, its

popularity tends to fade unless it can include new interpretations of stories, has socio-cultural relevance and features popular actors.

In regards to melodramatisation, *Cage of Karma* applies a) altered and moralised characterisations; b) the increase and intensification of the ethical functions of characters; c) a focus on the cast's theatrical performances; d) the extension of characters' self-change processes; and e) a reduction of subplots, event details and non-central characters. Other religious audio-visual metaphors also support the Buddhist theme.

The success of the series suggests there is a preference for Thai television drama that explores socio-cultural issues and moral desires through a realistic and complex mediation. Despite containing mysticism and shamanism practice, the message of the series prioritises Buddhism by showing the leading characters' eventual success in entrepreneurship and family acceptance after the persistence of hard work and virtuous conduct.

PART II: Audience analysis

The findings of the textual analysis in Part One revealed how the local producer used representation of a common Buddhist belief (karma) through television dramas to promote the basic precepts of the Buddhist religion for laypeople. The analysis of the section will answer the following question:

RQ2: How do Thai audiences negotiate Buddhism's meanings in new digital distributed texts into their religious awareness through online practices of participatory culture and social media?

The data for the examination comprises of three groups of data sources which are the most active in the local industry: highlighted clips from official YouTube sites of the television network Channel 3, Pantip.com blogs, and Facebook fan pages. The activities in those three platforms feature a variety of the audience's relationships to the karmic ideology, the series and online communities. In the official YouTube sites, the local audience enjoyed reading the given clips, as demonstrated by the vibrant comments section. Due to the absence of English subtitles, the majority of the conversations took place between local Thai people. Facebook fan pages that distributed the series with fan-

produced English subtitles were a data source through which this study was able to view the response of international viewers.

The structure of this audience analysis is composed of three sections, as follows.

Firstly, it will begin with the analysis of the online-based reception of the themes of the series: morality, family, and social class. In order to conduct the audience analysis in unison with the other case studies in the thesis, the chapter will utilise the reception analytical framework consolidated by Carolyn Michelle (2007), which is also used for understanding the audience' views and behaviours in Chapters One and Three.

Secondly, it will discuss the local fan interaction generated by the series across multiple approaches ranging from online to offline activities. The concept of fandom and new media looks at the affinity between the people, the application of popular culture and their participation in reproducing and making sense of the familiar religious ideology together. The analysis will also discuss the relationship between the case study and the other semi-explicit Buddhist television dramas. The findings will reveal the media users' textual interpretation and the ideological relevance that linked the readers to the text in the online and offline communities.

The third section of the analysis is a discussion of the overall findings of the chapter in relation to the notions of religious meaning-making, culture and media operation. The analysis will enable the reader to comprehend the local operation of communal components such as the online spaces, religion-related content, participants, shared values and activities. Finally, the conclusion of the chapter reveals the significant relationship between the mediation strategies of semi-explicit dharmic television drama in Thailand, the reception of these television dramas, and the current changes in the audience's roles as facilitated by social media.

I. Ideological reception of Buddhism embedded in *Cage of Karma* exchanges on YouTube

The study selected YouTube clips according to three major melodramatic themes: morality, family and social classes.

Firstly, concerning the clips that significantly address moral issues, the study selects five highlighted clips posted by the producer, as listed in Table 2.3. The first two

clips discuss the local belief in karmic law. The difference between the two is that the key dialogue of the first clip encourages the protagonist (Renu) to keep doing good things. The conversation notes that moral actions may take time to pay off; hence, it is crucial to never give up as the frequency and the volume of goodness conducted defines the outcomes. Meanwhile, the second clip displays the first turning point when the protagonist's mother-in-law (Yoi) begins to realise Renu's hard-working skills, diligence and caring qualities. In this scene, Yoi's husband shares the thought that it may be because of the negative karma that Yoi and Renu had against each other in their past lives that Yoi disliked Renu at first sight. He, however, asks Yoi if it is the time to stop such a hateful cycle. The ideology of the third clip is the gist of the series. It is the scene in which Yoi's husband gives Yoi the final speech about the importance of being mindful about the present, not the past nor the future. The fourth clip consists of a flashback scene where Yoi loses her control and murders her mother-in-law after years of tolerance. The incident caused deep guilt in Yoi and fear of karma returning. The fifth clip is the scene where Tim provokes Philai to admit her crimes. Philai's explanations of her motivation and methods in front of Yoi's family members, her mother and the crowd reflect Yoi's past karma. It is the climactic moment where Yoi and everyone become aware that Philai is unwilling to accept the inferior status assigned to her, resulting in greed, hatred and violence.

Table 2.3: The list of selected morality-based YouTube clips of *Cage of Karma*

Theme 1: Morality				
Ep.	Titles	Original air date	Number of views	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
4	FIN สักวัน...ความดีที่ยั่งยืนทำจะตอบแทนตนเอง ทรูogram Ch3Thailand (English: One day... the goodness that you diligently practice will pay off Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019o)	11 March 2019	1,414,715	135
6	FIN พอหรือยังละ...อาย้อย ทรูogram Ch3Thailand (English: Is it enough, Yoi? Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019h)	18 March 2019	1,452,007	160

Theme 1: Morality				
Ep.	Titles	Original air date	Number of views	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
12	FIN ชีวิตคนเรามีเวลาอยู่แค่ 3 วันเองนะ...วานนี้ วันนี้ พรุ่งนี้ ละครกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: We have only 3 days, yesterday, today and tomorrow Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019b)	8 April 2019	672,474	138
16	FIN ซ้ำโลก ซ้ำใจไม่ ละครกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: A prostitute, filthy woman Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019d)	22 April 2019	1,526,125	106
18	FIN ชีวิตมันขึ้นอยู่กับความเกลียดแค้นๆ เลยนะ อีพีไล ละครกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Your life runs with hatred, really, Philai Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019c)	29 April 2019	4,049,386	1,852

Note: All the YouTube clips were accessed on 15/10/2020.

Regarding the clips dealing with the melodramatic theme of family, the study chooses five clips that feature various kinds of familial relationships, roles and family management. The first clip is the scene where Sa begs his mother to give him his life back and allow him to choose his own life path. The second clip is the following scene that shows Yoi finally deciding to let Sa leave her to marry his lover, despite the agony this decision causes her. Before leaving, Yoi gives Sa some pocket money and challenges him and his lover to prove their true love through self-made success. The third clip is a sequence that shows how Sa and his wife have worked hard to build up a fortune together. The ideology of this sequence suggests the factors of successful family life consist of love, self-respect, caring, sharing the same vision between both members of the relationship and teamwork, and good communication. The fourth clip shows Yoi's family business management. The scene contains Yoi's clear and fair discussion with her son Tong and his wife, Philai, about family shares. The content of the scene suggests the necessity of parents making an agreement about the family plan with supporting rationale at an appropriate time to prevent arguments among children and in-laws. The last clip of the family-based group is one of the most emotional scenes of the series. It is the scene

where Yoi reunites with Renu and her newborn grandson. Yoi visiting Renu, forgiving her and approving of the baby's use of Yoi's family name symbolise the longed-for results of Renu's goodness.

Table 2.4: The list of selected family-based YouTube clips of *Cage of Karma*

Theme 2: Family				
Ep.	Titles	Original air date	Number of views	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
9	FIN ที่นี่คนเยอะแล้วเกาะกะ ครงกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Here is already crowded Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019f)	26 March 2019	3,687,445	1,220
16	FIN หนูโตแล้วมา...หนูขอชีวิตหนูคืน ครงกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: I'm grown up, mom. I beg myself back Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019p)	22 April 2019	1,010,512	847
16	FIN ถ้าแกหมดตัวแล้วล้ม ไม่ต้องคิดกลับมา ครงกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: If you fail, never come back Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019e)	22 April 2019	1,233,220	482
16	FIN บ้อนเฮียหน่อยสิ ครงกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Feed me please Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019g)	22 April 2019	1,861,195	687
19	FIN มาได้โปรดยกโทษให้หนูด้วยเถอะ ครงกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Mom, please forgive me Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019i)	30 April 2019	4,550,755	1152

Note: All the YouTube clips were accessed on 15/10/2020.

The selection of clips dealing with the melodramatic theme of social class is based on characters' different strategies to tackle social discrimination, ranging from passive capitulation to confrontation using witty conversation and physical fights. The first clip is the scene where Yoi severely rebukes Chanta, a poor young girl to whom her son shows some passion. The second clip is the scene in which Pom protects Boonplook (both are employees of Yoi's grocery shop) from physical harm at the hands of Philai. The third clip features the scene in which Renu uses a sense of humour to respond Yoi's expression of disgust for Renu's money. The fourth clip is the scene where Philai looks down on the

literacy level of Boonplook (an employee of the shop) and Renu. However, Philai is upset as she never gains support from anyone in the family when she discriminates against others. Lastly, the fifth clip is the scene where Yoi calmly responds to the newest daughter-in-law's boast about her wealth and high social class.

Table 2.5: The list of selected class-based YouTube clips of *Cage of Karma*

Theme 3: Social classes				
Ep.	Titles	Original air date	Number of views	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
3	FIN ไม่ต้องรังเกียจเงินฉันขนาดนั้นก็ได้...เงินนี้ได้มาอย่างบริสุทธิ์ ทรกกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: You don't need to despise my money that much. It is earned decently Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019l)	5 March 2019	7,272,523	811
5	FIN ไม่ได้มาซื้อของ...มาตำคนเฉยๆ ทรกกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: I'm not here to buy anything. I just come to damn someone Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019k)	12 March 2019	2,306,792	656
5	FIN เราจบ ป.4 เหมือนกันก็จงอ่านภาษาคน ป.4 รู้เรื่องกันเองเนอะ ทรกกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Both of us finish grade 4. So, we can read grade 4 people's language Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019m, 4)	12 March 2019	2,117,244	210
11	FIN มึงมาสิ ทรกกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Come on Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019j)	2 April 2019	4,343,194	1360
19	FIN ไต่หรือคะคุณแม่ ทรกกรรม Ch3Thailand (English: Are you chasing me out, mom? Cage of Karma) (Wachirabunjong 2019n)	30 April 2019	2,588,073	622

Note: All the YouTube clips were accessed on 15/10/2020.

The audience study created three individual NVivo projects to accommodate data files according to the three themes: morality, family, and social class. Each project contains five data files, as listed above. The study looks at clusters of the viewers'

comments (as groups of ideas) to understand what they pay attention to and how they make sense of the ideological mediation of Buddhism.

After the data coding, the study calculated the data frequencies of each thematic group into percentages to analyse the significant findings within and across the theme groups. The results of the analysis of the data organisation conducted in October 2020 are shown in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Frequency percentages of reception expressed on selected YouTube clips of *Cage of Karma*

Modes of reception	Morality theme (from 5 sources: 2,391 comments)	Family theme 100% (from 5 sources: 4,388 comments)	Social class theme 100% (from 5 sources: 3,659 comments)
1. Denotative reception			
i) Mediated-aesthetic reception (visual or textual aesthetics)			
• Directing	0.13	0.07	-
• Cast	0.92	0.75	0.19
• Acting	23.04	12.22	5.82
• Actors	3.89	7.79	5.9
• Actor's appearance	2.13	3.81	4.37
• Audio-visual details	0.33	2.62	2.71
• Mentioning other relevant productions	1.13	1.16	1.91
ii) Mediated-generic reception (production-based reception)			
• Novel	-	0.09	-
• Plot	2.18	1.25	2.46
• Directing	0.38	0.41	0.08
• Characterisation	6.56	9.48	11.18
• Script	3.01	2.35	12.51
• Translation	0.08	-	-
• Awards	3.01	1.75	0.16
• Others	5.23	4.3	5.25
iii) Mediated-intention reception			
• Motto	2.72	3.4	0.74
• Professional or industry-based receptions	1.59	4.58	1.48
2. Connotative reception			
A. Transparent mode (text as personal life)			

Modes of reception	Morality theme (from 5 sources: 2,391 comments)	Family theme 100% (from 5 sources: 4,388 comments)	Social class theme 100% (from 5 sources: 3,659 comments)
a) Sensation			
Liking	15.6	19.78	13.83
<i>b) Personal experience – individual biography</i>			
Sharing similar experience	1.25	1.75	0.46
B. Referential mode (text as like-life)			
• Closed person’s experience – biography	0.13	0.14	0.11
• Experience and knowledge of the broader socio-cultural context	2.17	3.03	1.26
• Jokes	0.92	0.59	0.3
Discursive mode (look at the text as the ideological message)			
<i>i) Analytical identification (comprehension of the message)</i>			
• Culture	0.08	0.46	0.03
• Plot	1.59	0.62	0.55
• Character’s motivation	5.27	1.64	0.96
The religious teachings (<i>The Eightfold Path</i>)			
1. Understanding			
• Audience’s right understanding of karma	2.92	1.73	0.47
• Noting characters’ wrong understanding	1.63	0.14	0.08
• The audience’s expression of their wrong understanding about the clips’ theme	0.29	0.02	-
2. Intention			
• Audience’s right intention	0.04	0.09	-
• Noting characters’ wrong intention	1.3	0.66	0.22
• The audience’s expression of their wrong intention	0.25	0.64	5.33
3. Speech			
• Audience’s right speech	0.59	0.27	0.25
• Noting characters’ wrong speech	1.55	0.27	2.05
• The audience’s expression of their wrong speech	1.97	3.35	11.37
4. Action			

Modes of reception	Morality theme (from 5 sources: 2,391 comments)	Family theme 100% (from 5 sources: 4,388 comments)	Social class theme 100% (from 5 sources: 3,659 comments)
• Audience's right action	0.5	0.55	0.27
• Noting characters' wrong action	0.71	0.32	1.45
• The audience's expression of their wrong action	-	0.02	0.05
5. Livelihood			
• Audience's right livelihood	0.25	0.41	0.19
• Noting characters' wrong livelihood	0.08	0.02	0.03
• The audience's expression of their wrong livelihood	-	-	-
6. Effort			
• Audience's right effort	-	0.11	0.16
• Noting characters' wrong effort	0.04	-	-
• The audience's expression of their wrong effort	-	-	-
7. Mindfulness			
• Audience's right mindfulness	0.04	-	-
• Noting characters' wrong mindfulness	0.04	-	-
• The audience's expression of their wrong mindfulness	-	-	-
8. Concentration			
• Audience's right concentration	-	-	-
• Noting characters' wrong concentration	-	-	-
• The audience's expression of their wrong concentration	-	-	-
Other ideological implications	-	0.14	0.11
ii) Positional interpretation (audience's response to the message)			
1. Agreement to dominant ideology	3.72	2.83	0.68
2. Negotiated responses	0.21	0.14	0.05
3. Oppositional responses to the series	0.38	0.34	0.14
4. Oppositional responses to other members of virtual community	-	-	-
Consumption and media access			
• Consumption	-	3.46	1.23

Modes of reception	Morality theme (from 5 sources: 2,391 comments)	Family theme 100% (from 5 sources: 4,388 comments)	Social class theme 100% (from 5 sources: 3,659 comments)
• Foreign audiences	0.33	0.43	0.55
Others	0.02	0.02	3.06
Total	100	100	100

The data above shows that the series relates to the local people with its discourses concerning basic morality (Confucianism and Buddhism), Thai-Chinese family values and social class. However, the data suggests that denotative reception (production-based reception) such as the acting, the plausible characterisations and the script were essential factors that drew local audiences to the series.

While the majority of the audience reads the doctrinal series *Buddha* connotatively, the audience of *Cage of Karma* pays attention to the text's denotative and connotative elements. Recognizing content by reference to the structure of the text - such as the awareness of program format, genre, stories articulating stereotypes, and the craft of the producer and the cast – enables audiences to constitute the television series narrative from perceived events (Wilson 2009, 51). Following the prevalent themes of mainstream Thai primetime television drama that feature the notion of karma and conflicting relationship between the in-laws, the local audience anticipates and interprets the text in a structured process of meaning construction. However, they do not always agree with the efficiency of the karmic law concerning the sense-making of the series' plot and the social reality. The following section will analyse the data and uncover the audience's varied relatedness to the series and their understanding of religious ideas embedded in the series.

Considering the total YouTube views, class-oriented clips gained the most attention at 18.6 million views, followed by that of the family and morality themes at 12.3 million views and 9.1 million views respectively. However, compared to the total views, the comments of the three groups were merely 0.026%, 0.036%, and 0.020%.⁵⁶ It

⁵⁶ The YouTube participation proportion:

- 1) the morality-based theme: (2,391 comments/9,114,707 total views) x 100 = 0.026%;
- 2) the family theme: (4,388 comments /12,343,127 total views) x 100 = 0.036%; and
- 3) the social class theme: (3,659 comments /18,627,826 total views) x 100 = 0.020%.

demonstrates that less than 1% of the total audience shared their opinions on the platform. The comment percentage frequency, however, excludes the frequencies of likes and dislikes of other participants responding to those original comments, which NVivo cannot code. Consequently, although the analysis is based on the online evidence, the data analysis should not strictly be regarded as the indisputable facts about the local reception and media practices. It is necessary to apply a qualitative interpretation to the quantitative findings vis-a-vis other related information with an awareness of the implicit and highly dynamic interactions that vary on social media platforms (Campbell 2012).

As reflected in the data above, local participants were most actively engaged with the family-based clips (at 4,388 comments on the five clips), followed by that of social classes (3,659 comments on the five clips), then morality (2,391 comments on the five clips). The audience's comments also showed the direct engagement of audiences with texts that feature family relationship and morality to a higher degree (at 19.78% and 15.60%, respectively) than the texts with the social class theme, which showed audience emotional engagement at 13.83%. The sensational expressions included in those comments show satisfaction, sympathy and dislike, to name a few. Some comments revealed the links audiences made between the content of the clips and their personal experiences. Notably, the scenes showing a father delivering final instructions to his family at his death bed, the caregiving of a disabled mother-in-law and the suffering required to balance familial relationships resonated with the audience's related memory and emotions.

For instance, M.M. (2019) repeated the final speech of Lakseng about living in the present moment and not worrying about the past or the future, which are out of their control. M.M. and many other participants agreed that this scene deeply touched their heart and made them cry heavily with the characters. Meanwhile, T.P. (2019) noted their uncontrollable crying when watching the scene where Yoi allows Sa and his lover to leave home and challenges them to prove their love and working skills. T.P. and fifteen more people stated that the series is real life shown on the screen.

Considering the audience's interpretation of the embedded ideologies, participants who commented on clips based on morality and family themes showed their sense-making at 3.72% and 2.83%, respectively. For instance, about 4,300 YouTube

participants liked K.D. (2019)'s view, which noted that:

It is the best television drama I have ever seen. There are no heroes and heroines. Everyone has bright and dark sides. This drama teaches us to see the world in a grey colour, as it is. It teaches us to look at the world to see the gist of the karma and consequences of goodness making – then to detach from adherence. Moreover, we see archetypes in the series as a lesson and positive energy for life conducts. It is not a series that only employs physical violence, hitting the good heroine and seeing her crying like other soap operas. Thank you for producing the social drama that encourages the society to consider many issues. It is because how our society expresses based on the family institution, which is the micro-unit of the society.

Meanwhile, more than 2,000 viewers agreed with P.J. (2019), who analysed the expression of Yoi and Renu that reveals their changed relationship in the final episode. P.J. noted that eventually forgiving is the best kind of giving. Likewise, P.P. (2019) and other 487 participants showed their recognition of the ideological message. P.P. underlined that the series teaches viewers about forgiving, karmic actions and irrevocable consequences. T.H. (2019) and 361 more people had a similar reaction. T.H., furthermore, offered that the series gave them many ideas. Most markedly, the series demonstrated that holding onto envy, hatred, attachment and ego is like holding onto the karma. Once an individual understands they need to let things go and to forgive, it will greatly benefit themselves. P.C. (2019) and other 393 viewers praised the series and the producer for making a series that centres on the idea of conducting life with consciousness and accountability for one's actions and their consequences.

Even after several reruns, many audience members still read the text's message similarly:

'I like the details of the production. No matter how many times I watch this series, I am fulfilled and cry heavily with the characters. More importantly, the series implants that using the black magic to their loved ones might exist. But what is real is Renu's diligence, patience, and sincerity.' P.A. (2021)

'This series is realistic because it does not end perfectly. During the life journey, it is not smooth but full of obstacles. Also, many things lead us to think wrongly and do wrong things. However, we can change back to the norm too.' T.T. (2020)

'I am speechless. The series gives me ideas and feelings. It is a very good drama.' (A.A., 2021)

'It is a television drama that offers me practical ideas for life conduct.' (S.K., 2021)

However, the most prevalent comments express the users' emotional engagement with the text. Noting that they cried with the leading characters is one of the most common responses the viewer shares with others on YouTube. Their sayings imply that their emotional involvement is not the result of learning the series' religious message but the cast's dramatic performance. Their engagement is character-driven more than plot-driven.

Regarding the notion of social cultivation, B.S. (2019) and T.P. (2019) suggest that proper training from family, self-training and appropriate friendships are crucial for individuals to become desirable members of society. P.S. (2019) praised the series for various ideas shown to the audience, especially the consequences of bringing up children without close nurturing.

Meanwhile, 0.68% of those who commented on the social class clips showed their agreement with the ideologies represented in the series. 606 people agreed with M.Y. (2020), who shared that despite the public concern about the prevalent use of coarse speech in the series, it actually made them become more aware of their own use of speech. K.T. (2019) and over 1,200 other viewers addressed the short- and long-term effects of the negative speech expressed by Lim, Yoi's mother-in-law. K.T. noted that even though there were only a few scenes in which Lim appeared, her strong damning and cursing words echoed powerfully in their mind for days.

The cluster of the audience's morality-oriented expressions discussed above suggests the dominant interpretation of the local viewer concerning the embedded ethical ideology and the right type of speech. Nonetheless, the social media space accommodates other types of reception, including negotiation and rejection of the exhibiting ideology.

Considering the oppositional reception, some participants showed their

disagreement with practising goodness as well as an approval of the antagonist's ideas and behaviours. For instance, A.M. (2020) noted that karmic law exists only in fiction. In reality, villains have a luxurious and privileged life. Similarly, eleven people agreed with P.T. (2019), who argued with the notion of religious practice:

In television drama, we can use goodness to master life. However, in my reality, it is difficult. My family members and relatives focus on materials and ignore the value of good deeds. I learned the lesson not to make the effort to do good for those who do not value it. It is because although we do so to death, they can still view it wrong, all the same. It is better to do good for those who appreciate it, always.

P.C. (2019) was another viewer who objected to abstaining from sexual misconduct, claiming attaining a better financial status was a more important priority. Similarly, R.A. (2019) and A.A. (2019) favoured the antagonist character (Philai) as a realistic characterisation. R.A. added that sometimes people cannot overcome their greed. Hence, they found Philai's misbehaviours and crime normal and acceptable.

Although the opinions of P.C., R.A. and A.A. gained no support or disagreement from other media users, their expressions in public show the current challenges faced by the religious community. The regular exposure to those ideas is likely to accustom the communal members to a more non-moral norm and environment.

For the family-based ideology, in general, most viewers agreed with the series' notions of gratitude, brotherhood, supportive partnerships, loyalty and family business management. However, at critical family-based plot points of the series, a considerable section of the audience argued about balancing family roles and meeting personal requirements. The most engaging issues include the conflicting values of familial tradition, gratitude, obedience, individuality, understanding and supporting individuals' growth, marriage without the approval of parents, and making decisions about one's life path, for instance. The expressions of the audience were shown in various fashions, ranging from referring to their personal experience to interpreting the actions of the characters from a distant observer's point of view.

Many viewers noted their related experience. Some samples of such digital ethnography include that of following participants:

Children of Chinese families in the past followed the practice of arranged

marriages. The parents usually organised the marriage without asking for their children's ideas. I was one of those who married according to my parents' decision. Later, my relationship collapsed badly. Thus, I truly understand Sa in this scene, in that he has to decide for himself. Otherwise, Yoi will definitely make him marry Wanna. At the same time, I also understand Yoi. The mind of the mother is like this. (U.W., 2019)

Now, I also fall into the same situation. Being the only child does not allow me to choose my love life freely. I have secretly been in a relationship with my lover. He knows that my mother dislikes him, but he is patient and waits for me. It hurts every single time when he asks when we can be together. One side is my mother. The other side is my lover. It is so painful. (T.T., 2019)

I think I am a female version of Sa. Actually, my case is worse. My parents force me to obey them with verbal and physical violence. I sacrifice many things in life because I love them. Yet, they never value it and regard me as a burden. They damn and bash me in various ways. If I do not consider them as a family, how can a human who has been treated like this for all my life can tolerate so? (O.J., 2019)

In contrast, other viewers applied referential viewpoints to evaluate the characters' actions. That is, some of them objected the idea of the child's leaving the suffering parent for a tainted lover who does not show any specifically good qualities. Samples of the comments include that of N.B. (2019), as below:

The most painful experience of a mother is when the child that we love with all our life prioritises another person. I feel so sorry for Yoi, who has recently lost two of her beloved ones. Sa, who is the most considerate one, chooses his lover instead of his mother. This is the utter agony. At the critical point of life, very few people choose the mother, no matter how pampering or controlling the mother brought them up.

However, while some participants showed acceptance of the decision to leave the mother, other viewers disagreed with Sa's decision. They instead value the local family culture, gratitude ideology and morality more than love. Similarly, some of them

suggested that if they were Chanta (Sa's lover), it is more respectful to sacrifice love and Chanta's decision showed personal selfishness. At the same time, many of the audience showed their understanding of the difficulties that the mother and children in the series encounter.

Such a variety of the audience's expressions above notifies the complex and, at times, problematic family practices in Thailand that the series shares with a considerable section of the audience's personal and social experience. The audience-produced discussion notes the commonplace struggles of family practices in multiple levels, from personal and communal to constitutional and family-law-related conflicts.

In terms of social inequality, the comments of the local audience reveal different views about the situations shown in the clips. The ideas range from accepting unfairness to believing in the power of individuals to change their socio-political status. In addition to responding to the socio-economical discrimination, T.N. (2020) stressed the importance of making ethical responses to injustice. They condemned the notion of using black magic to solve the social gap problem, writing:

Philai is the leading character of the story. Without her, the audience cannot recognise other characters' inner mind. However, even the character that seems to be decent is not particularly good. Renu's inner feelings are complicated. She did everything to defeat others without thinking about life and the severe affliction of the people who were under her black magic. Conducting black magic is the cruellest act, as those who are bedevilled would be half-dead. They are tortured with serial pain, unconsciousness, mental and physical impurity. Therefore, those who implement the black magic, no matter what approach it is, are seriously wrong. Else, it can cause death to the targeted person if the sorcery operates in the body for too long. This kind of misdeed is hard to forgive, as it is the murder with ignorance.

Considering the expressions of the audience in the three thematic groups of the clips, most the audience's views accord with the series' ethical message. However, there is the issue of the viewers' abusive commenting towards the characters in the show that is worth taking into consideration.

Currently, cyberbullying with hate speech is a concerning issue for Thai media

users. Cyber perpetrators and cyber victimisation are emerging public health concerns for adolescents in the country (Boonya-Anuchit and Piyaraj 2018). Collective cyber hatred generally involves social or political disagreements (Kummetha 2020). The verbal violence, degrading comments, social sanctions and physical harm have increasingly severe impacts on the victims (Kim and Leventhal 2008, Brighi et al. 2012 in Sittichai and Smith 2013).

In response to the prevalent aggression on the show and in the comments section, K.I. (2020) asked the other readers: *“Please help me think what the society would gain from consuming such the hatred, viciousness and envy like this?”* Another viewer also underlined the sickness of a society that views killing as a common approach for solving relationship problems. Although the questions received no responses, they, at least, show some efforts of commenters to advocate for non-violent responses to real-life situations. Also, although the clips that displayed physical fights between characters had a high number of views, clips where characters employed witty and comedic strategies to tackle discrimination attained higher viewing numbers. The silent response notes that the fan is always in constant conflict with the subordinates of media consumers (Grossberg 1992, 52).

Evidence to support this claim are the data of the audience’s religious practice on social-class theme as revealed in the clusters of comments. For instance, there was an absence of the audience’s comments on characters having the right intentions (0%) in the YouTube sites where there were comments discussing characters’ wrong intentions (to murder, commit adultery or proceed a physical fight) (5.33%). Moreover, a considerable section of the Thai audience repeated the same view, or even sentences, as previous ones. Similarly, when a significant number of the audience talked about characters’ wrong speech (11.37%) in the community (for example, being rude and cursing), the proportion of those who talked about the right speech (for example, compromising, explanation, analysis) was limited at 0.25%.

How the local viewer reads the text connotatively refers to the notion observed by Henry Jenkins (2005) that the engaged audience relates to the text from a personal reference. 'Fans seemingly blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, speaking of characters as if they had an existence apart from their textual manifestations, entering

into the realm of the fiction as if it were a tangible place they can inhabit and explore' (Jenkins 2005, 18).

As discussed earlier in the contextualisation part of the chapter, despite the local audience's regular exposure to the local socio-political inequality and dysfunction of authorities, a considerable number of the audience question the efficiency of leaving individuals' wrong conduct to the karmic law. Some challenge the faith by expressing their opposition to the text and others. Some of the other audience may find those strong expressions defensive.

Henry Jenkins (2005) describes the fan interpretive practice that 'from the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers' (Jenkins 2005, 18). Those comments that other members consider 'inappropriate' to express might get attacked to keep the conversation in line. Such negotiation may make it uncomfortable and isolate participants to further the discussion or to adapt the strategy of reading the text. The criticism alienates those readers from others who share common interests (Jenkins 2005). 'Even within the fan community, these categories are evoked as a way of policing the ranks and justifying one's pleasures as less perverse than those of others' (Jenkins 2005, 19). Consequently, a section of readers who experience undesirable criticism in public may marginalise themselves from the community and limit their participation on the platform. Silence is one of the strategies evidential on the online forum. Also, they may navigate from one community to another to which they feel more belonging and are freer to express.

The audience analysis in Chapter Three will discuss how many media users who question the monarchy institution and some of the Siamese/Thai Kings' righteousness navigate from confrontation with other television drama viewers about the issue. Their means include creating their YouTube videos sharing how certain Siamese/Thai Kings behaved to propagate the monarchical dysfunction. Whether or not such a practice arises according to partial political agendas, it underlines the process Jenkins calls 'collective intelligence' that the media users deal with their desire to argue and make sense of particular subjects in public.

The fans of the three case studies have practised multi-screen surfing to establish collective intelligence concerning their interests. That said, fans of the

series *Buddha* seek for religious reference of the Buddha's biography, his teachings, his principal disciples, historical sites, for example, to make sense of the series that constructs a new meaning of the founder of the religion and the socio-political context of the ancient time. In this chapter, the fans seek information about the story's fictional universe that links to the other previous television series. The relationship between the main character (You) and her sister (Yam), who is the antagonist of the other related television series, and the provinces that the story locates are examples of what the fans seek information from online sources such as websites, the author's interviews and social media. The third case study that the reader will find in the next chapter is a historical drama titled *Love Destiny*. The series refers to varied related sources of information that the viewer can enjoy their extended activities to dig deeper to the history.

One overlapping factor that makes the three case studies popular in Thailand is their rich historical contexts that attract the audience to want to know more about the story and the characters. Existing and newly-created sources of information provided by the producer supply those audiences' enthusiasm. Chapter One has discussed the transmediality of the story that Jenkins (2006) and Benshoff (2015) observe, which is one of a few characteristics of successful franchise that give rise to a fandom (Jenkins 2006; Benshoff 2015). The final discussion will focus more on the fandom-generating characteristics of a story.

More often than not, media users tend to follow the familiar sources of information (such as media platforms peer groups, for example) that reinforce or, at least, do not so contradict their current understanding and social identity.

Looking at the international consumption, the YouTube data shows that the series gained limited attention from international audiences at lower than 0.6% for all themes. From the international audience's identities shown evidently by either their statement of where they are from or their language, the findings show that most of the foreign audiences are from Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, India and China.

In September 2020, the study examined Facebook fan pages that posted the last four episodes of the series (episode 16–19) with English subtitles, presumably for the consumption of international audiences. These Facebook fan pages were hosted by a lead actor of the cast of the series. Over the month of September 2020, the platforms

revealed a moderate degree of participation of international viewers from a broad range of countries of origin in comparison to the YouTube channel, with a maximum of 8,300 views for the final episode.

A significant section of international Facebook audience's comments identified nationality. Some examples of international identities were shown directly in such comments as:

"Thank you so much for the subtitles #FC from Vietnam."

"Hi, I'm a fan from India."

"Thanks for the uploading. Her acting (Philai) is impressive! Love from Indonesia."

Elsewhere, they notify national identity by use of local languages, especially those from Laos. The majority of the nationally-identified audiences were from Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines. Some fans from South Asia were from India. Some other groups of East Asian audiences included that of China and Taiwan. A smaller section of the international audience included western countries such as the United States of America, and European countries.

The international audiences' attendance and textual comprehension shown in the rooms underline that the Asian audiences' cultural proximity (Dissanayake 2012) enabled them to make sense of the Confucian family values (Glynn 2014) and basic Buddhist morality of the series. The conflicts in the series *Cage of Karma* share common features with that of many Asian television dramas, such as respect for seniority and the elderly, preference for sons and conflicts in the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Hyun Mee Kim 2005 in Glynn 2014, 54). Moreover, the overseas viewers' reaction showed their ability to consume a foreign fiction despite their disbelief of black magic expressed through their comments.

The foreign audiences' comments were similar to the local audience's production-based reception. That is, their common expressions included engagement with the characters' situations in the scenes, characters' behaviours, the plot, compliments on the acting and production, thanking the distributor and the subtitle-maker, and requests for the title of the series. Also, a considerable section of the international viewers shared greetings from their country and announced their fandom of actors/actresses. In return,

the host and other Thai fans invited the international fans to follow more episodes and the actors' other shows via sharing embedded URL links.

The local and international members' participation cultivated a safe communal environment and accommodated a friendly fandom. Such a code of behaviour constructed by the members established a positive relationship between fans. Failure to follow the norm may result in getting rejected from the online tribe (Glynn 2014, 88). For the Facebook fans, what was important to the Thai audience in watching the series on Facebook fan pages (after the original telecast) seemed not to be the series' content per se but forum pride and the social engagement with multinational media users (Glynn 2014, 90).

II. Fan culture and the collective meaning-making of *Cage of Karma*

Considering the current communication approaches practiced in the Thai television drama industry, the producers and the cast members also play fundamental roles in creating online and off-line communities to boost the popularity of their productions. To do this, *Cage of Karma* implemented multiple social networks with the audience.

During the official telecast and immediately afterwards, the producer of *Cage of Karma* formally arranged a team to virtually participate with the audience on the production's Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Facebook Live Feed accounts. The social media communication unit might not have been the core mechanism through which the show was able to attain high nationwide ratings; however, it actively offered online audiences a family-like membership and the answers to any questions related to the show such as historical references, production updates, charities and fan meeting activities.⁵⁷ In Thailand, it is common for actors to voluntarily help to promote series via their conversations in Twitter with other members of the cast. The virtual participation of the cast leaders increases the fan activity by introducing the followers of an individual actor to the cast's extended networks. Moreover, depending on their appreciation of the story and the acting of the cast, other notable members of the industry (for example, directors, actors and producers) and media news organisations also include themselves in online discourse. They can play a significant part in fan culture by prompting opinion-sharing

⁵⁷ 'เปิดโต๊ะคุยกับผู้จัดผู้กำกับ บีบี เอกนรี และผู้ประพันธ์ละครกรงกรรม คุณเพ็ญ นิพนธ์' 2019.

and the sharing of news and analyses, which helps to notify the complex ideological embodiment and strengthen the audience's sense-making of the narrative.

Audiences were able to use the technological affordance of digital media to increase virtual connections by creating and adding hashtags of their imagined communities (such as #กรงกรรมep16, #กรงกรรมep17, #ASaTeam). Appealing headings, screen captures, short-cut clips and GIFs played essential roles in capturing media users' attention and binge-engagement. Competent media users in particular could share clips and comments almost effortlessly across popular social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Line and Pantip.com. As a result, it becomes more challenging to rigidly define the specific roles of the production makers and the audience. Individuals may play several roles in the industry simultaneously as long as the interaction gives them an enjoyable sense of identity and aligns with their values of choice (Hills 2002). Additionally, connecting pieces of information from various sources also strengthens their desired knowledge (Jenkins 2006) to promote themselves to those who know less in social media conversation. Some of the evidence for this in relation to *Cage of Karma* included news about rating statistics, the top worldwide trends on Twitter, high view rates on *Cage of Karma* clips on YouTube and awards.

Not only did the series inspire further discussions on social media, it also promoted temporary offline fan activities such as fan meetings and a slight increase in local tourism at locations where the series is set and interests in the local dessert menus that are frequently featured in the series. In the digital era, local media users tend to share their fandom-driven activities on social media. The audience-made practice benefits the producer, for it helps promote the series. Moreover, the fan activities help to commercialise local business and tourism. Therefore, the series has become a mediated tool connecting the television drama industry with fans, local authorities, and commercial parties for cultural consumption.

Unlike the many audience comments that show religious comprehension on the official YouTube platforms, there is an absence of explicit discussion about the law of karma or other socio-cultural ideologies inspired by the series, either on audience-generated YouTube, Facebook or Pantip.com forums. Those social media spaces also show no evidence of any offline religious activities of fans generated by *Cage of Karma*.

Such discourses, instead, were produced by entertainment and news organisations, and media scholars.⁵⁸

Considering the audience-made mediation, the study finds that the audience's fandom-related expression included copying the hairstyles, make-up, fashion and accessories of characters from the show and quoting their favourite character's speech or dialogue. Those ephemeral activities that the fans conducted to be part of the community stressed the close interrelations between textual and social preferences. Nonetheless, enunciation occurs only within immediate social relationships when the show was at its most popularity during its initial run (Fiske 1992, 38–39).

John Fiske (1992) compares the audience's self-made productions to that of professionals, arguing that the audience has non-profit-driven objectives and more limited production quality. However, I would like to argue that, currently, such a definition may not always apply. YouTube channels that have a lot of views and subscriptions have become another source of online income from advertisements. Subsequently, many Thai YouTubers take any possible opportunity to produce YouTube clips that link to popular television series and actors/actresses for their commercial benefit. Some examples of this include narration of episode synopses and spoiling the ending of the series (from how they read the novel) and discussion of the performers' personal lives. Often, those local YouTubers appeal to the viewers with exaggerated or misleading titles and image captions of related characters. Although the quality of the audience-made products may vary, there has been a constant increase in audience-created works that have a professional look and quality on YouTube and other linked social media. Therefore, the official series is not only an official commodity for the producer but also provides commercial capital for some media users too. Therefore, the profit exchange between the producer and the audience in the multi-screen media practice has shifted their relationship structure to be more commercially reciprocal.

⁵⁸ Nhongpon 2019; Filmsick 2019a; 2019b; Suansanan 2019; Phakdeemuanchon and Rattanasimakul 2019.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has investigated the faith-based Thai television dramas in the entertainment market in the socio-economic context of Thailand. The conclusion section will summarise the findings of the case study's textual and audience analysis.

In terms of textual analysis, the key findings are the case study's use of semi-factuality, co-plotting with the audience and melodramatisation. For the online audience analysis, the significant findings are the interrelationship among shared experiences of family relationships and social inequality; reproduction of religious themes; limitation of new religious learnings; impracticability; and co-storyteller roleplays.

Firstly, the study explored the status of semi-explicit Buddhist television dramas in the country during the period 1968 to 2020. The results show that this mediation style of Buddhism has continually practiced throughout this period following its cultural cultivating function. Looking at the forms of semi-explicit religious articulation, productions are commonly found in the form of mini-series, long-form television series and sitcoms. Daytime programs are more common and run for longer than primetime shows.

Following the Thai people's existing local faiths of supernaturalism and increasing socio-economic insecurity primarily caused by the widening economic gap, many Thai television dramas mediate Buddhist themes to align with the faith and work lives of the locals. Therefore, fantasy and horror-oriented narratives are commonly found featured in Thai television dramas to enhance the notion of karma, reincarnation and impermanence. The reason why karma is a religious tool to inspire the audience's religious practice is based on its capacity to represent in various forms of storytelling (Payutto 2012).

The textual analysis of the series *Cage of Karma* (2019) reveals that semi-explicit Buddhist mediation supplies the producer's and audience's desire for self-development for worldly pursuits. In addition to the entertainment value, the audio-visual representation encourages the participants to become more competent laypeople and focus their personal development on spiritual and external effects (Possamai 2005, 75–76) to develop their confidence with ethical practice and practical adjustments to their current relationships and life situation.

To articulate the negotiated ideologies above, one commonly found approach that the series also shared with other realistic semi-overt Buddhist television drama

productions is using a semi-factual plot developed from a true story. This plot strategy helps to establish ideological relatedness with the audience since it is based on real people's experience, which may be shared by many others who live in the same socio-cultural context. Although this fan-shared plotting is not new, the social media networks have expanded the exercise to be much more interactive. In the case of the novel *Cage of Karma*, the author and his Facebook fans together worked in the emerging role of virtual co-storyteller. Despite entertainment-based conversations on social media, this study finds that the media users' discourse is structured on their karmic belief, referential experience of themselves or their close friends and family and the sensibility of the whole plot and characters' actions and consequences. However, the findings show that the series' reproduction of the religious theme (karma) resulted in the audience's limitation of new religious learning.

The relationship between religion and its functionalist approach conducted via popular culture and social order is arguable. The data of the local industry's repetition of the idea of karma shown earlier stress that the residents are often exposed to the functionalist paradigm of the religion's function concerning the preferred social order. The mainstream media may suggest to the audience that social and moral conflicts are deviations from the norm caused by dysfunctional social or economic changes. The social transition to which the local people find too fast to adjust leads to their inability to adapt to the new social system and to maintain the preferred moral code (Joseph 2003: 197 in Grelle 2016, 72).

The repeated narrative of individuals' successful use of religion to seek life satisfaction accords with how Antonio Gramsci observes the discourse practice of medieval Christendom and nineteenth-century liberalism that establishes a form of passive consent to the existing social system (Grelle 2016, 71). To a certain extent, religion has become a political tool to preserve and legitimate the status quo by offering faith-based solace (Grelle 2016, 70). Thus, cultural productions romanticise the role of religion in maintaining the social and moral stability of the social system.

Nevertheless, such a dominant mediation of the integrating role of religion does not always accord with how the reader approaches social problems, its causes, and practical solutions. The contextual and textual analysis of a romanticized political

television series in Chapter Three more closely consider how Thai mass television drama furnishes the reader with a sense of meaning and reward of practising righteous ruling and obedience. Providing faith-based justification of socio-political boundaries to enhance the communal identity and a sense of belonging is one of the case study's discourse strategies to support the established social order.

Fandom is based on a distinct sensibility that the pleasure of consumption and further participation are superseded by an investment in difference (Lewis 1992, 3). That is, the audience's volition is influenced by affect which emerges from its power of invigoration and significance – not from its content (Grossberg 1992, 57-58).

The continuous reproduction of the local television dramas implanted the same ideologies and the absence of the audience's evidence of their further practice alludes to the fan's affect saturation. Additionally, the limited audience-made mediation suggests the restricted ability of the fan to turn their ideological agreement to self-made textual productions that they can share with others and that define the fan community (Fiske 1992, 30). The fans' investment relates to the text's empowerment of the audience with new strategies and confidence that enables them to take control over their current life problems (Grossberg 1992, 65). The audience's limited expressions of how they utilised the series' text in their real life may suggest there exists a gap between the taken-for-granted ideologies and the local audience's existing circumstances of everyday life, given that the series' conventional representation did not seem to make much difference to viewers (Lewis 1992, 3).

It is important to understand that, in cultural industries, the previously well-received products (meaning entertainment-driven television dramas with strong karmic themes) encourage mass investment for profits (Fiske 1992; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Subsequently, excess of the product is common and, in fact, necessary for the cultural economy (Grossberg 1992, 60–61). Given the familiarity of the karma-related theme represented in family drama, most of the online audience, therefore, paid more attention to the newer viewing experience, which was a sensational engagement with the cast's performance.

The domestic popularity of the series *Cage of Karma* (2019) and other productions with a similar ideology over the last few decades suggests that a large section of the local

audience is still agreeable to the idea of karma implanted in Buddhism-oriented television dramas. In relation to the collective belief in karma in society, multiple players, including producers and viewers, can exchange their roles as storytellers and circulate their own ways of making sense (Gadamer 1975, 167 in Wilson 2009, 5) of the karmic law. In the current digital era, media users are now equipped by digital media facilities to freely share their interpretations and meaning-making strategies with the broader public and therefore become key players in the media industry (Rose and Nightingale 2003 in Wilson 2009, 2).

Hence, regarding religious practices, it is essential to look at not only the conventional practice of individual viewers generated by the single semi-explicit Buddhist television drama but to view the operation of the whole industry as the collective religious conduct of Thai producers and viewers. The local participants regard sharing, producing and consuming karma-oriented narratives with other members of society as part of their quasi-dharmic practice. Although the responses of the media users in the multi-platformed landscape may show the diversity of the meaning-making (which do not necessarily directly accord with the provided television text) (Wilson 2009, 42; Morley 1992), the industry still utilises the traditional plots, genres and archetypical symbols to help the mass audience receive the primeval sacred teachings within the contemporary secularity of culture (White 1997, 48–49).

However, unlike the tight bonds between members in offline religious communities, the networked society features a looser structure of affiliation and commitment (Campbell 2012, 64). A large section of religious enthusiasts in contemporary society attends multiple and personalised religious networks that are suitable for their preference of the doctrinal depth and applicability (Campbell 2012, 66). Therefore, the participants share, debate and decide to express their religious practices in various possible ways, voluntarily and according to their preference and media affordance. Such participation constructs the social relations, media reception, production practices and faith-related identity (Bailey 2005, 2) of the current Thai media culture.

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Chapter 3

Contextualism and Audience Reception of Implicit Mediation of Buddhism in the Hybrid Historical Drama: *Love Destiny* (Panangkarisi 2018)

In the previous two chapters, this thesis examined the different ways Thai television dramas mediate Buddhism, in particular the religious practice of dharma. In the first chapter, despite the depiction of a range of doctrines in the series *Buddha*, the primary message focused on dharma in relation to individuals' spiritual freedom. In Chapter Two, the religious teachings in the series *Cage of Karma* focused on dharma in relation to householders. In order to understand the role of Buddhism in mass fiction on a societal scale, the third chapter of this thesis will explore a historical drama that depicts dharma in relation to governance, nationalism and monarchy in the digital era as it relates to themes of romance, family and culture.

The chapter will examine the Thai romantic comedy and historical drama *Love Destiny* (Thai: บุญเพ็ญนิवास, Lit. *Buppesannivas*; Panangkasiri 2018a), which received the highest television ratings in Thailand since 2014, at 23.4 and 18.6 for Bangkok and nationwide respectively (InfoQuest 2019, 24). While the extraordinary love journey of protagonists plays at the foreground of the series, the time travel fiction invites the audience to consider dharma in relation to the governance, corruption and social inequality of the Siam period in the 1680s. This series is chosen as the case study of this chapter because it raises essential questions for the thesis, as follows.

RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?

SRQ3: What entertainment values and experiences do Thai and foreign online audiences seek from Thai television drama in the digital era?

The analysis in this chapter will examine the case study's conservative reinforcement of the existing socio-political regime and the audience's corresponding reception. Despite some modernised characteristics, in general the series promotes the traditional identity of Thai culture and reinforces monarchist values. The representation of Buddhism in the series is implicit and as a more-or-less universal spirituality. Even

though the plot includes Buddhism as a subtext, pragmatically the role of Buddhism in the narrative plays more as cultural background than as the ethical code that leading characters hold onto. However, the religious sense-making of the local audience does not rely on the ideological code provided by a single production, such as the case study series. When the Buddhist doctrines in the series are simplified and, at times, minimised, the audience shifts to apply a larger system of Buddhist understanding circulating in the society (for example, the karma law, the Eightfold Path, the Four Sublime States of Mind and the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler) to make sense of their popular consumption and the meaning of themselves in relation to their community (Haines Lyon and Marsh 2007, 115 in Marsh 2009, 257).

Similar to the analytical structure of Chapters One and Two, this chapter's analysis is divided into two groups of methods: firstly, a context and textual analysis of the series; and secondly, an analysis of the audience's participation as shown on social media domains. The application of these methodologies will be discussed in the following sections.

Introduction

In modern Thailand, King Vajiravudh (also known as King Rama VI, who reigned from 1910–25) was known for his efforts to promote Siamese nationalism. His regime established the ideology of the triadic nation, religion and monarchy in order to establish a sense of nationalism after aligning Siam with the Allied Powers in World War I. During the process of modernisation that began in the period of King Rama V, the conventional perception of Thai kings as *devaraja* (divine king), *cakravartin* (emperor) and *bodhisattva* (Buddha king) was gradually modernised (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 50).

Among many approaches, King Vajiravudh promoted national identity through drama, music, literature and textbooks (Connors 2002, 36–37). He encouraged political theatre performances and wrote plays to foster the democratic understanding of the audience (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 15). After World War I and the change of ruling regime from absolute monarchy to monarchic democracy in 1932 (Marto and Tamprehut 2019; Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 50), the mediation of political

propaganda through mass media was continued in the periods of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (holding the position of the Prime Minister in 1938–1944 and in 1948–1957). Phibunsongkhram actively used films to promote his policies and the military more generally (Louiyapong 2013, 355). He also used dramas to rejuvenate the local people's feelings of patriotism by assigning Luang Vichitr Vadakarn to make nationalist theatre plays.⁵⁹ Therefore, Luang Vichitr Vadakarn is credited as the first person to use the commercial theatre to depict explicit nationalist propaganda under the commission of the military leader (Diamond 2007, 283–84).

The first few popularised propagandising plays such as *Luerd Supan* (เลือดสุพรรณ, 1936) and *King Ramkamhaeng the Great* (พ่อขุนรามคำแหงมหาราช, 1954) and all the following plays shown during the period of the 1930s to 1950s were embedded with political ideology. Vichitr Vadakarn's works promoted the supreme state authority, national hegemony, necessity of military ideology and gratitude to the historical heroes and heroines who made sacrifices for the state (Chaloemtiarana 2015, 147). After World War II, however, the popularity of political plays declined and shifted to more entertainment-based shows, especially melodrama (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 15). Nevertheless, the military-led governments continuously intervened in the television channels' operating policies, content and censorship, primarily for purposes of state propaganda and control (Daorueng 2007).

A study by Paowipa Bhamornsatitaya of Thai television dramas released between 1955 and 1973 found that nationalist and populist dramas were required to emphasise Buddhist morale, promoting good deeds and denigrating misdeeds (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 42). The television station would censor dramas that featured 1) depreciation of the king, royal family members, the government and government officers; 2) politics; 3) a tendency to incite hatred or discrimination against different social classes; 4) offence or humiliation to religions or historical objects that generated negative sentiment to any religion; 5) undermining national art or traditions; and 6) were contradictory with morality such as allurements to misdeed conducts. Other restricted subjects include nudity, suicide,

⁵⁹ Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 15; Diamond 2007, 283–84; Chaloemtiarana 2015, 147.

violence, murder, sexual crime or sexual dysfunction, and mysteries about superstition, ghosts and spirituality (Bhamornsatitaya 1985, 42–43).

The first six prohibitions listed in the previous paragraph suggest the state's sensitivity to public criticism about the governing rule, aristocracy, civil administration, religious beliefs and culture. The dictatorship ideology of the period tended to overshadow the notion of good governance and administrative transparency. Importantly, the nationalist–religious–monarchical censorship criteria still apply in local television drama production today. At times, the religion depicted may play a mere ideological role as the narrative is driven by issues such as economics, political interests and class discrimination (Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam, and Korff 2013, 36).

The case study *Love Destiny* also falls into this category. The religion in the series features a historical exercise of religious politicisation; however, the series also reconstructs the notion of virtuous kingship and underlines the deviation of righteousness for political legitimisation practiced by different groups of characters.

In Part I of the chapter, the textual analysis, the discussion will be based on how the producer applied a range of narrative strategies to mediate monarchical and nationalist ideologies. The findings of the textual analysis will answer the research question about Buddhism's role in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas. Part II, the audience analysis, will explore the audience's reception of the notion of good governance and their fandom.

PART I: Textual analysis



Fig. 3.1: A poster of *Love Destiny*

Source: <https://www.ch3thailand.com/บุพเพสันนิวาส.html> (accessed on 9/12/2019)

Background to the series

Love Destiny (Panangkasiri 2018a) is a hybrid historical drama adapted from the novel of the same name written by Chanyawee Sompreeda, pen name Rompaeng, that was published in 2009. Broadly, the story's main plot is a fictionalised time-travelling, where the kind and comedic protagonist, named Kedsurang, is reborn in the past to redress her twin sister's sin and to reunite with her soulmate, named Dej, in Ayutthaya Kingdom in the late seventeenth century. In contrast with her villainous sister Karaked, Kedsurang proves her goodness to the noble upper-middle class family with liberal attitudes and a sense of humour. This household-oriented plot involves strong Buddhist beliefs such as karma, incarnation, life after death, and Buddhist melancholia from attachment (Jory 2018). The primary Buddhist practices for householders in this plot are principles for parenting and supervising subordinates (called the Four Sublime States of Mind). Meanwhile, the series' subplot is historical, depicting King Narai and other historical political figures tackling political conflicts with western countries who sought trading opportunities and religious evangelism for political domination. More crucially, the state encounters internal conflicts and treachery generated by domestic nobles and a foreign minister that leads to the coup d'état and Siamese revolution of 1688 (Jory 2018).

While the extraordinary love journey of protagonists plays at the foreground of the story, the element of time travel invites the audience to consider the state rulership in political disorders of the past Siam period (in particular, the 1680s). Kedsurang's

archaeological knowledge helps fill in puzzles of personal karma and historical events. Simultaneously, being a member of an upper-middle class family, Kedsurang questions the existing socio-political system. Historical characters, in contrast, represent the political practices in Ayutthaya Kingdom during the period of King Narai (reigning 1656–1688).

The novel *Love Destiny* won the Seven Book Award for Outstanding Book, a book contest hosted by CP All Public Company Limited, in 2010. It was also informally voted by online fans on the popular Pantip.com blog as one of the novels they would most like to see as a television drama adaptation. Arunocha Panupan, the producer of Broadcast Thai Television Co, Ltd., purchased the rights to adapt the book to a television production (The Standard 2018). Then, Salaya Sukanivatt spent about two years producing the television drama script. The television adaptation, *Love Destiny* (2018), is a long-form nationalist drama with a genre hybrid that combines historical drama with romantic comedy, some horror and fantasy. The series consists of 15 episodes. Each episode runs for approximately 100 minutes, excluding advertisement breaks, resulting in a total running time of approximately 1,500 minutes. The content of each episode progresses from moral conflicts to romance development and political reforms. Those tensions drive the series to its climax and the denouncement at the end of the last episode.

The original telecast of the series *Love Destiny* commenced on 21 February 2018 on Channel 3 and immediately gained public attention, becoming a ‘talk-of-the-town’ production (Jory 2018; InfoQuest 2019, 24). During the first exhibition of the series, the revenue of local tourism increased by about 1.5 billion Thai baht. The Centre of Economic and Business Forecast of University of Thai Chamber of Commerce reported that in the central part of Thailand alone, the series stimulated local business by at least 5 billion Thai baht.⁶⁰ An economic impact estimated by a private sector media organisation, The Standard, noted an increase of at least 10,000 million Thai baht, which equates to at least 0.06% growth of GDP (compared to 2018) (Wongkittikraiwal 2018). The series was also officially broadcast on PNN TV in Cambodia; TVA Plus, Smile Plus and TVA Plus in

⁶⁰ Wongkittikraiwal 2018; ‘แม่หญิงการะเกดมาแรง มาดูกันว่า “บุพเพสันนิวาส” สร้างกระแสอะไรไปบ้าง?’ 2018.

Korea; RTV (Rajawali TV) in Indonesia; TVB J2 in Hong Kong; Dimsum (online streaming service) in Malaysia; meWatch (online streaming service); and regional Netflix.⁶¹

A range of local transmedia and cross media extended from the series. The series' transmedia included interviews on various television talk programs and news reports. The cross media generated by the producer ranged from screenings in cinema, the filming of extended stories, fan meetings, concerts and merchandise. In regard to the audience's self-made cross-media, the second part of the chapter will discuss their activities and fandom more closely.

Methods

When considering the narrative structure, this chapter applies multiple methodologies consisting of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The qualitative analysis considers the producer's narrative strategies to mediate the virtue of historical rulers. The quantitative method of content analysis is applied to two groups of data. The first data group is the nationalist and monarchical productions released between 1968 and 2020, as identified from subscribed online streaming service Seesan TV, entertainment websites and books. This research looks at those productions' genres, reproductions and adaptations. The second group of data is directly related to the series' narrative structure. This study uses granular coding to reinforce the textual analysis of the sequence arrangement and the embedment of the Buddhist worldview. The methodological practice consists of the procedures listed below:

1. A close reading of the original novel;
2. Viewing the series' first version, which aired from 21 February 2018 to 11 April 2018, on Seesan TV;⁶²
3. A second round of close viewing and in-depth note-taking of the action and dialogue of each episode;

⁶¹ PNN 2018; TV digital Watch 2019; 'ทีวีอินโดนีเซีย ซื่อบุพเพช ออกอากาศ...ถือเป็นครั้งแรกของละครไทยในแดนอิเหนา' 2018; Thai Post 2019.

⁶² The reason for using this version as screened on this channel is that after the first telecast, other versions were released. Although the other versions also gained good ratings, these were not as high as those received by the original work.

4. A third round of viewing the series with thematic note-taking in granular detail (as per minute) using an Excel spreadsheet with colour-coded representations of the main ideologies and themes embedded in each minute of the series;
5. Checking the accuracy of the ideological notes (4) and checking the original plot, sequences, and some other details with the novel; and
6. Analysis of the content with the focus on plotting, the adaptation from novel to television drama, narrative strategy, and ideological representation.

Narrative analysis

Given this chapter's interest in dharma in relation to ruling, this chapter will pay attention to the series' historical and political aspects. The section will analyse the producer's use of the historical and romantic comedy genres, sequence arrangements, and the use of characterisation and dialogue to articulate the series' implication of monarchical and nationalist ideology, as follows.

Genre: Historical drama

Generally, historical fiction carries an agenda and one commonly found agenda is to apply a particular virtue or virtues in specific communal identities (Sethi 1999, 194), such as nationalism, leadership and unity. Following the levels of conceptualisation in historical work introduced by Hayden White, historical storytelling consists of 1) chronicle, 2) story, 3) mode of emplotment, 4) mode of argument and 5) mode of ideological implication (White 1973, 5). An event must become a story before it can generate a communicative event (Hall 2005, 164). Telling a historical story primarily involves the selection of the event and sequence organisation of relevant chronicles with a particular motif (ideological implication) and an intention of discourse (mode of argument). The motif of historical storytelling is a kind of allegory that creates a moral link between the present audience and the historical events/figures, which it treats from a standpoint (Sethi 1999, 186; White 1987, 14). Then, narrative strategies (modes of emplotment, such as genre, characterisation and language) are tailored to tell a story that contains a beginning, middle and end (White 1973, 29; Wilson 2013, 36–37).

The series *Love Destiny* has a pro-monarchy ideology and maintains that the featured kings performed their best for the state in their given context. To comprehend the ideological implication and argument of the case study, it is beneficial to view the series' position vis-a-vis the overall Thai television drama production of its kind.

Content Analysis

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the study surveyed 578 samples of Thai television drama productions released between 1968 and 2020, paying particular attention to the productions' ideologies, genres and frequency of reproduction. The study finds 22 long-form Thai primetime television dramas that include depictions of nationalism and the monarchy. These productions exclude the series exalting the King and the Queen made for special occasions, locally called *lakorn chalem prakiat* (Thai: ละครเฉลิมพระเกียรติ). The list of the productions and their genres is in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Genres of long-form Thai television dramas with nationalist and monarchical discourse released in Thailand in 1968–2020

No.	Years*	Title	Drama	Historical	Fantasy	Romance	Comedy	Horror	War
1	(tv) 1987	สมเด็จพระนเรศวรมหาราช (<i>King Naresuan the Great</i>)	✓	✓					✓
2	(tv) 1992	สมเด็จพระศรีสุริโยทัย/ สุริโยทัย (<i>Suriyothai</i>)	✓	✓		✓			✓
	(film) 2001								
3	(tv) 1979, 1995	ร่มฉัตร (<i>Romchat</i>)	✓	✓		✓			
4	(tv) 2003	กษัตริยา (<i>Kasatriya</i>)	✓	✓					✓
5	(tv) 2009	วีรชนคนกล้า พระเจ้าพรหมมหาราช (<i>King Prom the Great</i>)	✓	✓					✓
6	(tv) 2009	วีรชนคนกล้า ขุนพล สุวรรณภูมิ (<i>Khunpol Suwannabhumi</i>)	✓	✓					✓
7	(film) 1990, 2004	ทวิภพ (<i>Thawipop</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	(tv) 1994, 2011								

No.	Years*	Title	Drama	Historical	Fantasy	Romance	Comedy	Horror	War
	(stage) 2005, 2011								
8	(stage) 1946, 1947, 1951	ขุนศึก (Khun Suek)	✓	✓		✓			✓
	(film) 1976, 2003,								
	(tv) 1959, 1977, 1980, 1995, 2012								
9	(tv) 2012	ขุนเดช (Khun Dej)	✓	✓		✓			✓
10	(film) 1966, 2000	บางระจัน (Bang Rajan)	✓	✓		✓			✓
	(tv) 1980, 2015								
11	(tv) 1971, 1981, 1991, 2016	พิชิตสาวท (Pissawat)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	(radio drama) 1974								
	(film) 1974								
12	(stage) 1945, 1965, 1989	พันท้ายนรสิงห์ (Pantai Norasing)	✓	✓		✓			✓
	(film) 1950, 1982, 2015								
	(tv) 1972, 1978, 2000, 2016								
13	(tv) 2001, 2016	อติเตา (Ateeta)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
14	(tv) 1996, 2017	เพลิงพระนาง (Plerng Pranang)	✓	✓		✓			
15	(tv) 2017	ศรีอยุธยา (Sri Ayodhya)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
16	(tv) 1991, 2003	สี่แผ่นดิน (Si Pandin)	✓	✓		✓			
	(stage) 1957, 1961, 1973, 1974, 1980, 1987								
	(Musical theatre) 2012, 2014, 2017								
	(film) 2007 (part II), 2011 (part III), 2011 (part IV), 2014 (part V), 2015 (part VI)	ตำนานสมเด็จพระนเรศวรมหาราช (The Legend of King Naresuan)	✓	✓					✓
17	(tv) 2017	ตำนานสมเด็จพระนเรศวรมหาราช	✓	✓					✓

No.	Years*	Title	Drama	Historical	Fantasy	Romance	Comedy	Horror	War
		ตอน องค์ประกันหงสา (<i>The Legend of King Naresuan</i>)							
18	(tv) 2018	บุพเพสันนิวาส (<i>Love Destiny</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	(tv) 2018	หนึ่งตัวฟ้าเดียว (<i>Nueng Dao Fah Deaw</i>)	✓	✓		✓			✓
20	(tv) 1986, 1995, 2003, 2018	สายโลหิต (<i>Sai Lohit</i>)	✓	✓		✓			✓
21	(film) 1936, 1951, 1979	เลือดสุพรรณ (<i>Lued Supan</i>)	✓	✓		✓			✓
	(tv) 1990, 2019								
22	(tv) 2019	ศรีอยุธยา 2 (<i>Sri Ayodhya II</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

*Note: Owing to active reproductions of nationalist fictions, the study includes data of other commercial forms of the story such as stage, film, radio drama or musical theatre. Subsequently, the years of distribution in other forms cover a wider range than the time frame of television drama survey (1968 – 2020).

The data in Table 3.1 above shows the market trend of Thai nationalist and monarchical stories' reproduction and adaptations written from the viewpoint of either the king or the nationalist people since the 1930s (Louiyapong 2013, 291). The traditional meaning of the Thai monarchy in modern times is often tied with history, religious significance and warfare (Diamond 2007). The conventional fashion of historical writing tends to focus on taking advantage of well-known Thai kings. The image that the Ayutthaya king characters generally feature in Thai fictions is based on the notion of *devaraja* (divine king), *cakravartin* (emperor) and *bodhisattva* (Buddha king) (Ayutthaya Studies Institute 2018). Simultaneously, the narrative will emphasise the ideas of citizens' duty and officials' loyalty to support nationalism and the institution of the monarchy. This follows a twentieth-century revisionist movement pioneered by Srisak Vallibhotama and Dhidi Saraya that shifted the attention from only state leaders' heroism to the role of local people and their experience (Sunait and Tun 1995, 17; Thongchai 1995 in G. Lewis 2003, 74). Notwithstanding, both elite and proletariat narratives above are nationalistic in their orientation, stressing the importance of unity, loyalty and dedication to benefit the community.

Love Destiny highlights the local politics flourishing in culture-specific ideals (Sethi 1999, 3; Wong 2018, 1) such as family, gender, religion and culture. The author and the producer both portray positive representations of this regime and Thai monarchy-based history. Thus, the series not only entertains the audience with the comedic romance of the leading couple, it also promotes the virtue of the state leaders of the Ayutthaya period to modern audiences. The leaders represented in the series are not limited to only kings but also include significant aristocrats and officials about whom contemporary Thai audiences may have limited knowledge. To address the virtue of a controversial time in history where a rebellion took place, importantly, the series represents those political figures as ordinary individuals who had strengths, vulnerabilities and repentance for decisions they made that had unexpectedly negative consequences.

Through their use of the genre of historical drama in *Love Destiny*, the producer shows their conservative monarchy ideology by looking at the history, the kingship and the state reforms in the 1680s from a non-radical point of view. The conservatism implanted in the story suggests the local people's acceptance of *some* political change as long as the governing structure of the country remains primarily monarchical and the change is rather gradual (White 1973, 24).

The series' mode of ideological implication is a belief that, despite individual kings' different policies and acts, all Thai kings have performed their best for their populace and the country given their context. Evidence of this claim is the written statement at the end of the series paying respect to all kings who have made great contributions to Thailand. It states:

*We bow and pay gratitude for the divine grace of all His Majesty the Kings who created a great benefit to the Kingdom of Thailand.*⁶³ (End credit, episode 15)

The series reinforces the belief that all Thai kings' actions benefited the populace through the contextual mode of explanation. That is, the text provides progressive sequence arrangement and dialogue that constructs the information in such a way that the audience perceives the context of the historical leaders' decision-making from a positive perspective (White 1973, 19). Subsequently, the series' mode of emplotment

⁶³ Thai script: ขอน้อมสำนึกในพระมหากรุณาธิคุณแห่งองค์สมเด็จพระมหาบูรพภักษัตริยาราชทุกพระองค์ที่ทรงสร้างคุณประโยชน์อันไพศาลต่อแผ่นดินไทย (episode 15)

follows a romantic tradition with a peaceful ending (White 1973, 29), showing close to no violence or state loss occurring due to the kings' acts. The semi-factual storytelling helps to contextualise the historical events and generate a moralising impulse to the depicted social system (White 1987, 14). Mediating the nationalist ideology through historical drama manages to circumvent essentialism and the controversial reception of historical politics by claiming its fictional attributes (Sethi 1999, 2, 186). On the fictional side, which involves the romantic comedy, the series implements a mixture of romantic and comic modes of emplotment.

It is important to note that among Thai fictional plots, a time-travelling diegesis is one of the most popular emplotment approaches to mediate monarchic values for the audience. The common purposes of main characters travelling across different periods of time tends to fall into one of the following patterns:

- 1) to solve a severe problem in the past or the future,
- 2) to help the protagonist(s)'s ancestor(s),
- 3) to escape from a crisis or fatal threat, and
- 4) to search for enigmatic facts (Jeenklub 2008, 237).

The conflicts in this kind of plot generally require a missing piece of information carried by objects or persons to fill in the puzzle and solve the problem. However, obtaining the missing information necessary to complete the mission is impossible to accomplish by ordinary means but instead requires a competent person from another era.

Having a range of characters from different cultures and backgrounds in time travel fiction helps the audience to relate to and enriches the argument about the story's ideology and values (Sethi 1999, 4). The cultural pluralism in the series does not limit the cultural interaction between classes, races and religions in Ayutthaya. Essentially, the time travel series pays attention to the cultural exchange of Thai people of different generations and backgrounds (Jory 2018). Here, romantic comedy plays a crucial role in depicting the process of cultural participation and harmony over the course of the series. The primary role of Kedsurang, the protagonist of the series, concerning the political plot is to be a representative of the modern audience questioning political situations without intervention. Kedsurang's more significant role is based on the fictional household. Her function is to raise the notion of accommodating cultural differences and identities with

compassion for harmonious cohabitation (Jory 2018). Notwithstanding, the narrative represents the maintenance of a conservative aristocratic regime and socio-political class. When the narrative depicts historical politics, only drama is involved to deliver these more serious events and characters.

Sequence arrangement

The television series *Love Destiny* follows the concept of a serial narrative that is composed of a story-world, characters, events and temporality. The series has a serialised story-world and characters whose actions drive ongoing and consistent narrative from the beginning to the end (Mittell 2015, 22). To look closely at the series' mode of argument and serialisation about the virtue of Thai rulers, the study closely examines the series' sequence arrangement by using a granular analysis method to unfold the series' strategy to contextualise the historical characters and their ruling. The data are shown in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 below.

Table 3.2: Thematic sequence flow per minute in each episode of *Love Destiny*

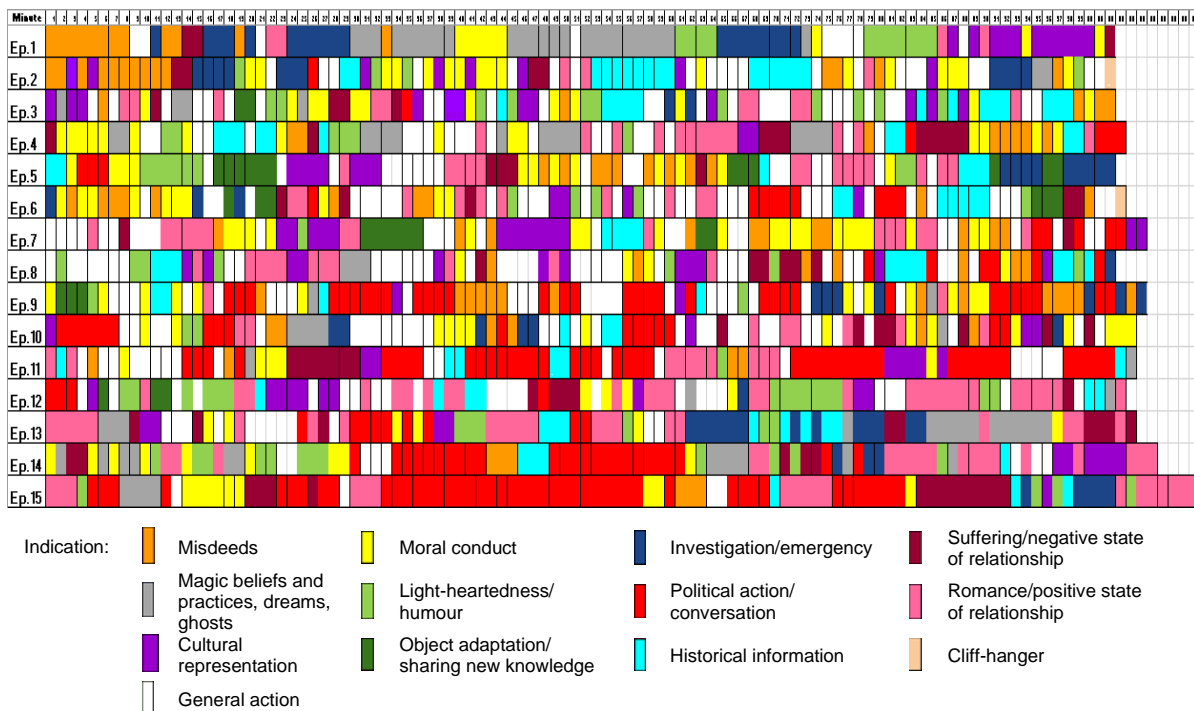


Table 3.3: Data frequencies of each thematic sequence represented in *Love Destiny*

Themes	Total frequency (minutes)	Percentage
1. Misconduct	106	6.80
2. Right conduct	158	10.13
3. Investigation/emergency	80	5.13
4. Romance/positive state of relationship	188	12.06
5. Suffering/negative state of relationship	84	5.39
6. Magic beliefs and practices, dreams, ghosts	91	5.84
7. Light-heartedness/humour	95	6.09
8. Cultural representation	104	6.67
9. Historical information	100	6.41
10. Political action/conversation	206	13.21
11. Object adaptation/sharing new knowledge/innovation	34	2.18
12. General action/conversation without specific ideologies	313	20.08
Total	1559	100

The colour-coded data in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 above show that the series contains a dynamic sequence flow that weaves together various themes to continually attract and engage the audience. The themes of the series include misdeeds, ethical practices, investigation, romance, suffering due to problems with a romantic relationship, mysticism, animism, comedy, culture, history, politics and innovation. Meanwhile, the data in Table 3.3 indicates that the series focuses on three significant ideologies: politics, caring relationships and morality, at 13.21, 12.06, and 10.13 percent of the entire content, respectively. Misdeeds, cultural illustrations, historical information and suffering romance relationships function as the grounds of story context and conflicts, with at 6.80, 6.67, 6.41 and 5.39 percent of the entire content, respectively. The data of both Tables underline that the content is a negotiated product of political ideology with love and ethics. Notably, the expression of moral conduct (bright yellow blocks) spreads in every episode

throughout the series. Additionally, giving historical information, cultural expression and humour (the bright blue, purple and bright green blocks respectively) significantly enrich the content and educate the audience. At the same time, representations of magic, belief in ghosts, investigation, innovation (or emergency incidents) and innovation significantly add frequent excitement to the story.

The comedic representation helps to negotiate the ideological myths presented by the series and offers an opportunity for the audience to laugh in a period of political disorder (Tulloch 1990, 246) – both in the story-world and reality of Thailand, as Thai politics has struggled with internal instability since 1995 (G. Lewis 2003, 70). Additionally, the acceptable social role of debating the local norms of the romantic comedy genre is a useful instrument to include and entertain the audience with local political history. Likewise, a certain level of comedy is unifying and an equilibrium-making agent to lessen societal conflicts (Creeber, Miller, and Tulloch 2015, 89–90).

However, the comedic role reversal of characters applies only to the group of fictional characters around the trivial and familial subjects on the accepted level of the local society. The language, cultural and personal gaps between characters from the two time periods offer plenty of light-hearted moments (bright green blocks) and innovation scenes (dark green blocks). These scenes function as agents of emotional relief and cultural pride throughout the story. Nonetheless, the popularity of the series shows that the dominant ideas about cultural tradition and political judgement exchanged in the contemporary era can no longer consist of the projected ideologies of those in the ruling class (Tulloch 1990, 260).

Additionally, data in Table 3.2 show the narrative tendency that develops from various household and cultural themes to the more political domain. The sequential data show the series' combination of episodic and serial forms of narration. Following screen time of episodic television drama, while the story accumulates the narrative (romance and politics) over time, there are minor events and their closure within every episode (family, culture and innovation).

It is important to note that the series does not end the narrative with a scene of dynastic change. Instead, the narrative completes the political component of the story with the emotional farewell between Phaulkon and his wife approximately twenty minutes

before the end of the series, with the rest of the series containing only harmonious family and romance scenes. The completion of the series does not only lessen any radical questions that the audience might have with the rebellion and the commencement of the new dynasty but also provides a light-hearted experience to the audience.

For the main arc, events, dialogue and character actions are consistently aligned to unfold the romance development and political transformation with cumulative impacts. The series' historical plot involves a range of events and characters that lead the situation in the narrative to its climax (the rebellion and the death of King Narai). Jason Mittell (2015) calls self-evident events "narrative statements" and events about which the audience is unsure or sceptical as "narrative enigma." *Love Destiny* applies both types of narrative serialisations to move the plot forward to and generate audience engagement, including satisfaction, surprise, suspense and curiosity. The producer uses a number of strategies so that events are told from multiple perspectives, including chronologic narrative, flashbacks, retelling past events and repeating story events from various aspects. At the same time, supporting subplots and subthemes (such as humour, family, culture, history and innovation) provide texture, tone and character richness alongside the main plot.

The scenic arrangement closely links characterisation and dialogue. The following section will discuss characterisation and dialogue to understand the series' contextualisation of the rulers. Nonetheless, before further analysis, it is essential to understand that the governing system in the Ayutthaya period was absolute monarchy. The King centralised civil administration, conducted the monopoly structure (Cho 2012; Martin 2015; Ruangsilp 2007) and wrote the Palace Law and the civil law, called the Three Seal Codes, of which he was the final judge (Baker and Phongpaichit 2016). The socio-political regime of Siam relied on individual kings' justifications. Subsequently, the series' narrative and the study's analysis of governance are based on the series' narrative, which lies on the King's conduct.

Characterisation

The historical story-world of the series involves evidence-based characters that the Thai audience is already familiar with (Margolin 2007). King Narai (reigning 1656–1688),

Phetracha (reigning 1688–1703) and Sorasak (reigning 1703–1709) were real Kings of Siam. Meanwhile, Kosa Lhek, Constantine Phaulkon and Kosa Pan were high-ranked politicians whose work performances were recorded. Regardless of the incompleteness of the available references, the producer of *Love Destiny* paid extra care to construct the characters for the purpose of the conservatism-based allegory. Their noble class identities, ideology, appearances, actions and dialogue are crafted in an impersonal omniscient style to enliven and qualify their existence in the surreal space and time of the historical drama world of the series (Margolin 2007).

In relation to the political realm shown in *Love Destiny*, those historical characters' identities are based on their political positions, power, relationship to the centre of power (king) and ideological views. Each character's intellectual and ruling-related attitudes are manifested through action-related and communicative behaviours, defining their value structure and norms of conduct. There is direct characterisation (for example, the character's self-explanation and actions) and multiple indirect characterisations made by other supporting characters of these top-class leaders of the country. The narrative prioritises characters' actions as the primary tool for representing each character. Later, a series of conversations will discuss those actions in more detail, especially Constantine Phaulkon, who is a complex historical figure; King Narai, who cannot always declare himself to others according to his position; and Phetracha, who leads a rebellion against King Narai the Great. Below is one example of the series' sequence arrangement to contextualise and legitimise the rebellion of Phetracha in episodes 14 and 15.

Table 3.4: The series *Love Destiny's* detailed timeline of the rebellion plot line of Phetracha from episode 14 and 15

Episode	Key actions
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pan, Dej and Hora Thibadi talk about Phaulkon defrocking monks to become labourers for the fortress building. ● A short scene shows Phaulkon is monitoring the rolls of Buddhist monks walking out of a temple. ● An argument between Phetracha and the King Narai about whether the king agrees with the defrocking of the monks.

Episode	Key actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sorasak asks Phaulkon to explain the reason for making monks labourers and punches Phaulkon in anger.
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phetracha and Sorasak report Phaulkon's monk defrocking and the French soldiers' readiness to invade Ayutthaya to the Buddhist primate. The chief monk implies that Buddhism and the country must be protected. ● Phetracha expresses his disappointment with the king for trusting Phaulkon too much. Phetracha tells Sorasak that if he has to do something, it is not because of Phetracha's personal ambition. ● Phetracha, Sorasak and some other soldiers have a meeting with two royal ladies and the chief monk again. Phetracha states that Phaulkon supports Pra Pi and says there must be no Pra Pi for Phaulkon to puppet as Phaulkon wants the throne for himself. Phetracha says that he has consistently objected to the pro-French policies; however, he can no longer tolerate when French soldiers bully and disdain local people. Phetracha declares that he has only one aim – to free the Ayutthaya people from the suppression of the French. ● Dej and Kedsurang inform Pan, Phetracha and Sorasak about Phaulkon's secret letter to the King of France asking for the complete rights to govern the state. Phaulkon promises to do anything for the benefit of France, including making Ayutthaya a land of Christians. Phetracha gets angry and exclaims that he hates all of the French. He is determined to expel all of the French out of Ayutthaya. Phetracha believes that the King has allowed Phaulkon and hundreds of French soldiers to enter Ayutthaya. He is highly disappointed with the King and he believes he can no longer allow the King to be on the throne anymore. Kedsurang awkwardly asks

Episode	Key actions
	<p>Phetracha his view of how the King should be. She shares that the King should conduct the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler. Phetracha listens and considers deeply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phetracha, Sorasak and their soldiers arrest Phaulkon. Phetracha grants Dej's request to allow Phaulkon to farewell his family. ● Kedsurang writes in a diary that Phaulkon died on 5 June. Two days later, Pra Pi is killed. King Narai passes away on 11 July 1688. Sorasak refuses to become the King. Phetracha therefore establishes himself as the first King from the Ban Plu Luang Dynasty and appoints Sorasak as the Great Viceroy.

The examples above consist of several scenes to enhance the notion of *what happened* and *what relevant people think/act about it*. This is often repeated in the representation of other momentous events in the series. Those composition scenes may include:

- a) An expositional conversation between secondary characters to introduce the subject;
- b) An action or conversation between historical characters about the topic;
- c) A conversation between historical leaders that investigates the related policies or reasons behind the act; and
- d) A post-reaction or summary of what characters make of the situation. Those groups of characters generally involve subordinate people who are in the community but not directly affected by the political incident (observers); principal noblemen/aristocrats (operators); and chief state leaders (decision-makers).

The findings accord with the concept of complex serial television narrative addressed by Mittell about narrative statement, narrative enigma and discourse time that use a range of events with characters and dialogue to unfold the conflicts from differing perspectives. Without considering their historical accuracy, the examples above shows

that the series carefully constructs a clear understanding of the necessity of Phetracha taking over the throne from King Narai the Great, who is more well known to contemporary audience as a ruler. The series implies that it is merely political viewpoints and miscommunication that separate Phetracha from King Narai. The series applies this same concept of contextualism to other historical characters that contemporary Thai audiences may have previously questioned about their characters and moral codes.

Notably, the series proposes a new way of understanding historical figures to the audience by creating information that reinforces the belief that the leaders were decent. There are no live-action scenes in the series that examine the state's administration and its impacts on the local residents, apart from some trivial scenes where foreign soldiers mistreat local people. Although the time period covered in the show included political disorders that occurred as a result of various factors, including the actions of indigenous officers, the absence of representation of this part of history implies a lack of interest in presenting local officers' inefficacy, instead pointing the blame at foreigners and their otherness instead.

Dialogue

For historical drama, examining language and how it signifies ideology is essential, as dialogue shows characters' thoughts in realisable forms. However, despite some historical references, dialogue in historical drama is a pure act of writing (Sethi 1999, 193). The dialogue and the historical imagination establish the mass audience's perception and the constructed message may even become true for them (Sethi 1999, 193; Ayutthaya Studies Institute 2018; Wong 2018, 2).

Love Destiny employs a range of dialogue and language styles owing to its historical and romantic-comedy attributes. Additionally, the series' time travel plot includes different groups of characters from different generations and with different socio-political statuses, worldviews and diplomatic necessities. All of these different characters deliver speeches at crucial situations. The dialogue is delivered in realistic, metaphoric and ironic styles with subtexts. At times, the series implements Thai classical poetry as a tool for metaphoric representation as well. The poem is either read (or recited) by actors in scenes or read by a voice-over narrator. The poem metaphors generally depict intimate passion,

sexual activity, a social phenomenon (for example, gossiping), and the sorrow of departure and death.

In the non-poetic style of conversation, the dominant styles of speech used in the series are language that is constructed to sound like historical language, and present Thai language with slang. The historical language construction is designed so that the audience can understand it rather than for historical accuracy. The speech of historical characters may, at times, involve metaphor, synecdoche and irony when talking about politics and diplomatic negotiation. In contrast, the fictional characters' conversation is mostly a clash of the languages used by different generations. Such confusion in communication for those characters is a significant part of the series' entertainment.

At crucial moments, leading characters give idealised speeches with subtexts that highlight specific ideologies and the cultural significance of the subject (Bronwen 2007), such as religion, gratitude and loyalty. Most notably, this occurs in episode 11, when the French ambassador raises the question of the king's plan for religious conversion. The king replies with realistic language, stating:

All religions teach people to conduct goodness, fear sins and practice merits. The King who governs those who hold a religion would administer them easier than doing so with the heathens. All the pastors, please teach your religion as you wish. Do not be afraid of anything. I will not obstruct my people over their faiths.

*For myself, I do not yet know exactly what Christianity is. So, I shall study it first. The wise King of France, please note that for a king to convert from a religion that has been revered for over two thousand years – it is, of course, very difficult. However, it is not impossible.*⁶⁴ (Dialogue of King Narai, Episode 11)

The dialogue shows King Narai's good governance to accommodate religious diversity and his wisdom in delivering a diplomatic answer to those who have more political power than he does. However, the King's mention of the many years that Buddhism has been revered in the region implies his pride in Buddhism and the religious

⁶⁴ Thai script: ทุกศาสนาสอนให้คนทำความดี เกรงบาป บำเพ็ญบุญ พระเจ้าแผ่นดินที่ปกครองคนที่มีศาสนาย่อมปกครองง่ายกว่าคนที่ไม่มีศาสนา ขอท่านบาทหลวงทุกท่าน สอนศาสนาของท่านไปเถิด อย่าได้เกรงอะไร เราจะไม่คิดขวางราษฎรของเราในเรื่องศาสนาใด สำหรับตัวเรา เรายังไม่ทราบแน่ชัดว่าศาสนาคริสต์เป็นอย่างไร ขอเราไปศึกษาก่อน ขอพระเจ้ากรุงฝรั่งเศสผู้ทรงปรีชาญาณ ได้โปรดทราบว่าการที่พระเจ้าแผ่นดินจะเปลี่ยนศาสนาที่เคยนับถือมากกว่าสองพันปีนั้นย่อมเป็นเรื่องที่ยากลำบากนัก แต่ก็มีใช้เรื่องสุตวิสัย (Episode 11)

hegemony in relation to other religions that were founded later. Similarly, later in the same episode, the King implies to Phaulkon that he regards conversion as disloyalty.

The most significant example concerning the notion of dharma for ruling is Kedsurang's dialogue to Phetracha and Sorasak in episode 15. After Phetracha confirms the rebellion, Kedsurang asks him how a King should be. When she is asked back how she thinks, the text qualifies her comment. She humbly shares that:

Should I have a chance to stand before one or two kings, I shall say that what the king should hold is the Dasavidha-rājadharmā⁶⁵ [the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler].
(Statement from Kedsurang to Phetracha, episode 15)

The examples of dialogue above delivered by the historical character (King Narai) and the non-actual but well-specified character (Kedsurang) govern mental models of possible individuals to which the audience can relate (Margolin 2007). Hence, their messages are qualified and contributed to the authority of the monarchy-oriented story (Bronwen 2007).

Not only does the text use dialogue to characterise characters and express ideologies and values, the dialogue is a tool also used to address the ongoing socio-political problems as well. The series' dialogue suggests different characters justify the corruption of the powerful figures based on their personal partiality. An example of this is an ironic conversation in episode 9 that refers to the corruption that takes place in the present-day Thai community. In the scene, the Minister of the Royal Treasury Department, Kosa Lhek, and his wife (Lady Nim) confirm to their daughter that their bribe taking is faultless:

Kosa Lhek: *Ah. That money. Taking [the money] is like not taking. It is okay, because I intend to expostulate the King about the fortress-building project already, even without the money.*

Lady Nim: *Do not worry, my child. The money is not a lot. Do you have any idea of how much other masters take tributes from proletarians?*

Kosa Lhek: *Everyone views it as a normal practice. Why are you anxious?*

⁶⁵ Thai script: ถ้าข้ามีโอกาสดำเนินต่อหน้าพระมหากษัตริย์ สักองค์หนึ่งหรือสององค์ ข้าจะทูลว่า สิ่งที่พระมหากษัตริย์พึงมีคือ ทศพิธราชธรรมเจ้าค่ะ (Kedsurang, episode 15).

Lady Nim: [...] *It is because people respect your father. Stop making it a big deal.*⁶⁶

After punishment for his denial of the bribe-taking, Kosa Lhek experiences severe mental trauma and dies a few months later. Surrounding characters' dialogue show varied types of non-objective thoughts. For instance, while Kosa Lhek admits his actions deserved consequences, Lady Nim blames Kosa Lhek's younger brother for not using his power to help. Phetracha is disappointed that the king listens to a reporter rather than to Kosa Lhek, who has dedicated his work to the king and the kingdom. Other people, including Kedsurang, view the penalty as exorbitant. In contrast, when debates about corruption in general occur, Kedsurang jokingly suggests a brutal death penalty without a second thought. She suggests beheading the criminal, confiscating their properties and chopping up the whole body. The dialogue shows local views and the practices of corruption, reciprocity and a discriminatory culture prevalent in the country.

Another example that shows a subjective justification is in episode 15. When Kedsurang asks her husband, Dej, if he chooses to take the side of the rebellion, he replies:

*I do not know how the life you came from was. However, here, if I desire to save family and myself, I can accept some tarnished acts. Currently, the state is suffering. I think Phetracha is the one who can solve it. If we seek righteousness, Sorasak also has the rights no less than that of everybody else. One more thing, Pra Pi, even though he has the rights, he has converted. It is like taking an enemy into the house.*⁶⁷

More crucially, a statement given by the unidentified Buddhist primate concerning the French troops and the increasing insecurity of the Buddhist Sangha community in episode 15 addresses a complex and controversial role of Buddhism:

⁶⁶ Thai script:

Kosa Lhek: รับก็เหมือนไม่รับ ได้อยู่ เพราะพ่อตั้งใจจะทูลทัดทานเรื่องการสร้างบิเอมอยู่แล้ว แม้ไม่มีเงินนี้
Lady Nim: อย่าพะวงไปเลยลูก เงินไม่ใช่มากมาย รู้หรือไม่ว่านายเงินคนอื่น เขารับเงินส่วยจากพวกไพร่ก็มากนัก
Kosa Lhek: ทุกผู้เขาก็เห็นเป็นเรื่องธรรมดาอยู่นะลูก แม้จันทรवादจะวิตกไปไย
Lady Nim: [...] นั้นเพราะเขานับถือคุณพ่อ อย่าเอ่ยเป็นเรื่องมาก (episode 9).

⁶⁷ Thai script: ชีวิตที่ต่อเจ้าจากมาเป็นอย่างไร พี่ไม่รู้ หากชีวิตที่นี่ ถ้าต้องให้ตนเองแลครอบครัวนั้นอยู่รอด แม้ต้องแปดเปื้อนสักเล็กน้อย พี่ก็ยอม เหลานี้ บ้านเมืองมีทุกข์เข็ญ พี่คิดว่าออกพระเพทราชาจะเป็นผู้ที่สามารถปิดเป้าได้ ถ้าแสงสว่างความถูกต้อง หลวงสรรพศักดิ์ก็มีสิทธิ์มีแพใคร อีกอย่าง พระปีย์ ถึงกันรู้ว่ามิลิทธิ แต่เข้ารีตแล้ว ก็เหมือนซักศึกเข้าบ้าน (episode 15).

*Thai means freedom. Ayutthaya is a Buddhist state, and is a kingdom that cannot be defeated, never!*⁶⁸

The dialogue of the characters who are qualified in ethical teachings suggests that deviation from righteousness is complex and risks alienating the audience who believe in the standard moral code. The series' occasional ideological shifts from idealist to political imperative present a multiplicity of voices clashing with one another.

Unlike corruption and state management, which are seen in live action and depicted in historical figures' dialogue, social inequality is mostly represented in a conversational form. The most frequent issues discussed in the series are slavery and gender inequality. The inequality refers to the different access people have to basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, properties, medical supplies, social welfare and education, for example. Often, the series uses the tropes of metaphor and irony (White 2013, 31) to discuss the subject. An example of dialogue between Kedsurang and her maidservant Yam in episode 7 contains both metaphoric and ironic verbal styles about social class and inequality:

Kedsurang: *I read somewhere that Ayutthaya is prosperous like heaven.*

Yam: (giggles) *Who said so? It is untrue.*

Deities and angels in heaven seem to be only those nobles and aristocrats. Slaves and serfs are so poor. This house is fine. Masters are generous. Else, we will need to have rice with chilies and salt.

Kedsurang: *Is it that bad? I could not believe it.*⁶⁹

Despite this apparent criticism, on other occasions, the series emphasises the notion of loyal slavery and the conservative values of the reciprocal relationship between masters and slaves. The narrative suggests no desire for social reconstruction but the

⁶⁸ Thai script: ไทย แปลว่าอิสระ กรุงศรีอยุธยาเป็นเมืองพุทธ และเป็นเมืองที่เจ้าฟ้าไม่ได้ (an unidentified Thai Buddhist Primate, episode 15).

⁶⁹ Thai script:

Kedsurang: ข้าเคยอ่านพบนะว่าอยุธยารุ่งเรืองดังเมืองสวรรค์

Yam: ใครเจ้าคะ ใครช่างว่าเจ้าคะ หากจริงไม่เจ้าคะ เทวดานางฟ้าที่อยู่บนเมืองสวรรค์ ก็เห็นจะมีแต่ขุนนาง เจ้านายมูลนายหรือเจ้าคะ พวกทาสพวกไพร่ยากจนชั้นแค่นี้เจ้าคะ เรือนนี้คือยังชั่วเจ้าคะ มูลนายท่านใจดีมีเมตตา หากไม่ ต้องกินข้าวจิ้มพริกจิ้มเกลือเท่านั้นละ เจ้าคะ

Kedsurang: โอ้โห ขนาดนั้นเลยหรือ ไม่อยากจะเชื่อเลยอะ (episode 7).

rightness of the existing regime, which is based on the compassion of the superior and the loyalty of the inferior.

Regarding gender inequality, the series also employs irony and metaphor to address gender discrimination and the violence that occurred in the male-dominated Ayutthaya society, as irony is negational, suggesting an ongoing problem as opposed to standard social practice (White 2013, 34). The series' use of metaphor and satire alludes to social inequality, polygamy and domestic violence as socio-political problems that are still unsolved to day.

The strongest evidence of gender injustice is in the state rules about the relationship between husband and wife in the period. The series highlights the brutal rules against women in Ayutthaya when Dej's talks about the penalty a wife can get if she commits adultery when warning Kedsurang about developing an intimate relationship with his friend. Some of the punishment possibilities include being killed, being beaten, being sold as a slave or a prostitute in a brothel, or being forced to have sex with a horse. In another scene, Kedsurang argues back to Dej that if she is treated badly, either herself or her husband will die. Again, the meaning of the dialogue itself is offensive to audiences who have the current view of human rights. However, when the character who delivers it is Dej, the lover of the protagonist, saying it in an explanatory manner, the meaning and its subtext become more generalised.

The examples above are only sections of the entire language variation in the hybrid historical drama *Love Destiny*, focusing on how the narrative mediates ideas of moral ruling through dialogue. The findings reveal the various uses of language and speaking strategies that carry primary meaning and subtexts. However, the complexity of meaning is even more crucial when qualified leading characters (either historical or invented figures) make statements that contradict with moral standards. Moreover, even when the meaning of the *script* is clear, how the dialogue is performed as *talk* by actors defines the cultural meaning and subtext (Bowles 2010, 8). The intertwining possibilities of characterisation and dialogue can highlight the nationalist-and-monarchical agenda of the television series. However, the juxtaposition of characters' multiple and contradictory views also suggests the socio-political insecurity occurring in the community, influencing people to rely on seeking patronage and deviation of righteousness for survival.

Towards fictionalisation, in some cases, the construction of fragmented information and memory involves mythical practice. It is because the conduct is closely linked to local discourse, the local reader's recognition, identity and historical construction. What people receive and remember serve as a consciousness network that influence human paradigm and activities, including spirituality, feeling, cognition and judgement. What the memory governs is subjected to the socio-political contextual connection (Ngoi 2015). The local discourse links to the prevalent reception of a particular subject. In the extent of the thesis, the local discourse refers to the local people's interpretation of their prosperous history and its virtuous kingship. However, as state governing, especially in the old time that its socio-political regime and moral code might differ from the present era. While there are agreeable memories, there are also forbidden ones. However, the romanticised historical narratives compensate for the local readers' memories (Ngoi 2015). Therefore, in Thailand, the case study is a successful example product of preferred memory selection and new meaning construction to navigate from political conflict against the monarchy and class struggles in a way that the people enjoy.

In summary, the textual analysis of this case study and other related productions shows that, throughout Thai television drama history, the most successful prime-time historical television dramas are those that continue to centre on familial and socio-political ideologies. The series *Love Destiny* is highly popular with the audiences, as it is able to connect with the past in a way that is useful for current-day viewers. Despite radical changes of capitals (from Ayutthaya to Thonburi and, presently, Bangkok) and dynasty lines, stories of the greatness of the states, the capitals and their dynasties have been the conventional themes of Thai fiction (Chutintaranond and Baker 2002, vii). The series' familiar standpoints of nationalism and monarchy are functional for the mass audience's referral of Thailand's prosperous history and kingship, of which they are proud. The series that depicts the period where Thailand was ruled by King Narai, which was regarded as one of the golden eras of national history (Cho 2012, 45), suggests the local people's desire to see stories about the King's wisdom and moral kingship. However, the textual selection of what to include and how to strategically structure the historical drama

underline the producer's intention to demystify reality and their ideology behind the exercise (Sethi 1999, 178). The combination of history and the idealisation of national culture constructs a new body of national and cultural identity.

Answering the research question about Buddhism's role in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas, the findings of the textual analysis show that Buddhism is flexible in terms of how it can be embedded in entertainment-driven Thai television drama. However, in nationalist and monarchical television drama, the producer can manipulate Buddhism for political purposes as well. In the case of *Love Destiny*, it reproduces and reconstructs the virtue of Thai kingship to the audience, showing well-known figures paying gratitude to those kings whose dedication benefits the country.

The series shows two different approaches to implanting the notion of religious practice. The first one is moral practices for householders centring on the principles of parenting or supervising. In this part, the religious discourse is apparent and some Buddhist rituals are performed. Nevertheless, generally, the Buddhist practices are presented as taken-for-granted culture. In the second approach, the meaning of virtuous kingship is enhanced by the conceptualisation of the King's moral code, political decision and undetailed violence. Crucially, representation of the role Buddhist monks play in a political party is the politicisation of religion, tying nationalism with a claim of religious stability.

With the series' implication of conservative monarchical ideology that legitimises kingship with virtue, the politics-related representation follows the contextualist mode of argument. The narrative strategies are constructed in romantic mode. The hybridisation of the romantic-comedy and historical drama genres supports the compromising narrative. The sequence arrangement, characterisation and dialogue depicted in the political plot contextualise and rationalise the historical characters' moral values and norms of conduct, regardless of historical accuracy. The flow of sequences progresses the narrative forward, unfolding the embedded ideology about kingship, loyalty and compassion. While politics, morality and romance play at the foreground, representations of family, culture, history, honour and innovation enrich the narrative texture.

The case study navigates straightforward discourse of dharma for ruling by minimisation, fragmentation, infiltration and the deviation of righteousness over the

course of the narrative. As a result, *Love Destiny* is not a strictly nationalist drama but a complex television drama that weaves, merges and reforms conventions and assumptions from a range of genres and themes (Mittell 2015, 233). Its audience can therefore enjoy the text and its nostalgic retreat into culture.

The series' representation shows the local political view that modernisation is accepted in Thai culture as long as the conventional meaning of national institutions remains stable. Newcomb (2007), Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith (2013) and Benshoff (2016) consider this as the process of generalisation and popularisation of the prevailing moral codes and virtuous simplification appropriate to the current taste and expectation of the mass viewer.⁷⁰ Buddhism as presented in the series sits in a prejudiced alignment with socio-political conflicts to secure the dominant state ideologies. The practice of value-pluralism embedded in the local mass fictions struggles to direct the local reader to a larger meaning and understanding of religious mediation concerning other socio-political institutions and their roles (Benshoff 2015, 19; Couldry 2012).

Notwithstanding, at a deeper level of ideology and the religious-political praxis of mass storytelling, this analysis uncovers a complex religious-political mediation of conventional ideologies. The narrative has a trace of the instrumentalisation of religion by the producer as a top-down process. Fundamentally, the text functions as another cultural and political artefact that circulates Buddhist and monarchical symbols across the community, such as suffering King Narai, pro-Buddhism Phetracha, moral Kosa Pan and compassionate Hora Thibadi. In contrast, historical stories of Kosa Lhek and Phaulkon represent impermanence and the undesirable consequences of dishonesty. More interestingly, while the narrative places the public's focus on the institution of the monarchy, it leaves a gap to justify aristocracy and indigenous officials' work performance. The partial representation of the religion in the series, therefore, functions as a source of political and social power (Hadden and Shupe 1988 in Hoover and Lundby 1997, 17). The historical fiction applies moral ideology and Thai hierarchical culture to construct a metaphor of the deservedness of the ruling class (Hall 2006), cultural prosperity and individual's appropriation of the socio-political regime.

⁷⁰ Newcomb 2007, 439; Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith 2013, 54; Benshoff 2015, 31.

PART II: Audience analysis

The findings of the textual analysis unveil a mixture of Buddhism's role and representation in a hybrid historical drama, depending on the series' political purposes. The following audience analysis examines the Thai and international audiences' reception of the series' Buddhist teachings, dharma for governance and other significant themes such as romance, family and culture. The findings of the section will answer thesis question, as follows.

SRQ3: What entertainment values and experiences do Thai and foreign online audiences seek from Thai television drama in the digital era?

Audience analysis requires multiple tools to access and process the data of online audience's interaction with the series' ideologies on YouTube and Pantip.com platforms. The methodologies for audience analysis in the chapter comprise of the following approaches:

1. A selection of four to twelve popular highlighted clips from the series from the YouTube sites that are most related to the core ideologies found in the section of content analysis (Part I of the chapter): religion, politics, romance, family and culture.
2. Coding audiences' comments on those selected materials into the NVivo program and categorising the comments following the same audience reception model developed by Carolyn Michelle (2007) that this study has followed throughout the thesis.
3. Calculating the data frequency of the five themes into percentages for data cluster analysis.
4. Analysis of the data cluster and note-taking of the findings.
5. Searching the audience's extended conversation about the series on the Pantip.com discussion website using the Thai keywords meaning "the series *Love Destiny*."
6. Owing to the large size of the audience's conversation topics and participation on Pantip.com, this study selected the 500 most recent discussion rooms to examine the content and activities in the rooms.

7. Grouping the audience's discussion topics and calculating the audience's participation frequencies into percentages for data cluster analysis.
8. Analysis of the Pantip.com audience's participation clusters and note-taking of the findings.

For the YouTube clip selection, the study focuses on only official highlighted clips. Due to four telecasts of the production over the period of February 2018 to January 2020, the series became available in at least three versions: the original version, the three-episode summary version, and the director-cut version. Only the short highlight clips remain throughout the period since series' the first airing. Considering textual justification, the selection criteria are based on:

1. Thematic relevance to the five groups of ideologies noted above;
2. Viewing popularity; and
3. Content variation of the clips within each group.

Additionally, it is essential to note the following information concerning the data collection as follows:

1. All of the total view data (*) is based on the same date of access: 16 April 2020.
2. The total comment references (**) are the original numbers of comments taken by the NVivo program, which are not necessarily the actual coded frequencies after categorisation.
3. The selection of thematic groups reflects the four most prevalent subthemes of the series' narrative found in Part 1 (the textual analysis). However, when cut into smaller units, the relationship theme separates further into romance and family groups. Thus, it results in five thematic groups in the audience analysis part: religion, politics, romance, family and culture.
4. Some of the selected materials had lower levels of viewing because of their later distribution and the shorter availability of the clips on the platform. Nonetheless, the study includes them because of their content and participatory significance.

Following such criteria, the selections are as follows. Firstly, the religion-based clips depict notions of misdeeds, karma, thanking for practicing good deeds, religious activity

(offering food to monks), and sexual misconduct. Secondly, the clips in the political group feature the notion of dharma for a king, gratitude to the kingdom, punishment, repentance, political conflicts and arguments, religious conversion, brotherhood between the King and the Minister of Royal Treasury Department, and distrust. Thirdly, the clips in the romance theme represent the leading couple's love expressed on various occasions. Fourthly, the clips in the family theme show the relationship between family members ranging from parents to the daughter in-law; husbands and wives; and masters and slaves. Lastly, the clips in culture theme feature cooking activities and composing and reading classical Thai poems. The lists of clips are shown in Tables 3.5 to 3.9.

Table 3.5: The list of selected religion-based YouTube clips of *Love Destiny*

Theme 1: Religion				
No.	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
1	FIN งามขนาดนี้...อย่าทำอะไรไม่ดีเลยนะเจ้าคะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: You are so beautiful. Do not commit any misdeeds, please Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018n)	22 Feb 2018	2,832,986	242
2	FIN มนต์กฤษณะกาลี... บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Krishnagali mantra Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018x)	22 Feb 2018	11,364,465	1,061
3	FIN โปรดใช้ร่างของข้า..ทำความดี แบ่งเบากกรรมชั่วของข้า บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Please use my body to do good, relieving my bad karma Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018w)	22 Feb 2018	5,311,523	1,025
4	FIN ขอจิตใจที่เกตุสุรางค์ยิ่งนัก ที่ทำบุญให้ข้ามาตลอด บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Thank sister Kedsurang so much for donating the virtue to me Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018g)	6 Apr 2018	9,118,256	1,007
5	FIN ขอตั้งบาตรด้วยคนได้ไหมคะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: May I please give alms to monks too? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018f)	23 Feb 2018	9,084,334	838
6	FIN คนมักมากในกาม มักมากในทุกสิ่งอย่างต่างหากที่ผิดหนัก บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand	6 Apr 2018	1,991,290	770

Theme 1: Religion				
No.	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
	(English: The person who is lustful, greedy of everything is so wrong Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018k)			
Total comment references**				4,943

(* , ** data based on 16 April 2020)

Table 3.6: The list of selected politics-based YouTube clips of *Love Destiny*

Theme 2: Politics				
No.	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
1	FIN ข้าจะพูดว่า...สิ่งที่พระมหากษัตริย์พึงมีคือทศพิธราชธรรม บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I would tell him that what a king should have is the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018j)	12 Apr 2018	7,847,134	933
2	FIN จำจดหมายลับของมิ่งได้หรือไม่ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Do you remember your secret letter? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018o)	19 Jul 2018	2,266,514	612
3	FIN ไม่ได้หวังให้เขาตาย...ข้าไม่ได้หวัง บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I do not want him to die. I do not Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018ab)	22 Mar 2018	2,249,032	511
4	FIN ข้าเกิดในแผ่นดินอยุธยา แลจักไม่มีวันลืมตน แลทรยศต่อแผ่นดินอยุธยา บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I was born in Ayutthaya and I will never forget it. I will not betray Ayutthaya Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018i)	16 Mar 2018	2,041,323	373
5	FIN มิ่งคิดว่ากูไม่รู้สึอะไรอะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Do you think I don't feel anything? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018y)	22 Mar 2018	1,878,310	926
6	FIN อย่างนั้นมิ่งก็มาเป็นขุนหลวงซะเองสิวะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Why don't you become the king yourself then? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018ad)	6 Apr 2018	1,859,431	472
7	FIN เจ้าก็จะได้เพราะเจ้าเป็นลูกของออกพระเพชรราชา บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: You will get it because you are the son of Phetracha Buppe Sannivas)	30 Mar 2018	1,398,246	519

Theme 2: Politics				
No.	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
	(Panangkasiri 2018p)			
8	FIN ถ้าเอ็งเปลี่ยนมานับถือศาสนาข้าเมื่อใด ข้าจะถือว่าเอ็งเป็นคนโกง บุปเพสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Whenever you convert to my religion, I will consider you a blackleg Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018s)	29 Mar 2018	1,234,844	312
9	FIN กูรักมึงประดุจพี่ชายร่วมอุทร ประหนึ่งน้องชายร่วมสายโลหิต บุปเพสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I love you like my biographical brother sharing the same blood Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018e)	22 Mar 2018	1,206,590	348
10	FIN กูไม่ตอบ ไม่ใช่เรื่องที่มีงจะมาคาดคั้นกู บุปเพสันนิवास EP.14 Ch3Thailand (English: I won't answer. It is not your business to force me to Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018d)	8 Jan 2020	439,821	72
11	FIN กูไม่ได้ตั้งใจให้มันตาย บุปเพสันนิवास EP.10 Ch3Thailand (English: I did not wish him to die Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018c)	4 Jan 2020	243,139	33
12	FIN แค่เห็นก่าพิศก็รู้แล้วว่าไม่สมควรเชื่อถือ บุปเพสันนิवास EP.12 Ch3Thailand (English: Only seeing through his background, I already know that he is not trustworthy Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018m)	6 Jan 2020	155,325	454
Total comment references**				5,565

(* , ** data based on 16 April 2020)

Table 3.7: The list of selected romance-based YouTube clips of *Love Destiny*

Theme 3: Romance				
No.	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
1	FIN ออเจ้ารู้จักวิธีจูบแบบฝรั่งเศสหรือ บุปเพสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Do you know how to French kiss? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018ae)	6 Apr 2018	23,942,125	1,030
2	FIN ซาดิหน้าข้าจะเกิดเป็นม้าน้ำ...พี่ก็จะเกิดเป็นม้าน้ำตัวผู้ บุปเพสันนิवास Ch3Thailand	12 Apr 2018	8,250,854	1,032

Theme 3: Romance				
No	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
	(English: Next life, I will be a seahorse. I will be a male seahorse too Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018r)			
3	FIN ฉันรักแกมาตลอด รักมานานตั้งแต่...ตั้งแต่ 300 กว่าปีมาแล้วเธอคะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I have loved you for so long. Since the last 300 years? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018q)	5 Apr 2018	7,127,919	1,001
4	FIN คั่นห้องที่ห้องออเจ้า...ชัดตืออยู่ๆ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Is the mirror in your room clear? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018l)	15 Mar 2018	6,105,577	1,066
Total comment references**				4,129

(* , ** data based on 16 April 2020)

Table 3.8: The list of selected family-based YouTube clips of *Love Destiny*

Theme 4: Family				
No	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
1	FIN ขอให้ยูดีมีความสุข ที่นี้เป็นบ้านของออเจ้าแล้วหนา บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Stay here happily. This is your home Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018h)	12 Apr 2018	4,612,874	817
2	FIN ลูกขอรับผิดแทนน้องเองขอรับ...ท่านขุน เชิญเจ้าค่ะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: I will take her punishment myself. Tan Khun, please come Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018ac)	15 Mar 2018	16,264,875	1,049
3	FIN เมียหนึ่ง เมียสอง รู้สึกอย่างไรหรือเจ้าค่ะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास EP.12 Ch3Thailand (English: How would the first wife and the second wife feel about it? Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018z)	6 Jan 2020	795,647	98
4	FIN เป็นคนที่จงรักภักดีเจ้าค่ะ บุปผเสถียรนิवास EP.14 Ch3Thailand (English: They are the loyal people Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018v)	8 Jan 2020	2,555,780	238
Total comment references**				2,202

(* , ** data based on 16 April 2020)

Table 3.9: The list of selected culture-based YouTube clips of *Love Destiny*

Theme 5: Culture				
No	Title of materials	Posted date	Total views*	Number of comments coded into the NVivo program
1	FIN กินมะม่วงน้ำปลาหวานกันมั๊ย รับรองว่าแซ่บ บุปเปสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Shall we have some raw mangoes with sweet and salty sauce? I guarantee that it is yummy Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018b)	9 Mar 2018	54,405,532	1,085
2	กุ้งเผาหน้าจิ้มซีฟู้ด แม่กระเทด Ch3Thailand (English: Grilled prawns with spicy seafood sauce by Karaked Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018af)	8 Mar 2018	39,520,874	1,072
3	FIN นี่ไงเจ้าคะ ใส่โลรงให้หมูเจ้าคะ บุปเปสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: Here it is – putting a sarong on the minced pork Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018t)	29 Mar 2018	31,684,561	1,062
4	FIN ไม่ใช่แกงแคนะเจ้าคะ...หลนเต้าเจี้ยวเจ้าคะ บุปเปสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: It is not a Kae curry. It is a curry with soybean paste and coconut milk Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018aa)	15 Mar 2018	17,977,486	1,027
5	FIN เป็นกลอนประตู ก็อาจจะพอได้เจ้าคะ บุปเปสันนิवास Ch3Thailand (English: If it is a door latch, I may be able to Buppe Sannivas) (Panangkasiri 2018u)	9 Mar 2018	16,888,379	1,099
Total comment references**				5,345

(* , ** data based on 16 April 2020)

The study categorised the data frequency into the audience reception model of Carolyn Michelle (2007) in Table 3.10 below.

**Table 3.10: Frequency percentages of reception
expressed on selected YouTube clips of *Love Destiny***

Audience reception	Religion theme (100% from 6 sources: 4,943 comments)	Politics theme (100% from 12 sources: 5,565 comments)	Romance theme (100% from 4 sources: 4,129 comments)	Family theme (100% from 4 sources: 2,202 comments)	Culture theme (100% from 5 sources: 5,345 comments)
1. Denotative reception					
<i>i) Mediated-aesthetic receptions (visual or textual aesthetics)</i>					
Casting	-	0.28	-	-	-
Acting and actors	5.98	12.91	3.01	2.51	1.23
Visual appearance (cast, costume, scene composition)	7.4	4.41	2.39	2.47	5.23
Music and sound effects	1.89	0.45	0.57	0.04	0.35
Crossed production notes	2.5	1.53	0.44	0.17	1.1
<i>ii) Mediated-generic receptions (production-based reception)</i>					
Production and directing	1.95	1	1.63	0.3	0.24
Re-running and editing	-	0.06	-	0.64	-
Novel	0.08	0.08	0.11	-	-
Script	0.23	3.1	0.09	0.51	-
Others	-	-	-	-	-
<i>iii) Mediated-intention reception:</i> (Not shown)					
2. Connotative reception					
A. Transparent mode (text as personal life)					
<i>a) Sensation</i>					
Liking	36.37	36.85	40.87	42.92	24.55
Audience's romance/sexual fantasy	1.7	0.62	1.95	0.77	1.17
<i>b) Personal experience - individual biography:</i> (Not shown)					
B. Referential mode (text as like-life): (not shown)					
C. Discursive mode (look at the text as the ideological message)					
<i>i) Analytical identification (comprehension of the message)</i>					
1. Culture/history	1.1	15.32	0.11	2.13	0.75
2. Plot	-	-	-	-	-
3. Character's motivation	-	-	-	-	-
Religious teachings (<i>The Eightfold Path</i>)					
1. Right understanding: Religious belief and morality	3.88	6.27	0.37	2.34	0.07
2. Right intention	-	-	-	-	-
3. Right speech Audience's negative speech	12.79	-	0.4	7.89	3.02
4. Right action	-	-	-	-	-
5. Right livelihood	-	-	-	-	-
6. Right effort	-	-	-	-	-
7. Right mindfulness	-	-	-	-	-

Audience reception	Religion theme (100% from 6 sources: 4,943 comments)	Politics theme (100% from 12 sources: 5,565 comments)	Romance theme (100% from 4 sources: 4,129 comments)	Family theme (100% from 4 sources: 2,202 comments)	Culture theme (100% from 5 sources: 5,345 comments)
8. Right concentration	-	-	-	-	-
Other ideological implications	-	-	-	-	-
ii) Positional interpretation (audience's response to the message)					
1. Agreement to dominant ideology - Kings and monarchy	-	5.57	-	0.13	-
2. Negotiated responses	-	-	-	-	-
3. Oppositional responses to the series	-	-	-	-	-
Evaluation of hegemonic reading	-	-	-	-	-
Consumption and media access					
Foreign audiences	0.93	0.15	4.33	1.53	5.29
Media access	5.34	0.75	1.05	2.22	4.21
Local audience's calling for affirmation of their membership*	1.25	0.93	7.95	7.08	14.54
Repeated consumption	1.59	2.52	25.04	18.63	20.25
Returning audience	0.11	-	0.04	-	0.05
Extended physical engagement	-	-	0.04	-	5.74
Others	14.91	7.2	9.61	7.72	12.21
Total	100	100	100	100	100

(Based on data access on 16 April 2020)

Note: *Some examples of the audience's calling for affirmation of their membership include statements such as, "*Who is watching like me? Am I the only one who still watches it this month? One who is watching now, click here,*" and many more.

As the thesis question relating to the audience analysis centres on the consumption experiences that Thai and foreign online audiences seek from Thai television drama in the digital era, the analysis of audience reception of the case study will follow the concept of the four basic causal relations between the viewer and the media. Moreover, as the study finds a close interrelation between the two groups of online audience data from YouTube and Pantip.com, the online audience analysis in the chapter will differ from Chapters One and Two by not separating the data analysis of YouTube

and Pantip.com media participants. The analysis order will follow the key interests of this thesis: 1) value reinforcement, 2) mediation, 3) audience-based power relations and 4) education. The focus of the chapter is the mediation of dharma for governing and Buddhism; thus, the analysis will prioritise the audience's reception about these subjects first, followed by other findings. Additionally, the analysis of each mode may overlap, as the audience's behaviours may relate to more than one function mode.

I. Viewing for value reinforcement

In a didactic television drama series such as *Buddha*, the viewer watches for specific religious codes. In semi-explicit religious dramas such as *Cage of Karma*, the viewer enhances their morality as householders through a more secularised representation of human suffering. The themes of implicit religious television dramas, in contrast, tend to display universal values that shape meaningful human behaviour (Marsh 2009, 258). The YouTube data of the audience's reception of *Love Destiny* in Table 3.10 above note their satisfaction with the series' reinforcement of their existing conservative social orders, which are family relationships, romance, politics, religion and cultural values (at 42.92%, 40.87%, 36.85%, 36.37% and 24.55% of the total comments, respectively). Most of evidential expression suggests the audience's hedonistic consumption of the presumed consolidation of existing doctrines (Tan 2011, 22). The representation of the dominant ideologies then becomes the typicality of stimuli when the preference for familiarity plays an important role in the collective reading (Rosch 1978, Rosch and Mervis 1975 in Tan 2011, 22).

Dharma for state government

Let us look at the audience's reception of the series' representation of dharma in relation to state governance. The data in Table 3.10 show that the local audience shared their analytical identification (comprehension of the message) to clips that displayed history and monarchical polity at 15.32%. While 3.88% of comments dealt with the audience's ethical understanding, the local audience paid double attention to the moral rulership at 6.27%. The comments and significant participation with the comments (which cannot be coded by the NVivo program and therefore is not included in Table 3.10) signify the audience's awareness of the Buddhist values in state government.

Examples of the audience's comments about good governance include those who talk about the meaning of the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler and King Bhumibol (King Rama IX), whom they regard as the best archetype of a dharma king. For instance, over 5,500 participants agree with K.W. (2018), who comments that:

If there is a scene where Kedsurang shares the story of King Bhumibol to Phra Phetracha, I think it will be a peak point. Tell him [Phra Phetracha] that in the next 300 years, there will be the King that we cannot find elsewhere. He ruled the country with the Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler.

Likewise, over 1,600 viewers agreed with the following comment from T.T. (2018):

The Tenfold Virtue of a Ruler. I am speechless for a moment and cry. Our King Rama IX followed all those ten principles, and maybe even more. I miss him so much. It is so lucky of me to be in his reigning period.

Many local audiences shared their changed views about Phetracha and Sorasak, about whom they had a negative previous perception. For example, over 1,500 viewers agreed with the comment from M.E. (2018) that states:

When I studied [about the history of Ayutthaya], I really disliked Phra Phetracha and the Tiger King [Sorasak] as I did not profoundly learn about the reason why they rebelled [against King Narai]. It seemed like the Tiger King took the throne from his biological father for his stepfather. It was like he was so ambitious. But when I watch this scene, all actors perform so well. It shows that they did not want to do it, but they had to. So, I cry. All our Kings had their reasons for what they did following their current conditions. Their decision was the best possible solution for all parties. Even in the television drama, it is this intense, how difficult would it be in the real situation?

In another scene that features Phetracha, Sorasak and the coup members arresting Phaulkon, many audience members shared their feeling concerning Phetracha's dialogue about Phaulkon's treachery. More than 2,100 members supported B.M. (2019)'s view about the corruption:

[O]nce I heard the dialogue "How could you do this to my country?" I was angry with present officials who corrupt for themselves and foreign investors. It is not different from treason at all.

Many of the participants actively engaged with B.M.'s idea and referred to current politicians, domestic situations and how they think the country is taken advantages from the corrupt. Other YouTube audience conversations involve a variety of politics-related topics including knowledge about the betrayal practice in the Ayutthaya period, opinions about King Narai's approval of Phaulkon's monk-defrocking request, current corruption cases in Thailand, and disagreement with politicians' governing practices, among other topics. The talk about current politics, however, was done in a non-specific manner to avoid any possible risk of being charged for defamation. Also, the socio-political history in the Ayutthaya period offers a limited opportunity for the audience to link to their personal experience. Thus, the audience's views are based on the referential mode of reception (text as like-life) by referring and comparing events from the series to situations that are happening in the present time.

It is vital to emphasise here that the analysis is based on the evident data from the selected clips. The absence of the audience's negotiated and oppositional responses to the series and evaluation of hegemonic reading from the data above does not necessarily suggest the total non-appearance of the audience's different views. The section of the viewers who are more politically active respond to anti-commercial and anti-state ideologies via other channels, as they find their beliefs are not compatible with the text's discourse (Hills 2002, 5). However, they may also find their comments are not suitable for the official YouTube site of the series and most of the viewers who favour the narrative, so the anti-monarchy ideas must be said elsewhere. Some of them create their own YouTube clips to mediate their negotiated and oppositional interpretation of some of the kings, aristocrats and politicians featured in the series. The mediated content in the rooms generally contains the creation or distortion of information of a targeted king and politicians that constructs a particular perception to their rulership different to how they are portrayed by the producer of the show. Thus, the audience-made contents may consist of royalism, agreement, discussion, criticism, incitement, argument and condemnation, to name a few.

It is useful here to consider these responses in relation to Stuart Hall's decoding model of negotiated and oppositional reading. The navigation of space (from official to self-made rooms) suggests the presence of social inequality, significantly in terms of class

positions, between those who are in positions of media control and self-censored principles and/or disempowerment (Shaw 2017). At the same time, the struggles of political discourse may also point to the technology-oriented perception of affordance coined by cognitive psychologist James Gibson (2015, 1979) and developed further by William Gaver (1991).

Gaver (1991) suggests different types of affordances through which to look at users' participation with objects or technologies, which are perceptible, hidden, and false. It is beneficial to consider his justification of hidden affordances (uses that are not apparent) and false affordances (uses of objects in ways that look like they should be able to do but do not) (Shaw 2017) to the political media practice. In spite of the democratic affordance of the internet-based facilities, misuses or underuses of technology are often regarded by most members as inappropriate.

Hills observes that such self-limitation might suggest the power of those missing discourses because of the non-discursive investments that the viewer made and the structuring absences and familiar repetitions (2002, 43). However, it also relates to the socio-political pressure to immorally criticise or reveal the audience's inner aggression against the historical kings in the public space hosted by the producer. The official forums and the fan majority tend to construct the space with a conservative culture of participation toward the institution of the monarchy.

Whether or not the audience's interactions accord with the exposed dominant ideology, it is evident that the local audience identifies their norm of civil governance based on an ethical code. Being able to express some of their political thoughts in popular platforms among other virtual members via the politic-related allegory allows the audience an opportunity to reaffirm their political idealism from various perspectives.

However, despite the audience's awareness of the idea of applying dharma to state governance as discussed above, there is no further action other than sharing their feelings and opinions in the online room. The major reason for this may be due to the political situation operating in the country. In the series, the dharma for state ruling is embedded in a subplot and it is represented in an implicit and deliberately deviated manner to not challenge the notion of kingship and aristocracy. Additionally, the continuous flow of the series' sequence with multiple themes and the indirect language

(using metaphors, irony, comedy and poem) removes radical debate in favour of discussion of good governance.

For instance, the online audience's responses to Kedsurang's idea about the penalty for those who commit serious corruption focus more on her comedic acting than the actual discourse about corruption. Only some statements about the fraud in the period are given. Similarly, discussing the audience's view about the brutal laws against women in Ayutthaya, most of the audience do not express any objections. Some shared their view in a joking manner, such as:

[I]n the past, a husband was more superior than wives. Now, a wife is more dominant. (H.F., 2018)

In the past, everything belonged to a husband, even wives were properties of a husband. But these days, everything belongs to a wife, including my soul. Well, let me stop now. My wife tells me to clean the roof. (S.W., 2018)

If you love your life, don't dare fight back to your wife. You have no idea how forceful the wife in the future will be. (I.A., 2018).

It is important to note the audience's overwhelming feeling about dharma kingship – the changed perception of the historical figures, the boosted nationalist feeling, the laughter about the corruption penalty and the jokes about swapped role of husband and wife in the present era – underline the power of the producer's role in shaping the collective structure of meaning. Those reactions of the audience confirm the efficiency of the producer's skilful emplotment that is the combination of romantic comedy and historical drama genres, multiple subthemes, sequence arrangement, characterisation and dialogue, as discussed in Part I of the chapter. This type of inarticulate mediation does not elucidate the meaning of dharma for state governance. Although the notion of ethical governance is not alien to the audience, the swift and truncated statement obstructs the audience from following it (Hall 1973, 271). Although there is no guarantee if the audience's reception will always accord with the producer's suggested ideology, when the meaning is initially taken away, the message (of good governance) has no effect (Hall 2005, 164).

Subsequently, the audience's reception will depend on something else – whether its meaning is more dominant and socially practicable for them (Hall 2005, 164). The data

show that while local Thai audiences appreciate the content of all the five themes, the clips that depict romance, culture and family relationship are re-watched the most, at 25.04%, 20.25% and 18.63%, respectively. Non-political comments are based on praising the acting and sharing their feelings when watching the intensely political scenes. The topics of their comments include the realistic acting of the cast, especially those in the political and morality theme at 12.91% and 5.98% of the total comments, respectively, and production-based aesthetics, such as the visual appearance of the cast, the production and the script.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the first part of the chapter, the audience were influenced by the series to extend physical activities in the offline domain, with cultural consumption including food, advertisements, tourism and dressing in classical Thai styles, a phenomenon that generating a marked rise in the domestic economy. These consumerist activities are evidence of the audience's affordability of social practice with their favourite production. The limitation of the audience's ideological relatedness to the notion of karma and the dharma for government does not suggest the failure of communication, as the producer does not aim to raise such ideologies to the surface but to enrich the narrative in the first place. This study only analyses the causal relation between the producer-made mediation of the dharma for governance and the audience's reception.

Stuart Hall explains the audience's tendency of favouring visual denotative understanding over linguistic connotative reading because the visual codes of perception are more universal and less arbitrary than linguistic ones (Hall 2005, 167; 1973, 268). Therefore, in an open space such as YouTube, commenting on visual aspects can serve the audience's desire to be involved with the series, and there is less risk of showing their textual misunderstanding, if any. The interests of the Pantip.com members also accord with the YouTube viewers' denotative mode of reception, as they pay attention to visual appearance and other elements of production and ideological interpretation is not involved. Similarly, international audiences showed their interaction with the clips with cultural and love themes, as, at least visually, they are easier to comprehend, unlike the clips about Buddhist beliefs and Siamese politics that demand more cultural background to understand the deeper meaning of the local ideological message.

Dharma for supervising

As discussed in Chapter Two, the notions of karma and dharma for householders are well decoded following the cultural familiarity with the belief, as it is often featured in Thai television dramas. However, the ideological redundancy and the repetitive style of representation (discussing about karma from the same viewpoint) limits the audience's volition to specially apply the series' message further into everyday life practice (Grossberg 1992, 57–58). In *Love Destiny*, the unrealistic karmic cycle and back-to-the-past incarnation featured in the series means dharma is treated as a mere fictionalisation. Hence, the audience has no personal connection with the aberrant karma to share with others. Subsequently, their opinions about karma and morality are referential and based on their existing understanding. Their comments show limited religious interpretation vis-a-vis the Eightfold Path, only mentioning the right understanding and the right speech. The audience evidently identified characters' right understanding of ethical practice at 3.88%. In contrast, a larger section of the participants shows their objection against the content, such as rude, hateful and violent speeches in the morality- and family-based clips, at 12.79% and 7.89%, respectively.

For those 3.88% comments concerning the correct understanding, the audience's interaction reveals their understanding of intentional actions and consequences, karmic justice, spirituality and the fundamental Buddhist precepts. They also utilised karmic logic to discuss why the antagonist developed the villain behaviours against her subordinates and the inferior that eventually led to suffering, death and unpleasant life after death, especially in the hell scene (Panangkasiri 2018w). The representation of hell is, in fact, common in the local television industry. Nonetheless, as long as the audio-visual exhibition generates dismay, it reinforces local beliefs and benefits the existing social order. Some examples of the comments are below:

It means that Karaked is fully aware of what is right, wrong or vile all along. That is how she can tell Kedsurang to do goodness to prove to others that Karaked is not all bad, but has some goodness too. So, all the vile she did was intentional, right? Because she knew what was right or wrong. (R.P., 2018)

One that committed the bad karma must be responsible for it herself. How can she have someone else to help? How can others do goodness to lessen her vicious karma? She must take it herself. Fiction is fiction. (S. A., 2018).

I would like to say that it is impossible to share karma. Whoever committed their karma, they must repay. Only some things are beyond foreseeability. (G.P., 2018)

The karmic law is never negotiable. Its solemnity is equal for all peoples, all genders, all races, and all religions. (M.G., 2018)

Our bad karma – no one can escape from misdeeds we commit. Everyone, please do not do bad karma. Do lots of virtue. (K.C., 2018).

The hell is scary. I will not do any more badness. (P.P., 2018)

Please produce more of such a good television drama like this, so that the society will be afraid, ashamed of sin and do not follow the evil society trend. (K.M., 2018)

The ethics-related comments above suggest that the local audience applies Buddhism as a justifying tool to measure, value and argue with characters and their actions. However, regardless of the main plot is about destined love and the law of action-and-consequences, the rationale of the enigmatical karmic plot of the leading characters is almost never raised and not debated at all. What seems to be more relevant to the audience is the Buddhist principles for supervising, called the Four Sublime States of Mind (love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity). Some evidence of the online audience's interpretation of the teachings are below:

Kedsurang has one luck, that she is in the family governed by dharma and goodness that we cannot find in today's reality. Compassion is such a great thing. I love this family. (T.D., 2018)

This scene is the most touching for the audience. The uncle [Hora Thibadi] has so much mercy for Karaked [and Kedsurang], so much. Although in the past, no one

liked Karaked, he did. Surely, whoever listens to what he is saying will cry. Even though I have watched this scene one hundred or one thousand times, I still cry with this scene. It is so sensational. (P.S., 2020)

The actress [playing Hora Thibadi's wife] acts through her eyes sadly. She is suffering but cannot show it out the same way as Kedsurang does. It is because she is the supervisor, the head of the family. She cannot cry badly in front of her subordinates. (P.S., 2018)

Moreover, it is crucial to note the data that show the audience's liking of morality-based sequences (36.37%) in comparison with the frequency of the audience's statements of their re-watching of the same clips (1.59%). Such a difference suggests that the Thai audience may view Buddhism in the series as part of the Thai taken-for-granted culture as they did not watch the same series repeatedly – unlike how they did with other more entertaining theme groups. That is, for the mediated Buddhist community, the audience plays a *member* role, enjoying their religious identity but not necessarily taking further actions to stricter religious practices. Nevertheless, viewing Buddhist practice as part of the local culture also promotes in the audience a sense of desirable living as per religious belief. Below are some examples of the audience's comments vis-a-vis the local Buddhist belief depicted in the series:

I feel ruefulness more than sorrow. It is because not everyone can die this way – die because of ageing, die in the presence of all family members. He has the time to give his final farewell. He can listen to dharma before death. At the last moment of life, everyone wishes to die this way, only not everyone has such a holy chance. (B.S., 2018)

Before my grandmother died, all our family and relatives gathered [...] Everyone said goodbye, leaving no worries behind. Her last breath was very loud. Then, everyone saw her shadow walking out of the house with a shadow of a big man [...]. (M.R., 2018)

The findings above underline the audience's multiple uses of Buddhist values as tools to practice evaluating the norms of social and personal conduct from the perspectives of

righteousness and religious faith. Seeing the representation of the state ideologies from the series may not radically trigger distinct conduct concerning good governance and ethical practices in audiences. Nonetheless, viewing the series is an enjoyable exercise for the audience and their virtual peers to evaluate their ethical norms in relation to the function of social institutions and themselves (Tan 2011, 22–23).

Since the Buddhist teachings in the series generate no new inspiration but instead provide reinforcement to the existing faith, the audience subsequently shifts to playing a *consumer* role in the Thai television drama industry. Their cultural consumption and activities on social media are also part of their social practice and the mediation of their identity with other members of their world.

The discussion above has examined the audience's learning and self-made mediation about the historical politics and references to the present polity in *Love Destiny*. The following analyses of the audience's mediation and education will turn to the domain of consumption. The findings of the analysis in this section will answer the research question about the entertainment values and experiences that Thai and international audiences seek from the case study.

II. Viewing for the mediation

The distinct popularity and the increasing size of fan communities throughout Thailand invigorate the audience's volition to continually watch the series and take part in the offline and online fan communities (Grossberg 1992, 57–58). Regardless of whether the audience identifies as religious or not, their attendance to the narrative is stimulating consumption that involves pleasure and life enhancement (Marsh 2009, 261).

The data of YouTube audience's comments shown in Table 3.10 highlights the audience's mediation to their inner self (in forms of memory and sensation, for instance) and their community. Since the last section discussed the mediation of political and moral sense-making of the audience, this section will pay attention to the aspects of romance, family and culture.

Significantly, the data in Table 3.10 reveals that the local audience are most actives in rooms that focus on communal inclusion such as culture, romance and family to mediate with their personal and communal desire. Romance-based official YouTube

clips of the series gain the largest number of views and have the highest repeat consumption. The audience liked the family and romance themes the most among the five themes at 42.92% and 40.87%, respectively. Texts with romance and cultural content are re-watched the most (25.04% and 20.25%, respectively), and the cultural theme encourages the audience to take further action in their everyday life (at least 5.74%). Below are examples of the audience's views about the effect of viewing the series that mediates with their sensation and memory:

Romance: *This is the peak point of "Buppe Sannivas." No matter what life, one will unite with the bonded loving souls. No obstacles can obstruct. If one cannot marry each other, one prefers to stay single. I feel so involved.* (K.P., 2018)

Family: *This is an impressive scene. Everyone speaks their mind. This is a real family.* (J.Z., 2020)
I really like this scene. Masters and maids respect each other. Lao FC. (T.B., 2019)

Culture: *The houses in the Ayutthaya period, environment, properties, outfits, dialogue, language are all beautiful. The atmosphere is so serene, so enjoyable. Even though everything is set up, it clearly shows the "Thai aesthetics." This is what makes the series so popular. I admire it [the production work].* (W.T., 2019)

A large number of the Thai YouTube audience note that viewing the series generates a hearty feeling in them. The audience's satisfaction with the series' confirmation of loving relationships and a caring family within the local culture reflects their desire rooted in a collective subconscious. They treat the series as a tool to recall codes of behaviour and an ideal state of living (Kracauer 1947 in Tan 2011, 21).

The audience members do not only mediate self-reflectively but also with their community members. For example, in the clips featuring culture, romance and family, the audience significantly calls for affirmation of their membership in the *Love Destiny* fandom and audience at 14.54%, 7.95% and 7.08%, respectively. Examples of their calls include:

Those who have watched the series more than five times, please press 'like' (M.G., 2018). More than 1,100 other participants noted their repeated consumption as requested.

Am I the only one who still watches it on 23 August 2019? (D.D., 2019). 836 other viewers supported them that they also watched the series too.

Now is 2020, I am still watching (A.A., 2019). Over 1,200 other viewers also showed their presence watching the series the same way as A.A.

I am crazy. I still re-watch Karaked again (G.U., 2018). Over 2,900 other viewers support G.U.'s viewing and 80 more comments also noted that G.U. was not alone.

Those who would like to watch the second season, please give me a 'like' (B.B. 2018). More than 4,000 participants followed B.B.'s request.

Comments like these underline the desire of the audience to express their view and involvement in relation to their subculture (Hills 2002, 38–39). As the generalised space may not particularly encourage their full thoughts at a given time (Hills 2002, 42), such expressions have become ritual and copied patterns for young audiences to quickly signal their viewing practices to the community. The repeated sayings echo the notion that fandom does not prosper in personal isolation but is closely tied to a localised sense of cultural value and legitimacy (Hills 2002, 49). The reactions of other participants to such expositions may consist of positive responses depending on requests, ignorance and criticism over the efforts and repetitiveness. Nonetheless, the extent that a subculture dominates the space also points to the social interaction that embraces another form of democratic practice in the community.

The data of the audience's repeated calls accord with the offline and online audience's practice of fear-of-missing-out.⁷¹ Also, as seen in the example images of extended offline activities below (figs. 3.2 and 3.3), a large number of fans enjoy engagement in social practices that mediate their cultural identity and belonging to the community (Tan 2011, 23).

⁷¹ Jory 2018; Bhathravez and Jirayudh 2018; Kittimahachoke and Cheichanya 2018; InfoQuest 2019, 24.



Figs. 3.2-3.3: Screen captions of news reporting of tourists at the historical site in Ayutthaya, dressing in Thai costumes during the airing period of *Love Destiny*⁷² (Accessed on 20/5/2020)



Fig. 3.4: The leading actor of *Love Destiny* and young fans in classic Thai dress⁷³ (Accessed on 20/5/2020)



Fig. 3.5 Examples of *Love Destiny*'s marketing and audience responses to cooking
Source: google image with searched keyword 'เมนูแม่การะเกด' (Karaked's menu) (Accessed on 20/5/2020)

Another way the audience could participate in fandom communities other than official clips is through audience-made productions. The audience-made productions work to mediate the views, identities and fandom of viewers with others in varying ways

⁷² 'เที่ยงวันทันเหตุการณ์ | ปรากฏการณ์บุปผะเสนินิวาสท่า ศก.- ท่องเที่ยวเงินสะพัด | 30-03-61 | Ch3Thailand (English: Midday News | the Buppe Sannivas phenomenon boosts the tourism economy | 30-03-2018 | Ch3Thailand)' 2018 (accessed on 20/5/2020).

⁷³ 'กระแสด "ละครบุปผะเสนินิวาส" (English: The wave of the series Buppe Sannivas)' 2018 (accessed on 20/5/2020).

depending on media practice skills. Simple practices include taking screen captures of the series and adding comments; taking photos of fan activities to share on popular social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LINE; and engaging in online fan talks, for instance, and these are widespread. Those who are more capable of content generation may produce self-made YouTube clips, reviewing food and Thai classical dress online, recording international viewers' reaction while watching the series as well as live and recorded self-performed scenes of the series and recorded cover versions of the series' songs.

Viewers are located in a variety of international countries, such as Laos, Myanmar, China, Korea, Indonesia and Russia, as well as South Asia and other English-speaking countries. Vietnamese viewers are the most prevalent and active participants in the YouTube platforms, especially for the culture and romance content. The local and international consumption on YouTube indicates the value of the series as a mediated tool to connect a broader television drama community (Staiger 2005; Marsh 2009; Feilitzen and Carlsson 1998). The local and regional acceptance of the themes reveals that personal relationships and cultural exchange have the potential to articulate membership in a borderless community that exchanges the same worldview (Tan 2011, 23) – at least, at the surface level. Similarly, Matt Hills also explains that individuals are part of a cultural identity and value system which interchanges with others in a broader cultural environment (2002, 44). This idea may help to explain why international media users showed very limited interest in the religious content, at only 0.93%, and in local politics, at 0.15%, since these subjects are more socio-politically specific.

III. Viewing as power relation

The power relation between the series and the audience is significantly active. While the well-made series fascinates the audience, the audience takes an active role in consuming and interacting with the series and their community. Additionally, the production process of the novel and the series are orientated very much around fans' involvement, ranging from supporting the author to promoting the novel and consuming the series and related productions. The audience's involvement indicates their enjoyment in taking part in the industry and manipulating their consumption power as per their personal preference and

communal trend (Rungtanawit 2017, 202). Importantly, almost all offline activities are shared online as part of the current media practice of Thai media users in the multi-screen era (Rungtanawit 2017, 204; InfoQuest 2020, 2–3).

From a technological perspective, such an active interaction emphasises the collective imagined affordances that the internet-based facilities actively converge users' perceptions and expectations about the technology and its functionality (Nagy and Neff 2015, 5 in Shaw 2017). Thus, the audience-created circulation of the media content across different systems fosters a participation culture and a practice of viewer's holding multiple roles (Jenkins 2006). Fans' new roles and interactions with others may range from viewing-only audiences to participants, content providers and online distributors across their viral communities. The media practices they conduct to make meaning of the text and the community experience increase the collective process of well-trained media users to a higher degree (Jenkins 2006).

Another exercise of the audience's power in relation to the series' narrative found in Pantip.com and YouTube platforms is 'what if?' role plays. In the 'what if?' story-world, the audience takes an opportunity to suspend their disbelief and imagine themselves as their favourite character and take on any possible scenario in a safe space (Marsh 2009, 268-69). Their interaction shares a wider range of the characteristics of Jenkins's (1992) *Ten Ways to Rewrite a Television Show*. The local exercise may incorporate one or more features in the three types of explorations: 1) narrative re-structure (re-contextualisation, expansion of the timeline, genre shifting, plot or dislocation crossovers); 2) thematic alteration (moral realignment, emotional intensification); and 3) re-characterisation (re-focalisation and eroticisation) (Jenkins 1992 in Benshoff 2015, 229–30). Similar to the previous audience-made political products inspired by the series, such 'what if?' role-play reflects the reinforcement, mediation and power relation model of television drama and extended space where the audience can exercise their ethical imagination and test their worldview in public (Marsh 2009, 268-69).

Even though the local members do not create a long and complete rewriting of the series, their activities suggest the tendency of the interests shared with that of western media practitioners for all three fashions of textual fantasy. The most active conversations

among local members relate to narrative restructuring and re-characterisation such as genre shifting, plot crossovers and plot and character dislocation.

Among the varied interactions in Pantip.com rooms, eroticisation, emotional intensification and moral realignment seem to be least engaged with in the public conversation. The limited circulation of such ideas underlines that even in imaginary situations and with possible identity disguises, the audience tests and makes collective meaning of the existing value system and ethical framework (Marsh 2009, 269).

IV. Viewing for education

The comment data of YouTube and Pantip.com media users note that being able to learn new knowledge about historical events, culture, socio-political practices, significant figures, historical sites, poetry and cooking recipes from the series enriches the audience's viewing experience. The audience's interest also extends to self-directed research and online questions and answers about those subjects. Many of the users enjoy information provided by professionally made transmedia and cross media productions that expand historical knowledge, such as news reports, talk shows on television/radio/social media, and seminars.⁷⁴

Audiences who have good production-making skills may also advance their products further by creating clips summarising relevant knowledge about the topic (Figs. 3.6 and 3.7). Their contents generally obtain significant viewing rates and interactions. The idea of education is not limited to only secular knowledge but also includes alternative sources of sentiment, ethical guidance and norms too (Horsfield 1997).

Exploring a range of professionally made and audience-made products (Fig. 3.8) helps to broaden the media user's knowledge as the media is the central source of values, symbols and ideas (Hoover 2011). Such interchangeability of knowledge sources

⁷⁴ Burapha Channel 2018; Orawan Marketeer 2018; Theerapat 2018; Ayutthaya Studies Institute 2018; 'ประวัติศาสตร์สู่ละคร "บุพเพสันนิวาส": งามตรงๆกับจอมขวัญ | 23 มี.ค.61' 2018; 'Lightning Talk กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง ตอนจุดประกายคนรุ่นใหม่ให้รู้จักภาควิชาประวัติศาสตร์020461' 2018; 'INSIGHT กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง | ตอน อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์พระนครศรีอยุธยา | 15-03-61 | Ch3Thailand' 2018; 'Lightning Talk กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง ตอนจุดประกายคนรุ่นใหม่ให้รู้จักภาควิชาประวัติศาสตร์020461' 2018; 'Lightning Talk | ตอน "จากปรากฏการณ์บุพเพสันนิวาส ต่อยอดสู่อุตสาหกรรม" | 19-04-61 | Ch3Thailand' 2018; 'Lightning Talk กับ สายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง ตอนบุพเพสันนิวาส จุดกระแสการแต่งกายชุดไทยต่อยอดอย่างไร190361' 2018; 'Lightning Talk | ตอน เสวนาเรื่องบุพเพสันนิวาส สู่อุตสาหกรรมสร้างสรรค์ | 18-04-61 | Ch3Thailand' 2018; 'INSIGHT กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง | ตอน ต่อยอดประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรมไทย | 22-03-61 |' 2018; 'INSIGHT กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง | ตอน อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์พระนครศรีอยุธยา | 15-03-61 | Ch3Thailand' 2018.

confirms the education and mediation model of television drama and the media network (Marsh 2009, 258, 260). Also, the audience's educating role emphasises the significance of convergence culture in that the audience can construct their own meaning through cultural and information exchange in the participatory domain. Sharing information and interacting with others within the convergence culture is collective intelligence that can alter the source of media power (Jenkins 2006).



Fig. 3.6: An example of *Love Destiny's* audience-produced YouTube clip sharing knowledge about the historical literature mentioned in the series (Point of View 2018a) (Accessed on 6/7/2020)



Fig. 3.7: An example of *Love Destiny's* audience-produced YouTube clip sharing knowledge about the classes in the Ayutthaya period (Point of View 2018b) (Accessed on 6/7/2020)

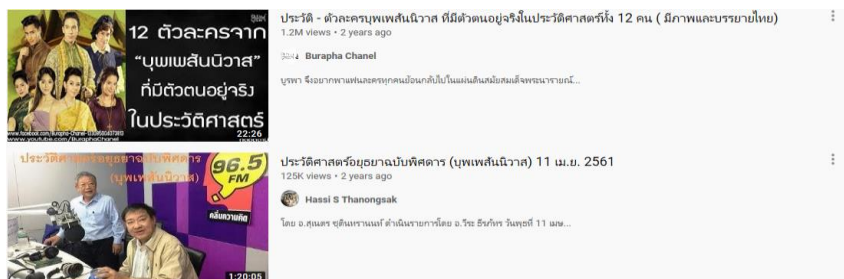


Fig. 3.8: Examples of Ayutthaya history discussions related to *Love Destiny* shared on YouTube with the keyword search ‘บุพเพสันนิวาส ประวัติศาสตร์’ (Meaning Buppe Sannivas, history) (Accessed on 6/7/2020)

Despite the active online learning activities, the education-based activities are more fruitful and official in offline communities. During the series' peak popularity, there were education-based cross media produced by governmental and educational organisations, such as professional and academic seminars that aimed to decode the accomplishment factors of the production,⁷⁵ popularity,⁷⁶ authorship⁷⁷ and scriptwriting.⁷⁸ Moreover, after the series' first run, a considerable section of young audience members applied to do an official undergraduate education in history.⁷⁹ The mass media organisations did not only congratulate the extraordinary effects of the series, but also showed a concern about approaches to strengthen the sustainable development of the Thai television drama industry.⁸⁰ All the engagement of professionals and the audience discussed above indicates the educational power of the successful historical television drama.

Recognising the story's format helps the viewer anticipate the story's development. Morley (1992) remarks that 'knowledge of genres is being aware of sets of rules for the production of meaning' (Morley 1992, 127) by viewers. To understand how the audience interacts with the text and the community, Wilson (2009) suggests contemplating their cultural conditions and their consensus with (or criticism of) the text's conclusions (Wilson 2009, 39). As discussed in the chapter's contextualisation section, historical drama has

⁷⁵ ‘คนเบื้องหลังละครอิงประวัติศาสตร์ “บุพเพสันนิวาส” 2018; ‘เบื้องหลังความสำเร็จ ฟินทั่วประเทศ กับละคร “บุพเพสันนิวาส” | EP.178 | 11 เม.ย. 61 | โทษกระแส’ 2018; ‘เที่ยงวันทันเหตุการณ์ | 5 องค์ประกอบเกิดปรากฏการณ์ “บุพเพสันนิวาส” | 22-03-61 | Ch3Thailand’ 2018; Chuastapanasiri 2018.

⁷⁶ Chuastapanasiri 2018; ‘แม่หญิงการะเกดมาแรง มาดูกันว่า “บุพเพสันนิวาส” สร้างกระแสอะไรไปบ้าง?’ 2018; ‘เบื้องหลังความสำเร็จ ฟินทั่วประเทศ กับละคร “บุพเพสันนิวาส” | EP.178 | 11 เม.ย. 61 | โทษกระแส’ 2018.

⁷⁷ ‘เปิดทุกแง่มุมของอ้อเจ้า! รอมแพง ผู้เขียนนวนิยาย บุพเพสันนิวาส - The Standard Daily วันที่ 20 มี.ค.61 2018; ‘LINEกนกกว่าจะเป็นบุพเพสันนิวาส’ 2018; ‘ตอบโจทย์: “อ้อเจ้า” รอมแพง...? “บุพเพสันนิวาส” พี่เวอร์ (6 เม.ย. 61)’ 2018; ‘ช่วงคนเป็นข่าว รอมแพง ผู้เขียนบุพเพสันนิวาส ออกอากาศวันที่ 31 มีนาคม 2561’ 2018; ‘Lightning Talk | ตอน รู้จัก “รอมแพง” ผู้เป็นที่รักในโลกแห่งนวนิยายที่งดงาม | 26-03-61 | Ch3Thailand’ 2018.

⁷⁸ ‘เขียนบทละครโทรทัศน์อย่างไรให้ปัง กับ ศัลยา สุขะนิวัตต์ - The Standard Daily วันที่ 23 มี.ค.61 2018; Brandbuffet.in.th 2018; Thongthep 2018.

⁷⁹ ‘ช่วงคนเป็นข่าว รอมแพง ผู้เขียน บุพเพสันนิวาส ออกอากาศวันที่ 31 มีนาคม 2561’ 2018.

⁸⁰ ‘Lightning Talk | ตอน การเรียนรู้และต่อยอด จากกระแสละครบุพเพสันนิวาส | 23-03-61 | Ch3Thailand’ 2018; ‘Lightning Talk กับ สายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง ตอนบุพเพสันนิวาส จุดกระแสการแต่งกายชุดไทยต่อยอดอย่างไร190361’ 2018; ‘คนเบื้องหลังละครอิงประวัติศาสตร์ “บุพเพสันนิวาส” 2018; ‘กระแส “ละครบุพเพสันนิวาส” 2018; ‘เรียนรู้ประวัติศาสตร์จากละครดัง “บุพเพสันนิวาส” (1/2) | 24 มี.ค. 61 | คุณนอกรอบ’ 2018; ‘อ้อเจ้าพี่เวอร์! ยอดนักท่องเที่ยวยุทธยาทะลัก (2/2) | 24 มี.ค. 61 | คุณนอกรอบ’ 2018; ‘Lightning Talk กับ สายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง ตอนบุพเพสันนิวาส จุดกระแสการแต่งกายชุดไทยต่อยอดอย่างไร190361’ 2018; ‘INSIGHT กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง | ตอน ต่อยอดประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรมไทย | 22-03-61 |’ 2018; ‘INSIGHT กับสายสวรรค์ ขยันยิ่ง | ตอน อุทยานประวัติศาสตร์พระนครศรีอยุธยา | 15-03-61 | Ch3Thailand’ 2018; ‘ประวัติศาสตร์สู่ละคร “บุพเพสันนิวาส”: ถามตรงๆกับจอมขวัญ | 23 มี.ค.61’ 2018; Theerapat 2018; Orawan Marketeer 2018.

regularly circulated in the country. Usually, those texts reinforce the ideologies of nationalism and monarchy. The straight historical drama and the time-travelling historical drama are the staples of the Thai television industry (Lewis 2003). The local parties mediate Thai historical drama with fantasy and national nostalgia (Jewachinda Meyer 2014).

On the other hand, such repeated circulation does not only propagate the national institutions (such as the monarchy and the military) but also constructs national identities (Lewis 2003). Morley describes the practice that 'presenters become the point of identification within the message and consequently transmit the preferred reading to the audience' (Morley 1992, 10-11). In the case study, the local audience's broader cultural awareness of watching a historical romantic comedy series allows them to anticipate the range of possible discourse and construct program meaning. Even though some media users may resist the proposition, they tend to navigate their argument elsewhere to avoid confrontation with others who disagree with them.

Recent discourses on cultural citizenship have emphasised the importance of collective connection through media, including alternative forms, even though they exhibit no effective link to public issues (Couldry 2006, in Bilandzic et al. 2012: 253). *Drama fandom* is a dynamic intercultural communication process in which individuals interpolate as citizens of the world. It is an open space where multiple origins of members and interbreeding are idealised. It is a virtual community based on individuals' self-donation, in which primo uploaders and fansubbers play a pivotal role (Bilandzic et al. 2012: 253).

The redundancy concept does not apply to only the producer-made text in popular industry. Some examples of the audience's redundant comments are saying hello; *sadhu* (a Buddhist word, meaning similar to amen in Christianity); stating their appreciation to the Buddha; sharing their emotional engagement to the series (e.g., how heavily they cry with characters, how much they like the series); noting their viewing date and time; calling for others who agree with them or having the same media practice as theirs, to name a few.

The Thai YouTube users' comment redundancy involves ego-drive expression – a need to have their presence noticed, acknowledged and accepted (Fiske 2010a, 12). For local media users, understanding those repeated styles of comments may not make a

particular effort because the members are in the same cultural context and structure to decode the meaning. In contrast, those viewers whose background differs from Thai media users (and some neighbouring viewers familiar with the expression of Thai social media users enough) may struggle to make sense of such abundant says. Therefore, the local or international viewers who encounter cultural gaps to understand the conversation practised by a particular section of the audience may find limitations in further engagement.

Among a few groups of international fans of the series, a qualitative study of Sorarat Jirabovornwisut in 2019 finds three aesthetic aspects of the series that engage the Chinese viewer: the aesthetic of the exotic past, the aesthetic of memorable acting, and the self-reflection of the viewer's identity (Jirabovornwisut 2019). The series is the medium that positively connects people from different cultures. Reading the series offers those Chinese fans to learn Thai culture and the Thai language. Besides, the series encourages visiting historical sites featured in the series (Jirabovornwisut 2019).

On another hand, some Vietnamese fans show their favour to the leading actor's nice looking. Some of them note that:

Many times, I smile to watch this movie and get jealous of Karaked. (X.P., 2022)

Wow. The more I watch, the more addicted I have become. Pope (the leading actor) is so beautiful. Love you, Pope. I can watch this so many times with no bores. (N.N. 2020).

Meanwhile, those international audiences who cannot understand Thai request for English subtitles. International consumption does not limit to only the original television series but also the transmedia produced by professional producers and media users. Following the series' complex plot and its popularity in the original country, more recently, the text has sold its copyright to adapt live-action films and television dramas in China, South Korea, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Russia have also shown enthusiasm to do so (Jirabovornwisut 2019, 54).

More recently, the text has been presented in manga form and distributed on YouTube Webtoon Thailand, which offers Korean manga for Thai readers (“บุพเพสันนิวาส” บังจุดไม่อยู่ โผล่เว็บตูนชื่อดังจากเกาหลี 1 เมษายน 2022). The practice is part of the current cultural trade that seeks new content and the expansion of audience groups. The product aims to invite

the viewer of the producing country and that of the original text to increase the consumption volume and the audience sections. Some examples of the Thai plot that is purchased and remade by international film-making companies include *Shutter* (Pisanthanakun and Wongpoom, 2004), *Bangkok Dangerous* (Pang Brothers, 1999), and *Bad Genius* (Poonpiriya, 2017).

Such localisation has little to do with the religious message but commercialises the plot that structures local faith. When adapted to a receiving country, the representation usually accords to the local media industry requirements, such as local ideologies and values. Although Buddhism may play no role in the discourse of the franchised production at all, its non-conflicting faculties, however, allows the international producers to explore adaptation possibilities. Due to the language-oriented barrier of Thai texts, international remaking is part of the global response to the entertainment demand of international audiences.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, discussing Buddhism's role in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas, the findings reveal the complex political role of Buddhism embedded in historical drama, including the hybrid historical-romance television series *Love Destiny*. Form-wise, the mediation between Buddhism, nationalism and monarchy have been prevalent in mass fiction forms including film and prime-time television drama since 1936 (Louiyapong 2013; Bhamornsatitaya 1985; Chaloeontiarana 2015). Generally, Buddhism's manipulated role in nationalist fiction is to support the value of the monarchy and nationalism (Louiyapong 2013). For the monarchy, Buddhism is evident through the ethical code and conduct of the kings (Louiyapong 2013; Ayutthaya Studies Institute 2018). For nationalism, Buddhism is the state religion that soldiers and citizens are required to protect. Buddhist monks also perform a central source of local people's wisdom and mental stability in warfare (Louiyapong 2013). The representation of Buddhism usually features well-known kings with loyal soldiers, external enemies and intra-disorders (Louiyapong 2013). However, contemporary audiences do not hold the same level of faith in the virtuous kingship as older audiences, as they have access to more evidence to which propaganda have limited effects.

Love Destiny is a modern production that generally maintains the conservative ideology of a moral monarchy but uses different genres to represent idea of the moral monarchy – from straight historical drama to the inclusion of romantic comedy, based on compatible historical documents. Also, the series constructs the audience's reception by giving information from various viewpoints in the contextualism style of explanation. Such a practice establishes a new understanding about the historical figures featured in the story in a less constrained manner compared to that of previous nationalist productions. The humanisation of those historical characters by showing their sorrow, repentance, wisdom, bitter resentment and deep oppressiveness significantly benefits the narrative's restructuring the audience's comprehension about rulership in the historical Ayutthaya period. However, as this chapter has shown, the role of Buddhism in the series is more complex than other existing productions following a) the historical events that involved the politicisation of religions and b) the narrative's reluctant articulation about the righteousness of historical Kings and politicians depicted in the period where violence was common and moral practices were very different to today. As a result, compared to the didactic series *Buddha* and the semi-explicit Buddhist series *Cage of Karma*, in which Buddhist discourse is foregrounded, the implicit Buddhism-related political drama *Love Destiny* struggles to openly pronounce the meaning of Buddhism for state governance.

Subsequently, the producer-made mediation of Buddhism for state administration in the hybrid historical drama is aligned with conservative ideology. The narrative's mode of argument is contextualisation, focusing on the humanisation of the featured historical characters from various perspectives. The series' fundamental contextualisation strategies are a) the constant flow of sequence arrangement with those multiple subthemes in each episode; and b) direct and indirect characterisation through the actions and debates of various groups of characters to structure the context of those historical characters' decisions from multiple perspectives. Additionally, constructed dialogue that is delivered in various styles of language (ranging from sophisticated, metaphorical, ironical and poetic) reinforces the new perception of the virtue of historical leaders. The series' contextualism of argument results in two characteristics of the implicit mediation of Buddhism: doctrinal minimisation and deviation of righteousness. The

inarticulate mediation of Buddhism in relation to good governance in the series subsidises the meaning of the dharma for state government.

In terms of the second thesis question of the chapter, the study finds several Buddhist and entertainment values and experiences that Thai and foreign online audiences seek from Thai television drama in the digital era. Following the basic casual relations between the media and the audience, the audience markedly enjoys 1) the reinforcement of existing values, 2) mediation access to their affect, memory, community and cultural identity, 3) the practicability of consumer power, and 4) learning new information about their history and culture.

Firstly, the series' ideologies reinforce the local audience's existing conservative values (Marsh 2009, 262), which are family, romance, politics, religion and culture. The Buddhist values in the content display in two aspects – one for householders and the other one for state administration. Generally, the audience can justify the meaning of the karma notion and the virtue of a ruler. However, due to the incredible karmic logic in the fictional plot and the long past history of the political plot, the audience lacks personal relatedness to the embedded ideologies. The audience's reception is about good governance and the state ideologies, which are nationalism, religion and monarchy, generate no significant social impact due to the unarticulated meaning of dharma for state administration.

However, the audience uses the larger existing Buddhist values that operate in the country as an ethical framework of thought through which they evaluate the role of the socio-political institutions and individuals' actions – both in the fictional series and in reference to the present reality. Also, the Buddhist values depicted in the family relationship, romance and culture themes reconfirm the local audience's idealism of marriage and caring family relationships. The audience recalls the codes of behaviour and ideal state of living (Kracauer 1947 in Tan 2011, 21) via viewing the series. The role that the audience can take with such implicit Buddhism-related television series is membership of the Buddhist culture. While the religious practices performed in the series give the look and the sense of Buddhism, the morality of the protagonist is a universal spirituality that anyone, including international audiences, can relate to with limited effort.

Secondly, the values of mediation to individual's sensations and their community are a fundamental factor of why the audience favours the series. The findings show that the audience viewed fiction for not only relaxation and a mood change, but also due to interest in learning new information, communal relationships, and aesthetics (Moller and Karppinen 1983 in Tan 2011, 17). For the local audience, viewing the series and engaging with related cultural consumption (such as food, tourism, product purchases and dressing in classical outfits, for instance) is stimulating consumption that generates pleasure and life enhancement (Marsh 2009, 261). Additionally, engaging with the "talk-of-the-town" production provides access to communal inclusion. Online and offline participation is a tool through which audiences use to confirm their cultural identity and belonging to a broader television drama community where the same worldview is exchanged (Hills 2002, 44; Staiger 2005; Marsh 2009; Feilitzen and Carlsson 1998).

Thirdly, the data reveals that the local audience has a great experience using their consumer power to further their reading in online and offline activities, depending on preference. In particular, social media and its advanced functionality markedly provides endless opportunities for media users to play multiple roles, ranging from ordinary audiences to supporters, consumers and online streaming distributors (Cholatan 2018; InfoQuest 2019; Wongkittikraiwal 2018). Also, the romantic-comedy story offers flexibility through which the audience can explore their versions of textual alteration in social media platforms with their peers.

Lastly, the local audience significantly enjoys the educational values inspired by the rich detail of historical events, culture, socio-political practices, significant figures, historical sites, poetry and cooking recipes. The collective intelligence is vigorously performed and exchanged across multiple units in the country, ranging from official organisations to commercial sectors, media units and the audience. Being able to learn new and relevant information about *their* history and culture with numerous references adds more value to viewing a television drama. Additionally, committed viewers or fans may use the narratives in their personal development and the choices of action they take which tie with their moral code and norms of conduct (Marsh 2009, 265; Adirekhotikul and Kongton 2002).

The audience's meaning-making of the dominant values embedded in the series, the self-made contents, the mediation to the community members, the 'what if' game play and the self-education discussed above correspond to Jörg Herrmann's observation of the religious dimensions of film: 1) the allocation of role models, 2) participation with dominant themes to understand one's self and the world, 3) dealing with life issues, 4) seeking authenticity, 5) fostered aesthetic experience, 6) discovery of transcendence, and 7) ethical reflection (Herrmann 2007, 279-88 in Marsh 2009, 269). Moreover, viewing the series, learning and creating a fictional self-storytelling inspired by the archetypal fiction may advance the audience's existing ideologies and values further as they take the idea into their own hands and act it out.

The findings of the chapter derived from both textual and audience analysis confirm the strong role of Buddhism in the form and content of Thai television drama. Despite the implicit representation of Buddhism in the series, the audience alternatively applied an existing Buddhist code to justify individuals' behaviours, cultural practices and the operation of social institutions. The case study has also addressed the local audience's collective desire to make more meaning of national television dramas implanted with state ideologies and convergence media through the enhancement of moral codes, local identity, communal inclusion, equal participation power and self-development.

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CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the mediation of Buddhism in contemporary Thai television drama, a process through which Thai and mainland Southeast Asian media users engage actively via multi-screen media practice. This project asked three main questions: 1) What is Buddhism's role in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas? 2) How does the audience make sense of Buddhism through media convergence practice? And, 3) How does Buddhism promote social, cultural, and spiritual connections between mainland Southeast Asian peoples? It looked at the process of the television drama mediation of religion on three levels. The first level, ideological mediation, relates to how Thai people negotiate Buddhist beliefs with other socio-political ideological systems within the Thai context. The second level is how the television drama producers represent the negotiated discourse resulting from the ideological negotiation through primetime television drama narratives. The third level refers to how audiences respond to the mediated television dramas on social media and interact with other virtual members. This research investigated three case studies: the localised biography drama *Buddha* (2013), the melodramatised family drama *Cage of Karma* (2019), and the hybrid historical drama *Love Destiny* (2018). These television dramas embody explicit, semi-explicit, and implicit Buddhism mediation, respectively. The case studies cover the period from 2014 to 2020, when the Thai television industry officially switched from analogue to digital system.

Each chapter begins by providing the relevant socio-cultural and production-based context of each case study. The study then explored samples of television drama productions and films originally released in Thailand from 1936 – 2020 from various sources, including websites, online streaming services, books and YouTube. The study paid attention to those productions' genre; ideology; years of original release; remakes and adaptations. The contextualisation benefited the comprehension of the ideology and representation of each case study. Then, the thesis applied the mixed methods of textual analysis and online audience analysis.

The textual analysis component comprehends the religious symbolisation that the producer of each case study implemented to connect with the contemporary audience. Overall, the study paid attention to how the case studies used specific genre, plot, characterisation and dialogue to construct the religious meaning. However, each case

study also had its particular production context and storytelling approach that essentially effected its form and meaning construction. Therefore, the study included those textual alterations of the case studies in the textual analysis too.

For the biographical drama titled *Buddha* imported from India and officially dubbed in the Thai language, the thesis exercised textual analysis in two parts. In the first part, the study focused on the series' fundamental narrative structure concerning the Buddha's communication strategies and its embedment of Buddhist doctrine. In the second part, the thesis explored the localisation and transmedia conducted in Thailand which vitally affected the local audience's reception. Meanwhile, the textual analysis of the melodramatised family drama television series titled *Cage of Karma* scrutinised its melodramatisation and other textual alteration techniques which the producer exercised in the television adaptation process to enhance the story's religious message further from its novel. The hybrid historical television series *Love Destiny*, on the other hand, demanded a granular textual analysis to reveal its implicit representation of Buddhism in a minimised-but-prevalent style of mediation.

For the online audience analysis, the project looked at the audience-made mediation from YouTube. The study counted participants' comments on 1) producer-made highlighted cuts of the case studies and 2) audience-made YouTube clips inspired by the series. The following section will offer some concluding thoughts on the thesis.

Concluding remarks

In the current multi-screen media landscape primetime television drama producers work hard to achieve popularity, cultural value and commercial profits. Embedding Buddhist teachings, or at least the notion of the karmic law, for the purpose of shaping social order is common in the Thai television drama industry. This discourse can be understood as what John Fiske (2010) calls *redundancy*. Redundant discourse is a predictable or conventional message, easy for the reader to decode and understand, even amid semantic noises (Fiske 2010a, 9). Texts that contain new information (or a new interpretation of the convention), which Fiske refers to as *entropy*, may cause controversy with the mass audience who have existing expectations. Although it may be less challenging to the audience, textual redundancy serves the marketing-driven

television drama industry's communication purpose. Market-driven fictions need to ensure that the audience of all ages and groups can make sufficient meaning out of the text.

To a certain extent, Buddhist teachings as a discourse of redundancy helps minimise reception error and semantic noise to local and international audiences familiar with Southeast Asian culture. In general, however, the meanings and influence of Buddhist teaching in Thai television drama remains relatively unknown for international viewers, apart from those from neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and certain parts of Myanmar that have regular access to Thai television drama long before the commencement of the Internet-based media.

This study found that most international audiences of the case studies are from Asia. Straubhaar and Duarte (2005) describe the phenomenon as the influence of cultural proximity. Glynn (2014) asserts that 'people have become more and more aware of living within larger imagined communities than their nation-states' (Glynn 2014, 50). Despite numerous choices, 'people still primarily want to watch their own culture or similar ones on television' (Straubhaar and Duarte 2005: 221-2 in Glynn 2014, 49). Thus, in Asia, the inter-Asian circulation of Asian-produced dramas is more active than Western ones because it satisfies Asian tastes (Glynn 2014, 49). The regionalisation of Asian cultural values has influenced the inter-Asian television exchange (Glynn 2014, 50-51). For instance, the shared cultural values such as the importance of family obligation featured in Islamic and Korean television dramas contributed to their popularity in the global market (Glynn 2014, 51).

Straubhaar and Duarte (2005) note that, on top of the production quality, the Korean dramas generate shared languages, shared historical experiences, geographical proximity and cultural proximity to audiences from other Asian countries (Straubhaar and Duarte 2005 in Glynn 2014, 51). Korean dramas effectively mediate certain ideologies of which Asian peoples can make sense. Those ideologies and values include Confucian values, families, modest sexuality, respect for the elderly, preference for sons, the conflicting relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Mark James Russell 2008, 117, Hyun Mee Kim 2005, 187 in Glynn 2014, 51-54). Thai television dramas also share such practices and values. A study by Jirattikorn (2015) concludes that a section

of neighbouring audiences from Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar prefer Thai television dramas. The Thai cultural expression and traditions exhibited in the Thai television dramas satisfy their cultural preference (Jirattikorn 2015). Yet Glynn crucially notes that those conventional ideologies such as Confucian virtues, nationalism, filial piety, morality, hierarchy, and righteousness that were fundamental in previously successful television dramas may not necessarily ensure the same achievement in the contemporary period. The current readers may challenge the same formula of the form and content 'because they are perceived as outdated, old-fashioned and even politically incorrect for supporting sexism, feudalism and authoritarianism' (Glynn 2014, 226). This suggests that current television drama producers need to reconsider the ideological redundancy and search for newer ways to look at life. In contrast, Zang and Harwood argue that specific values, especially Confucianism and interpersonal values, play the core role in Chinese-ness (Zang and Harwood 2002, 251 in Glynn 2014, 226). Hence, promote a view that those essential Confucian values remain as the basis of cultural identity.

This debate underlines the necessity to balance contemporary values and principal ideologies in the modern television drama in relation to national identity and current taste formations, and also the new online reception context. The findings from the audience analysis undertaken in this thesis suggest that no matter how much effort producers of Thai local television series expend to make Buddhist religious principles or local faith 'universal', the required investment of international audiences to overcome cultural proximity remains too high for regular consumption. Despite a willingness to explore a television series from another country, cultural restraints can still be an obstacle.

According to Fiske's theory, repeated exhibition of a text in varied approaches and some special preparations are practical means to lessen discourse opposition (Fiske 2010a, 10-12). Nonetheless, the changeability of the audience's reception and viewing preference occurs slowly, and this thesis found that while many choices are available in the market, fans of Thai TV dramas are like many groups a community where the same passion, language, media practices, and the will to participate are present. They are however culturally diverse. Despite sharing geographical connections, the Thais, Burmese, Laos, Khmers, Cambodians and Vietnamese are culturally diverse. Those peoples are ethnically variegated, use different languages, follow different ideologies and

conventions, and practise varied ways of thinking and acting (Cosslett and Cosslett 2017, 5). Although Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, the population follows different religious branches in adjustment to existing local faiths (Assavavirulhakarn 1990). Compared to other countries, Thais and Laos tend to share a similar mode of belief, religion-related expression and cultural values, whereas the participants from other countries show limited ideological engagement. The different religious discourse mediation styles result in varied groups of attentive media users. The media users' varied engagement and activities may concern the mediation of their understanding and role-plays: ordinary viewers, distributors and producers. Ordinary viewers refer to causal and regular consumption.

Jenkins (1992, 2006) observed that fans are active receivers who use technologies to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment to create and redefine language, practices, identities and values. He sums up the core of new television practices in three significant media practices: re-circulation, participation and virtual communities. Re-circulation symbolises the transmission of (fan) materials and texts to a larger audience. The participative dimension is where fans engage actively and widely in creating and circulating cultural materials. The cultural logic of fans draws a blurred border between consumption versus production and between reading versus writing. Finally, virtual communities are places of Internet-mediated social relations. Many viewers take pleasure in the fact that they are part of a unique and specialised social audience.

Today, virtual communities are spreading, drilling and colonising websites. They allow fans to re-circulate their tastes from one community to another. Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, where producers and fans meet and interact, amplify this phenomenon and spread the social links formed in these communities (Jenkins 2006). Pearson (2010) observes that the digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom, both empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbolic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production (Pearson 2010: 84, in Bilandzic et al. 2012: 245)

For those engaging fans, their explicit conversation and activities such as showing their like or dislike, downloading, saving to watch later, and sharing, for instance, can

signal their cultural values and identity. Observing other online members' comments also falls into this audience's mode of action. However, when the media users produce their content, their mode of action shifts to the mode characteristic of producing (Ridell 2012 in Bilandzic et al. 2012). The users' comments in the case studies in this thesis show that members' comments perform as producing mode. However, the producing mode of action and the uploading of already-made materials must be explored separately. Industry players may also advertise and market their content, hoping that their audience will circulate this material across communities. On the other hand, those media users who consume given texts and share them further with another community operate in the mediator mode (Bilandzic et al. 2012, 21).

What YouTube users aim for in online comments is to express their views and gain desired responses or feedback from other members. As Fiske defines it, 'feedback is the transmission of the receiver's reaction back to the sender' (Fiske 2010a, 19). YouTube's two-way communication channel and facilities offer users open access to the text and open feedback. Importantly, giving and receiving feedback helps the participants feel involved in the communication and belong to the community. However, feedback may involve a cybernetic bias which is a kind of control as it enables the sender to adjust his/her performance to the audience's responses (Fiske 2010a, 20). Individual variations of comments have become self-directed filtered within the limits of the religion-oriented conventions. This thesis found Laotian and Cambodian media users are the only non-Thai participants posting in the rooms that host the *Buddha* series after several reruns. The findings confirm that cultural proximity remains key to enabling international audiences' involvement even as fans.

Another aspect of the YouTube participants' viewing and engagement is the notion of 'semantic noise'. According to John Fiske's explanation, semantic noise refers to any meaning distortion during the communication process which is not operated by the source but has an impact on the message received at its destination (Fiske 2010a, 7). When viewing a YouTube clip, online media users are likely to be distracted by a range of other information, e.g., other participants' comments, suggested YouTube videos and disrupting advertisement (in the case that the media user does not purchase the YouTube

Premium option that offers no ads.) There is a high chance that such disruption weakens the user's attention to reading the embedded ideology discourse.

According to Jenkins' (2006) three major concepts to look at the new relationship among all key elements of the communication system, media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence have played an essential role in the mediation of socio-cultural values of media players. The term convergence in his sense counts on merging all elements in the communication process – if to look at it through the classic Berlo's S-M-C-R communication model. Multi-content flows across multi-platforms or multi-function appliances available according to the internet infrastructure. The radical strategies and changes of producer-consumer convergence role and consequences of engaging communication participation have altered the new communication culture, audience's perception and their information meaning-making process (Jenkins 2006).

The audience's demand for participation and their active information collection and collaboration within their communities have generated 'cyberethnography' and transmedia storytelling to mediate their meaning-making of the given texts and the virtual community experience. Such media practice and the new multiscreen consumption culture has promoted what Jenkins termed collective intelligence. The collective learning remakes personal selection and interpretation to collect and collage series of scattered information. As this thesis confirms, the collective meaning-making within popular culture is changing the operation of religion, social values, family, education, and politics. The process of convergence consumption and thinking is altering the shape of Thai popular culture and media players' relationship. The interactive circulation of local values has opened up new possibilities in the relationships between media audiences, producers and content. What matters for all convergent participants is to mindfully merge and utilise conventional ideologies which partly identify the Thai-ness to the new media environment under the responsibility of ethical codes and social contracts to determine how participants relate to one another with political and social fairness.

The following section will summarise the key findings following the three levels of mediation – ideology, producer-made mediation and audience-made mediation. These findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions.

Key findings

1. Ideological mediation of Buddhism in Thai television drama

The findings of the production context address that it is common practice for the producer and the audience to mediate Buddhism and other faiths with other socio-political ideologies, especially romance, family, social inequality and political disorders through television dramas. This thesis found three essential purposes of mediation of Buddhist belief in Thai television drama. The first goal is to directly *propagate* the Buddha's teachings for the audience to follow. The second is to *demonstrate* a person's true-life experience for the audience to learn from and accordingly better their household lives with essential ethical practice. Ideologically, the role of explicit and semi-explicit Buddhism-based television dramas is to debate characters' practical problem-solving. Genre, plot, characters and dialogue are tools used to argue social and religious conflicts from different viewpoints to challenge the audience's understanding and application of the credo concerning the discussed problems. The third objective is to *allegorise* constructed Buddhist beliefs and socio-political hegemony to reproduce the existing political or social order.

Primarily, Thai television dramas prioritise romance, family relationships, and morality with other ideologies, such as social class, governing, folk beliefs and culture encompassed within these three dominant themes. Ideas of self-development and social order are central tenets of Buddhist practices. When the producer regularly incorporates these functions into television dramas, they result in the ritual circulation of faith-based television dramas in Thailand.

The following section will summarise the key findings of the producer-made mediation.

2. The television drama producer-generated mediation of Buddhism

The section's content answers the first research question.

RQ1: What role does Buddhism play in the form and content of contemporary Thai television dramas?

The first production-based element to consider is the form of the presentation. This research shows that long-form television series and daytime mini-series are the most common forms to present ethical messages to the audience. However, the size of each group of Buddhism mediation and the years of distribution explained the trend of the secularisation of Buddhist teachings in popular television dramas. Most newly-made explicit and semi-explicit Buddhism-mediated television drama made locally struggled following the contents' less marketable attributes. The data of the production-based context of each case study underlined the importance of the distinction of the production format, genre, and plot in relation to the enthusiasm of the audience and their social investment to engage with the production further in their social network.

The findings from the textual analysis uncovered several narrative strategies that producers apply to generate *relatedness* to the audience. The relatedness refers to the *ideological connection, textual comprehensibility and sensational engagement*.

The repetition of the taken-for-granted theme and clichéd plots and characterisations restrict the productions' spiritual impact. Hence, television drama producers mediate the discourse with a mixture of new storytelling techniques such as genre, plot, characterisation and dialogue that connect to the target audience's existing experience, socio-historical background and practice.

Generally, Thai Buddhism-related television dramas develop plots from 1) fictionalisation, 2) semi-factual adaptation, and 3) factuality. Furthermore, this research found that the producers simplified Buddhist teachings and applied appropriate genres, credible characterisations, catchy dialogue and other understandable audio-visual symbols to make the narrative comprehensible and engaging. The section below will highlight more of the key findings from the case studies' textual analysis.

Didactic Buddhist television drama production

Key findings: Extensive doctrine embedment; credo simplification and localisation

The first case study was the television series *Buddha* (Thai: พระพุทธเจ้ามหาศาสดาโลก), released on Thai television in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2020, dubbed in Thai language from the Indian

series of the same name. It is considered an explicitly mediated series because it embeds extensive and direct Buddhist teachings throughout the series. The objective of the series is to proliferate Buddhism and encourage the audience to practice the Eightfold Path (the gist of the Buddhist practice) to pursue secular success and spiritual freedom.

The original Indian version of *Buddha* was a long-form television series. The producers constructed each episode like a mini-film to portray the life of the Buddha and his numerous teachings ('Buddha Is a Global Subject: B.K. Modi' 2013). Doctrinal simplification and localisation were the two principal strategies that the Indian producer, B.K. Modi, and the Thai distributor utilised to create discourse comprehensibility and media accessibility. Despite some mistranslations and cultural discrimination in the localisation process, the local translation, dubbing, and editing made the religious message accessible to the Thai and neighbouring viewers. Both the original Hindi and Thai-dubbed versions use straightforward language to deliver the unusually lengthy credos. The extensive teachings shown in the series offer a range of opportunities to the viewer to benefit from any religious message that relates to them. Moreover, the Thai distributor and other professional producers created transmedia and cross-media to support the local audience's understanding of the series and its embedded creed as part of their professional work and religious practice. Examples of the supporting texts include interviews with the distributor, well-known monks, authors of Buddhism-oriented books and the leading actor; quiz game shows; new documentaries produced by other professional documentary makers and aired in other television channels; meditation activities; and preaching; to name a few.

Semi-explicit Buddhist television drama production

Key findings: semi-factuality; co-plotting; melodramatisation

The second case study is a semi-factual family drama titled *Cage of Karma* (2019), adapted from the novel of the same name. It is regarded as a semi-explicitly mediated series following its plot, characterisation, dialogue, and other audio-visual symbolisation, which primarily centre on a Buddhist belief of karma. The series' karma-driven plot iterates the audience to be mindful of their intention, speech and actions as corresponding consequences will follow. Nonetheless, the religious message is delivered through lay characters' actions and dialogue with limited involvement of official Buddhist characters.

The religious aim of the series is to invite the lay audience to balance their household life with basic precepts for secular accomplishment.

Cage of Karma is an example of a karma-oriented Thai television drama that benefited from fans sharing true stories. Social media participation enabled fans to collaborate with producers as unofficial co-storytellers. Additionally, the television drama producer exercised melodramatisation to highlight the conflicts between morality and social discrimination. The use of melodrama as a mode promoted the story's ethical code and tearfulness of the story. The melodramatisation involved a) altered and moralised characterisations; b) reduction of subplots, event details and non-central characters; c) the increase and intensification of characters' ethical functions; d) focus on the casts' theatrical performances and e) the extension of characters' self-change process. Other symbolisation included visual metaphors, songs, daily ethical quotes, monk chanting, and a well-known Buddhist quote about karma.

Implicit Buddhism-related television drama

Key findings: hybrid historical drama; time-travelling plot; contextualisation of individual characters' political performance; inarticulation of good governance; doctrinal minimisation; infiltrating representation of Buddhism and deviation of standard moral code

The third case study is a romantic-comedy historical drama fantasy titled *Love Destiny* (2018). The series is a popular Thai television drama that involves love destiny, family, karma, magic, extraordinary reincarnation, culture, nationalism and the monarchy. The series *Love Destiny* reproduces conservative ideologies of monarchy, aristocracy, parenthood, partnership and basic ethics. It is counted as an implicitly mediated series, for its Buddhist belief is fantasised and minimised throughout the series.

The producer's primary intention is not to significantly impact the local religious community but to supply what the local audience find entertaining, based on television rating statistics. One of the most frequent plots that interests the local audience is time-travelling from the present to the past. This plot offers entertainment when characters from two different eras have to learn about each other and compromise their cultural differences. Moreover, the history-related plot often ties fantasy with monarchy and

politics at a moment of historical crisis. The reference to Buddhist teachings for laypeople, parents, and state rulers is complex and partial following socio-political influence.

The series used genre hybridisation to weave the main plot and subplots together due to the complex plot and multiple ideologies. Crucially, contextualisation of historical characters' political acts through multiple strategies, especially sequence arrangement, direct and indirect characterisation, varied styles of speech (for example, realistic, metaphor, irony) expressed from different characters' viewpoints helped to construct the meaning of righteous rulership in the historical Ayutthaya period. The open discourse about good governance in the series is minimised to prevent contradiction with the acts of the leading historical characters that involve violence, betrayal, hypocrisy and corruption. Subsequently, the strategies used by the producers to embed Buddhist beliefs were *doctrinal minimisation*, *fragmentation* and *infiltration*. The producers show the religious ideas and practices in small but increasing sections throughout the series.

Simultaneously, the humanisation of the historical leaders is included in the characterisation. Presenting those characters' conscience and feelings of ordinary people who can make mistakes such as sorrow, patheticism, worry, confusion, repentance, for instance, help to transfer the characters' perspective and to generate the audience's sensational inclination toward the characters. In addition, frequent breaks with other non-political themes (such as romantic comedy, family, culture, investigation, innovation, and education of history) help to remove the tension of political conflicts.

Generally, religion-related scenes are part of the taken-for-granted culture to enrich the characters' Thai-ness attributes and the Thai culture as much as necessary. More essentially, there is a discriminate justification of violent action for different character groups. For non-political characters, the series utilises karma to rationalise the causation of their actions and consequences. The mediation of Buddhist teachings about the dharma for supervision is depicted through actions and dialogue of relevant characters. For historical and political figures, on another hand, the series partially navigates political criticism without karmic reference. Instead, the series claims the political crisis and necessity to rebel and take control of the state. The notion of the virtue of a ruler is mentioned only briefly. Finally, the series features the primary character's religious legitimation and the protagonist's reasoning about the civic practice of proceeding with

violence. Importantly, undetailed violence legitimises the historical characters' aggressive political conducts. At the end of the series, the producer addresses their gratitude to all dedicated kings and related royal family members whose works benefit the country.

3. The audience reception and self-made mediation:

Key findings: Media access; community contact; ideological tangibility; practicability; role-plays (practitioners, co-storytellers, and members)

The audience analysis revealed a complex interaction between the media and community networks, ideological exposure, and the audience's role-plays. The summary below will answer the second research question of how the audience makes sense of Buddhism through media convergence practice:

RQ2: How do Thai audiences negotiate Buddhism's meanings in new digital distributed texts into their religious awareness through online practices of participatory culture and social media?

The following section will give the summarised findings of the audience reception and audience-made mediation. The summary of this section will begin with the audience's reception, ideological contact and role-play and then followed by the media access and community contact.

Ideological contact and role play

Key findings: Doctrinal exposure; new spiritual learning; ideological tangibility; role plays (practitioner, co-storyteller and member)

The findings unveiled the relationship between Buddhism's explicitness in the case studies and how the audience interacted with the series on social media. The audience's different modes of reception and their cross-media participation examined in each case study suggests the three series had varied meanings to the viewer. The study shows that the audience prefers viewing television dramas that bridge their multi-screen experience (from watching television and Internet-based channels) and real life, where they can physically engage with in various forms such as researching, practicing and creating their products to share further offline and online. Furthermore, when television series' discourse is truth-based, there are resources available for the enthusiasts' research and

reference. In that situation, media convergence and participatory culture can benefit the producer and the audience in taking multiple roles in the ideological circulation processes that they find valuable to them.

The Thai-dubbed series *Buddha* is a didactic Buddhist television series that focuses on delivering dharma with extensive but simplified teachings. The extensive doctrinal exposure offers choices from which the audience can pick teachings that have meaning for their specific situation. Therefore, a large section of the audience showed their agreement with the religious message. Their responses to audience-made YouTube clips were transparent and referential, relating the text to their personal experience and societal situations. The frequency, depth and continuity of the viewers' digital ethnography were more remarkable than that of the other two case studies, especially on the localised social media platform (web blogs). The conversation on social media involved sharing their practice results inspired by the series, discussing the Buddha's biography and sharing URL links to relevant religious materials such as electronic books, preaching, and YouTube clips. Some web blogs also applied gamification to participants to become more involved with fun and digitised rewards (such as stickers, GIFs, URL links and PDF copies of rare books about Buddhism).

The audience performed their role as *practitioners* and regarded sharing ideas about the credo on social media as part of their religious practice. Offline religious practices were also photographed and posted on social media. On publicised social media such as YouTube, there was marked participation from mainland Southeast Asian viewers. Compared to the international audience's responses to the case studies, viewers in Southeast Asia showed more spiritual inclusion to the religious community than the international audiences' responses to the case studies. In the years since the first telecast of the series *Buddha* in Thailand, there are always new audience-made YouTube clips that compile the character Buddha's teaching dialogue. Some Laotian YouTube media users also produced similar content clips and posted some episodes of the series' Thai-dubbed version. The digitised mediation of mainland Southeast Asia peoples demonstrates that their shared values exist, despite local differences. The other

participants' positive responses to the audience-made products further enhance the meaning of the media users' actions.

The themes of the semi-explicit Buddhism-mediated series *Cage of Karma* are karma, the role of family and social class discrimination. Following those social conflicts that Thai people are familiar with, audience members were involved with the series as *co-storytellers*. Many viewers' interactions with the series posted on YouTube were in a referential mode – meaning they viewed the series as *life-like*. The comments noted that the viewers experienced similar family relationships and social bias as represented in the series with their close friends and family or referring to society's problems in general. Only a small section of the audience on the producer-made YouTube platform shared their personal experiences related to the series' morality, family and social class themes. The melodramatised series *Cage of Karma* is notable for its intense emotion and the cast's theatrical performance. Therefore, the audience's expressions shown on YouTube were about the sensational involvement and production-based reception, especially the impression of the acting and characterisation.

Although many of the audience showed their agreement with the karmic ideologies portrayed in the show, other audience members expressed their counter-practice of the Eightfold Path, especially disbelief of karmic justice, violent intention (physical harm and murder), rude speech, adultery, and corrupted livelihoods. The findings stress how people theoretically acknowledge that dharma may not accord with the practitioner's actual mental state. Apart from the audiences' comments on producer-made YouTube platforms, there was no extended conversation about karma, family and social discrimination on other social media, either published or in localised rooms. Evidence of offline religious practice is also absent. Narrative- and production-based elements such as melodramatisation and the cast's dramatic performance resulted in the audience's emotional saturation. However, as there was no new spiritual learning, the series' reproduction of the ideology and the repeated narrative structure per se generated limited impact on the viewer's religious awareness.

However, it is necessary to observe the audience's online participation for a sufficient length of time. After several reruns, the audience's expressions about *Cage of*

Karma were significantly less aggressive. The findings of this thesis emphasise that the television drama's representation and the audience's dominant conversation had some influence on the interaction in the community. Later, after those influences became less powerful and continuous, the audience's view of the show became more moderate and less extreme. After some time had passed, the audience could justify the series' ethical message. They also shifted the attention to the production-based aesthetics, such as realistic acting, dialogue, costume, props, in a less fiery manner.

The study found that when the audience's prominent contact is *emotion*, the media user might find creating transmedia and cross-media surrounding the series restricted. Most transmedia found on social media were parts of the series' marketing that aired on television and were posted online, such as entertainment news scoops and interviews. Some audience-made cross-media included site touring and reviews of restaurants or markets in the location where the series is set. However, those extended activities were temporary responses to the provincial authorities' commercial set-up.

The implicit Buddhism-related television series *Love Destiny* is top-rated to the audience for its mixed themes, especially family, romance, politics, morality, and culture, respectively. The continuous flow of sequences with the genre hybridisation of romantic comedy, historical drama and drama fantasy excited the audience throughout the entire series. The series' popularity, the audience's delight and their cultural pride generated a fear of missing out on the audience. However, the fantasised karmic cycle, magical reincarnation and inarticulation of good governance made the religion-related ideas unrelatable for the audience in real life. In addition, due to the current political control of the military-led government in Thailand, the audience struggled to share their view by relating the depicted historical leaders and politicians to the more present figures openly on social media. Therefore, the viewers shared no discourses on their personal experience about karma and religious practices, either in the online or offline domains. The only dominant ideologies that the audience expressed their agreement with were undetailed ethics for laypeople and the King's Virtues. Most of the audience's reception was based on mediated-aesthetic and production-based details, such as the cast's acting, script, costume, props, directing, to name a few. Partly, the audience's focus on denotative visual reception is universal. In contrast, the linguistic connotative reception

requires sufficient knowledge to support their opinion sharing in public, particularly when many of the relevant historical documents are conflicting per se.

However, *Love Destiny's* most relatable themes are *history* and *culture*. Subsequently, the series resulted in the audience researching history. While the audience played a member role in the Buddhist community, they significantly enjoyed playing a cultural *consumer* role in the television drama industry. The series' transmedia and cross-media concerning history and culture were active since those subjects had many resources that viewers could access to find extra information. Also, many cultural practices such as cooking, dressing up in Thai costume, classical music, and literature support the audience's interest. Notably, the audience enthusiasm for the series resulted in the highest television ratings for a television show in Thailand in the digital era and the marked rise of the domestic economy.

Despite the series' representation of the complex issues of religious conflicts (between different religions) and ongoing corruption problems, the series deliberately minimised those controversial issues. Thai historical television dramas target *some* historical kings' righteousness and some queens, propagating the audience's respect to individual leaders who performed their duty with a conscience. However, this type of television drama does not examine the aristocracy or the military and civil administration that officially run the country. The implicit Buddhism-related television drama is a socio-political product that suggests the complex negotiation among the ideologies of righteousness, politics and the under-developed democratic culture. Such political navigation alludes to domestic residents' lack of capacity to debate and examine the transparency of the economic-political administration publicly. However, the series offered the audience a positive feeling and sense of belonging to the socio-cultural community. This is shown in the national audience's repeated consumption of the clips with romance, culture and family themes, which were remarkably higher than that of the clips with the subject of morality and politics. International audiences from areas other than mainland Southeast Asia were mostly interested in the series' culture and romance content.

The discussion above indicates the multiple functions of the series from which the audience benefit. Firstly, consuming the Buddhism-mediated television dramas allows the

audience to learn more about their adhesion to the religion and norms of conduct. Secondly, reading the text and its meaning is an approach to reinforce and confirm the audience's devotion to their existing ideologies and values. The audience's emotional involvement is a practice of their cognitive reflection to their idealism. Their ability to share their views with other community members supplies a common need for communal membership. On top of that, the technological advancement in the digital era facilitates the audience's desire to generate their products to share with others and take control over their consumption power and role within the industry.

Media access and community contact

The circulation of religious messages cannot benefit society without the audience having on-demand *media accessibility*. In the multi-screen era, content distribution is conducted via all popular platforms, ranging from television to online streaming channels, social media and limited-version hard copies (DVDs). In one case study, the final episode was screened in a cinema. The media accessibility on secondary screens refers to consumption that is on-demand and rewatchable. The international audience requests an option of watching television series with English subtitles too. Immediate media access soon after the national telecast without regional blocking is needed for Thai people who live overseas and international viewers. Suppose there is clip blocking or deletion due to the rerunning practice of the Thai television drama industry. In that case, audiences may struggle to re-consume clips and re-read the comments from other participants they previously enjoyed on social media. Therefore, audiences may desire content manageability, such as downloading and sharing. Subscription streaming services are another option, as they offer on-demand and uninterrupted viewing. However, unlike public social media, many audiences may find the pay-to-watch channels and the platforms' limited interactivity restrict their communal mediation. Hence, free-to-access internet-based channels are the most potent spaces open for cultural negotiation and influence the participants' experience and reception. Generational factors as well as technical skills and digital literacy have a growing importance in the evolution of cultural practices in some western countries (Donnat 2009, in Bilandzic et al. 2012: 246).

Furthermore, creating and maintaining a *fan community* has become more critical to the entertainment industry than ever before. The fan-based establishment may include setting up an official social media room and developing social networks and offline activities to communicate with the audience. However, the series' popularity is also crucial in inviting the audience to the series' community. The series' positive reputation resulted in fear of missing out, influencing the audience's regular consumption to ensure that they are included in their online and offline television drama communities.

Online participation involves a range of individuals' ideological identities, desires for support from other members in a form that one-way communication media such as television cannot facilitate. However, the community members' satisfaction with the audience-made discourses and products depends on its quality and complexity and a strong connection between the original story (the television series) and the new creation (audience-made products). Although a considerable section of the audience places more emphasis on the spectacle and sensations, the findings underline that religion generates the most engaging participation from domestic and international audiences. Religious discourse in cyberspace may appear in various forms following web page design or specific social media layout and interface.

The chapter explores the audience's discourse featured in YouTube. The social media platform communicates that images, written language and other uses of digitised items such as emojis create distinctly casual and friendly characteristics to the communities. Such an environment encourages the local participants to interact with others comfortably. One factor contributing to the casual talk about religion may point to the fact that the conversation is extended from a television drama that contains both believed-to-be facts and fictionalisation. Thus, the discourse is based on curiosity and then expanding to other related subjects about the Buddha's spiritual journey.

The final area of analysis answers the third research question:

RQ3: What role does Buddhism in Thai television drama play in reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual connections between people across the region of mainland Southeast Asia in the era of regional cultural trade?

The research results showed that local and international audiences watched, re-watched, shared and reproduced those clips that feature entertainment and cultural identity by representing romance, religion, family and culture. The absorption of spiritual development, romance, family love and refined culture lightens the audience's feelings. The awareness of themselves with others and the environment help the audience feel humble, mentally secure and inspired to improve oneself and benefit others.

Nonetheless, the mediated television dramas' impacts depend on the audience's ability to take further action in everyday life with the series' principal activities. In the case studies where ideologies are distant from the everyday life experiences of audiences, viewers tend to follow physically doable, fashionable, and shareable activities online. Everyday actions that the audience performs as part of their consumption and inclusion in the community include cooking, speaking using the same terms as used by lead characters, touring the series' locations, and dressing in the same fashion as their favourite characters. Some media users who had more media-making skills also utilised the online space to produce and share related knowledge and political views. However, the community members' satisfaction with the audience-made discourses and products depended on its quality and a strong connection between the original story and the created material.

The thesis closely observed how the Thai and mainland Southeast Asian YouTube users interacted with the three case study television series as well as the reruns and audience-made para-texts related to the series between 2014 and 2020. The study found that the mediated television dramas that generate longer-lasting impacts on the audience link receivers to the essence of the religion and the viewer's problem-solving in everyday life. Buddhism's problem-tackling concept involves knowing the problem, its causes, the optimal state after solving the problem and practical means to cease the problem completely. Therefore, television dramas that suggest problem-solving ideas without misleading fantasy, political propagation and consumerism promotion tend to invite viewers to interact with the text comfortably in the long run.

However, after watching the same series more than once, audience participation on YouTube, web blogs and Facebook fan pages became less interactive. The conversation was predominantly based on their fandom of the production and their

favourite actors and actresses. The study found no significant social impacts during the reruns. Primarily, the reruns resulted in re-consumption on a smaller scale. The wave-like interest of the ideologies faded after audiences' repeated experience of a series. Notably, the mediation of religion in popular culture needs regular revitalisation as the audience always seek new excitement. Where the thematic message of the television series is profoundly related to the viewer and their society, their engagement may further generate transmedia and cross-media.

Significance of the findings

Religious mediation

The findings of this thesis help to fill the knowledge gap concerning the mediation of Buddhism in popular television drama. This thesis is the first major study in English that unfolds the complex communication of religion in Thailand in the multi-screen era. The study's analysis of the mediation on three levels (ideology, television drama production and audience reception) expands the comprehension of the circulation of religion in a step-by-step schema, from a) ideological background and inspiration to b) producer-made symbolisation of religious beliefs and content circulation, and c) audience's reception and responses to the given television drama texts with their offline and online community members. The findings of the relationship between how religion is articulated and how the audience engage with the texts and social media communities have significantly paved the way for new scholarship about the multi-screen mediation of religion.

Thai television studies and Asian media and communication

The thesis' inclusion of a socio-cultural and political context to the textual analysis helps global readers understand the local participants' worldview and cultural production from a sociological viewpoint. The textual analysis intensely interrogated ideological embodiment through specific genres, plots, characterisation and dialogue, extending the scholarship of television drama dramatology for religious and political purposes. The findings of Thai television drama narrative, consumption and reception in the digital era add knowledge to Thai television studies. The findings concerning multi-channel distribution, transmedia, cross-media, and multi-screen consumption related to the case studies support Thai and Asian media and communication studies.

Media convergence

The findings of how the producer and the audience utilised the multi-screen practice and participatory culture to circulate their interpretation of the religion contribute to media convergence scholarship in mainland Southeast Asia. The international audiences' findings, especially from mainland Southeast Asian origins, have introduced the global reader to the television drama consumption and secondary screen practices of Thai television viewers, leading to the exchange of cultural values. Additionally, the findings of media users' different interactions in various social media domains reinforce the studies of media convergence and Internet-based audience studies.

Suggestions for future research

The thesis has introduced new media and communication studies (television drama and its multi-screen mediation of religion) and new methodologies (doctrine-based textual analysis and online audience analysis). Future works may find more opportunities to apply similar methodologies to other ideologies in the same or a related territory. More studies about dominant ideological circulation via Internet-based media in neighbouring countries in mainland Southeast Asia will significantly benefit the scholarship of mainland Southeast Asian media and communication. Comparative textual analysis of original television series and remakes – either from local or international plots – would profit television drama studies by revealing ideological interpretation and production-related differentiation in the local contexts. Analysis of how the online audience read those original texts and global adaptations will extend transcultural audience studies.

New and existing media platforms are constantly being made linkable, and media consumption behaviour becomes increasingly complex. Currently, local media users use YouTube, web blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the LINE application to connect with their community daily. Future studies may consider including those popular social media platforms and other emerging tools to comprehend media users' practice, interests and values. How media users construct their virtual identities and tell their stories on social media is highly worth exploring. Simultaneously, the rapid increase of media-user-generated content on social media has offered media scholars materials to promptly monitor and investigate the audience-made discourse and its impacts. More advanced

online data processing programs or updated versions are launched annually. As a result, future studies utilising new online audience methodologies across platforms and analyses will become possible and valuable to media and communication studies globally.

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Appendix

Principal Buddhist teachings embedded in the case studies

The study employs essential Buddhist doctrines as the tools for the textual analysis and audience reception analysis to comprehend the circulation of Buddhism practised by the producer and the audience. The relevant teachings of Buddhism discussed in the study enclose 1) the Four Noble Truths and 2) the Eightfold Path.⁸¹ The content of the section below will give a piece of brief information about the teachings, as follows.

The Four Noble Truths are the conceptual framework or map for practitioners to understand the religion's structure. Without a thorough understanding of this essential guide, misunderstanding or misleading practice is likely to result in inefficient problem-solving. *The Four Noble Truths* consists of the following comprehensions.

1) life problems: suffering (dukkha);⁸²

2) causes and factors of the problem: unawareness (avijja), craving (tanha) and attachment (upadana) (Akincano 2006, 104);

3) the goal of the solution: the cessation of suffering, called vimokkha or nirvana;⁸³ and

4) approaches to achieve the goal: the Eightfold Path (Akincano 2006; Payutto 2016; Nanamoli 1995, 154).

Towards understanding causes and factors of the suffering, Buddhism emphasises *the Law of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppada)* to comprehend constructing conditions of existence and its deconstruction (Keown 2004). The chain composes of 1) ignorance (avijja); 2) compositional factors (samskara); 3) consciousness

⁸¹ These teachings and extended practices were categorised into three main groups called *Tipitaka* (Vin.V.86.), meaning three baskets of teachings: 1) Vinaya Pitaka, 2) Sutta Pitaka, and 3) Abhidharma Pitaka (Harvey 1990; 2001).

⁸² Buddha described three types of dukkha: 1) suffering of mental and physical pain, 2) suffering produced by change, and 3) suffering resulting from the failure to recognise that self is conditioned and interdependent (Harvard Divinity School 2019).

⁸³ Vimokkha/nirvana (liberation) consists of 1) Sunnata-vimokkha: void liberation, 2) Animitta-vimokkha: signless liberation, and 3) Appanahita-vimokkha: disposition-less liberation (Ps.II.35; Vism.657; Comp.211 in Payutto 2016, 101). The state of complete salvation called 'nirvana' has two forms: 1) *saupādisesā nibbānadhātu*, meaning the state of defilements (enlightenment) that an achieved one no longer has any worldly passion attachment yet has his/her physical aggregates to continue, and 2) *anupādisesā nibbānadhātu*, meaning the final nirvana at death that the sensory body and all the mental formations discontinue (Intapanyo 2010, 11; Collins 2010, 39–40).

(vijnana); 4) name and form (nama-rupa); 5) six sense spheres (ayatana); 6) contact (sparsa); 7) feeling (vedana); 8) craving (trnsa); 9) grasping (upadana); 10) becoming (bhava); 12) old age and death (jara-marana) (Keown 2004).

When practitioners are realised about the first three elements of the Four Noble Truths, they are encouraged to put the understanding into *the Eightfold Path*⁸⁴ the practice which combines the simultaneous conducts of:

- 1) Right Understanding (Sammaditthi);
- 2) Right Thought (Sammasankappa);
- 3) Right Speech (Sammavaca);
- 4) Right Action (Sammakammanta);
- 5) Right Livelihood (Samma-ajiva);
- 6) Right Effort (Sammavayama);
- 7) Right Mindfulness (Sammasati), and
- 8) Right Concentration (Sammasamadhi).⁸⁵

Buddhist lay people are encouraged to practice *the Five Precepts* (Payutto 2016, 175), which is composed by:

- 1) to abstain from killing (Panatipata veramani);
- 2) to abstain from taking things that are not given (Adinnadana);
- 3) to abstain from sexual misconduct (Kamesumicchacara);
- 4) to abstain from false speech (Musavada); and
- 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness (Surameraya-majjapamadatthana).

Apart from the principal doctrines above, the case studies also include other teachings as follows.

The Four Paths of Accomplishment (the Four Iddhipada):⁸⁶

- 1) Chanda (aspiration),
- 2) Viriya (perseverance),

⁸⁴ D.II.312; M.I.61; M.III.251; Vbh.235. (Akincano 2006, 110; Payutto 2016, 215).

⁸⁵ A crucial meditation tool to detach from causes of suffering is a mindful observation, called 'vipassana', on a) the body, b) the feelings, c) the mind, and d) the nature dharma, as they are (Harvey 1990, 253–55).

⁸⁶ D.III.221; Vbh.216.

- 3) Citta (active thought; dedication), and
- 4) Vimamsa (examination; reasoning) (Payutto 2016, 160).

The Four Divine Abidings or the Four Sublime States of Mind (the Four Brahmaviharas):⁸⁷

- 1) metta (loving-kindness or benevolence),
- 2) karuna (compassion),
- 3) mudita (joy at others' success),
- 4) upekkha (equanimity; recognising limits of one's ability and let go) (Akincano 2006; Payutto 2016, 124–27).

The Four Principles of Service (the Four Sangahavatthu):⁸⁸

- 1) dana (giving/charity),
- 2) piyavaca (kind speech),
- 3) atthacariya (helpful action), and
- 4) samanattata (equal participation) (Mahidol University 2002; Payutto 2016, 143).

The Three Unwholesome Roots: the critical roots of evil behaviours (the Three Akusalamula):⁸⁹

- 1) lobha (greed),
 - 2) dosa (hatred), and
 - 3) moha (delusion). Vice versa,
- Kusalamula (wholesome roots) (Payutto 2016, 84):

- 1) alobha (non-greed; generosity),
- 2) adosa (non-hatred; love), and
- 3) amoha (non-delusion; wisdom).

The Thirty-Eight Highest Blessings (the Mangala Blessings 38):⁹⁰

1) not to associate with fools; to dissociate from the wicked, 2) to associate with the wise, 3) to honour those who are worthy of honour, 4) living in a suitable region; good environment, 5) having formerly done meritorious deeds, 6) right direction in self-guidance, 7) extensive learning, 8) knowledge of the arts and sciences, 9) highly trained

⁸⁷ A.III.226; Dh.262; Vism.320.

⁸⁸ D.III.152,232; A.II.32,248; A.IV.218,363.

⁸⁹ D.III.275; It.45.

⁹⁰ Kh.V.3; Sn.259–268.

discipline, 10) well-spoken speech, 11) support of mother and father, 12) cherishing of children, 13) cherishing of wife, 14) livelihood which is free from complications, 15) charity, 16) righteous conduct, 17) rendering aid to relations, 18) blameless actions, 19) abstaining from evils and avoiding them, 20) abstinence from intoxicants, 21) perseverance in virtuous acts, 22) respect, 23) humility, 24) contentment, 25) gratitude, 26) the opportune hearing of the dharma, 27) tolerance, 28) amenability to correction, 29) seeing the monks or holy persons, 30) regular or opportune discussion of truth, 31) self-control, 32) conduct holy life, 33) discernment of the Noble Truths, 34) realisation of nirvana, 35) to have a mind which is not shaken when touched by worldly vicissitudes, 36) to have the mind which is free from sorrow, 37) to have the mind which is undefiled, and 38) to have the secure mind (Payutto 2016, 274–77).

*The Ten Pieces of Advice on How to Investigate a Doctrine (the Kalama Sutta):*⁹¹

- 1) be not led by a report,
- 2) be not led by tradition,
- 3) be not led by hearsay,
- 4) be not led by the authority of texts,
- 5) be not led by mere logic,
- 6) be not led by inference,
- 7) be not led by considering appearances,
- 8) be not led by the agreement with a considered and approved theory,
- 9) be not led by seeming possibilities,
- 10) be not led by the idea, 'This is our teacher.'

Whence carefully considered and comprehended by oneself whether the doctrine is sinful, charitable, harmful, or harmless, for instance, then one can omit or follow according to that (Payutto 2016, 232).

⁹¹ A.I.189.

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