

# The Impact of Boys' Love Television Series as a Way of Shaping Thailand's LGBT Rights Acceptance

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*The journey of Thailand's cinematic queer existence can be traced back to the 1960s with a portrayal of a same-sex couple's tragic story. However, the re-emergence of Thailand's cinematic queer in the form of the Boys Live series in 2020 has succeeded in enticing audiences' attention and soon created the narrative of the exact sex couple series portrayal to be the icon of Thailand's entertainment industry. The increased demand for Boys Love series production later shifted into giving a proper platform for the LGBT community to represent themselves in the media. The expansion in exposure led to reshaping the discourse in society and creating a way for familiarising the community with the public, all while providing the chance to address the topic matters, including long-standing discrimination.*

**Keywords:** LGBT; human rights; discourse school; media representation; gender equality

## Introduction

While the appearance of the LGBT community in the media, especially in Thailand, has existed for some time, in the past, it has yet to utilize the platform as a means of advocating. It only recently started to shift as the same-sex couple given the screen time as the main lead and whose story is being told to the media. The shift was assumed to begin back in 2016 with the appearance of a remarkable series called SOTUS that caught the audiences' attention (Yukari, 2020)

SOTUS offered a lighthearted story and created positive feedback that led people to see more about what a same-sex couple could be. Coincidentally, the despair of the

pandemic, which led to the extended quarantine, has allowed people to spend more time exploring cinematic entertainment, giving momentum to the Boys' Love series made by Thailand. For example, in 2020, the 80 series was broadcast alone (Mitchell, 2020). Poowin Bunyavejchewin, a Thai political scientist, argued that the trend, which is booming not only locally but also gaining global notice following its widespread, has helped in normalizing male-male romance in Thai pop culture that seems to be unthinkable a few years back, and in the process has become a platform to educate the people about the representation it showed (Watson & Jirik, 2018).

Thus, it gives a glimpse of the definition of the Boys' Love genre, which often refers to the portrayal of romantic interest between male-male protagonists. It is mainly consumed by audiences who seek redemption, which they often fail to find in real life (Welker, 2022).

This article argues that the wake-calling of same-sex couples' portrayal in the media, especially in Thailand, is creating an awareness of the livelihood of the LGBT community, which often still experiences discrimination and is scorned. A question of *How Does Boys Love Genre in the TV Series Campaign Shaped Thailand's LGBT Right Acceptance* will be used as the main anchor in this article.

As this research is trying to bring a new perspective in looking upon the issue of the same-sex series as support towards the LGBT community agenda, two highlights on the previous research will elucidate the justification. Most previous research has contributed significantly to shining a light on this matter. However, it has yet to specifically cover the shift of mindset and how the ongoing discourse in Thai society is facing the growing number of LGBT portrayals. It did, however, highlight the power of the series, which undoubtedly captured many audiences' attention by depicting a soft erotica show with good-looking male characters who ended up being together (Ünaldi, 2011).

Baudinette (2019) claimed that the series *wai*, which now refers to the *Boys Love* genre, generates a narrative that challenges the typical heteronormative narrative conventions of a series as it neglects the homo-

erotic storyline. As such, the extension of the research explores the changing representation of sexual minorities in the current Thai pop culture. Although, to be fair, Baudinette has yet to extend the research to the result of the challenge and the exploration of the changing representation. Nevertheless, despite the limitation, it is still showing a significant change in looking at how the narrative usually leads to more ambiguity as to the commonly used queer representation in order to blur the line and to avoid challenging the societal primacy of familial (Farmer, 2011).

Another point of the previous research is the anticipation formed by looking upon several recognitions and homonegativity often dominated by the older generation for their disagreement towards emerging mass media trends. Alas, the older generation's viewpoint can be justified by bringing up the Marxist view, which brings upon "privileges" to shun or even ignore the issues of oppression (Wolf, 2009). Berry (2000) argued that as the use of media increases among youth, so does the exposure to media messages as the transmission of cultural experiences depicted by characterology by creating and reinforcing cultural appropriateness. However, Berry's research has limited the focus on the youth's role in the use of media, which arguably hinders the older generation from coming to terms with the new occurrence. The anticipation mentioned refers to the research on the observation progress to see further changes created by the emerging mass media trends. In Thailand, as the LGBT community served protection by law, the social norm

is still being questioned; this means that the public is still in an unstable condition to be considered accepting the perspective. Now, with the acknowledgement of the existing occurrence of both challenge and changing representation, supplemented with the increasing use of media by youth, the implications and the result of the previous research are left to be explored within this writing.

## Methodology

This paper will adopt two frameworks: Cedric Clark's Four Stages of Representation and Marie-Bénédicte Dembour's 4 Schools of Thought. Clark categorized representation stages into Non-Representation, indicated by outright exclusion; Ridicule, which indicates the small number of inclusion towards a particular group to create a mockery; regulation, which indicates the showcase of socially representable representation but within a limited number; and lastly, Respect which indicates the inclusion of portrayal similar to everyday lifestyle. Clark's theory will highlight the last two stages as a framework to support the development of Boys' Love genre affinity in the media.

Furthermore, Dembour's 4 Schools of Thought in discussing human rights are categorized into Natural, Deliberative, Protest, and Discourse. Following down the list, Natural school is designed to see human rights as something universally accepted by everyone without any limit, Deliberative school to see human rights as something agreed upon by a collective of people and Protest school to see human rights as something to fight for and a group of people bound to question the

rights they are given to by social standard, and lastly, Discourse school which designed to see that human rights will be socially acceptable when people familiarized with the law of the rights. It required the collective of people to justify the rights imposed on a particular group. In this case, Dembour's framework supports the argument that the popularization of the Boys Love genre campaign creates a platform for people to be aware of the LGBT movement and helps neutralise the mindset of the collective people of the image they have upon the LGBT group.

The technical methodology will use in-depth interviews to gather information about experiences and points of view concerning specific research of interest (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007). A set of prepared questions will be available to navigate and provide limitations in the data collection process. The interview will help to understand the discourse by triangulating the different perspectives compiled.

## Long Road to Recognition

Before the Boys' Love series boom in Thailand, it was doubtful for LGBT topics to be discussed mainly in public. Despite the acknowledgement towards the numbers of LGBT-identified individuals, Thailand's path still goes a long way, especially with the discrimination that is still prevalent. Although many advocates have fought for it, legal matters have yet to give a certain degree of protection.

**[The Matter of LGBT in Thailand]** Thailand has long been in the melting pot regarding

perceiving the LGBT community. Despite no persecution by law or blatant discrimination, it still does not automatically make the living conditions different from theirs. It is infused with profound moral and patriarchal culture. Cases of gender inequality remain.

Before further divulging into the matter of human rights, this article will present the discourse in Thailand regarding sexual identity to create an aligned understanding as it is severely different from what is commonly found in Western countries. In looking into Thailand's society, an idea about the discourse of what we would call *phet* (เพศ) worked as the umbrella term for both the gendered system and sexual preference. *Phet* as a term is the closest thing that could be related to the Western idea in indulging upon the topic of queer studies as it could be used to refer to both gendered systems as well as sexuality that is interlinked within each other (Morris, 1994). Furthermore, the Thai identities that separated gender and sexuality led to the rethink of the categorical separation between queer studies and feminism in the establishment (Jackson, 2000). Thailand in the former period recognized three sexes under *phet*, which are normatively masculine men (*phuchai*, ผู้ชาย), normatively feminine women (*phuying*, ผู้หญิง), and an intermediate or a hermaphrodite despite men and women called *kathoey* (กะเทย) (Jackson, 2000). The term often used to refer has slowly been considered derogatory throughout the period.

**[The Discrimination against the Community]** Despite the tolerance society claimed to be implemented, it does not mean

discrimination has been eradicated. Many factors could play a role in the existence of discrimination, such as the predominantly heterosexist societal norms that pressed the society to think in a heterogeneity mindset, thus leading people to believe that people are inherently heterosexual and that having a sort of attraction other than the opposite sex would categorize them as abnormal in an instant (Gregory, 1990; Herek, Chopp, & Strohl, 2007). The contradiction that remains gives a slight depiction of the unequal treatment which the LGBT people still experience in their daily lives. While the government does not arrange severe sanctions, it does not mean the sanction is not there (ILO, 2014). Over time, discrimination comes in a variety of forms. In the past, direct abuse was more likely to be seen as they targeted the members of LGBT. The forms can go beyond jokes and harmful stereotypes that manifest into hate crimes such as murder and rape. The brutality is so horrifying that the victim of the hate crime can be found stabbed, strangled, suffocated and burned alive (Liljas, 2014). The example can be seen in several cases, as mentioned, the action of burning alive a bisexual woman back in 2006 and the rape, murder, and burning of a lesbian back in 2008 (Likhitpreechakul, 2009).

In the present time, where LGBT activities are more likely to be seen, especially in 2019, which can be considered as the peak visibility (Pawa, 2021), discrimination in the form of direct abuse is less likely to happen due to the morality standard set by the public. This statement, supported by Assistant Professor Ronnapoom Samakkeekarom

from Thammasat University, gave a point of view from the cultural sector which described the consideration embedded in most Thai individuals that created a cultural buffer preventing the people from conducting confrontation and helps the society to coexist with the LGBT group. However, coexistence itself does not imply understanding (Promchertchoo, 2020). Generally, LGBT rights are being affected in specific areas; however, they are more prominent within these areas: the work field sector, education sector, and medical sector (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

Discrimination in the work field sector exists as a disadvantage regarding access to the refusal of employment and dismissals, and there is increasing evidence of a pay gap (ILO, 2014). Because of the lack of jobs offered for LGBT individuals, they usually resort to a low-paying jobs such as opening a hairdressing shop or a market seller, and most of the time, it comes to the extent of being a sex worker as a last resort. An example of a case happened to Phakjira Visavakorn-skow, who was hired for a sales administrative officer position on June 5 2007. However, on July 5 2007, Phakjira received a cancellation of the employment contract after the company disapproved of cross-dressing as a woman (ILO, 2014).

In the education sector, several bullying cases towards LGBT Youth, which led to the suffering of mental illness, have been reported (Zaza et al., 2016). Moreover, the lack of understanding creates a condition to usher out what is considered abnormal – in which generality cannot be met. A study in 2014 determined the fact that more than half

of the LGBT-identified students had been bullied, one-third experienced physical abuse in school, and almost a quarter experienced sexual harassment (Mahidol University, Plan International Thailand, & UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2014).

Lastly, from the medical sector, the issues are represented in health services itself. In terms of legislation, transgender are not allowed to change their identity in legal documents despite undergoing surgery. In terms of organizational capacity, the lack of funding becomes the main obstacle for research on addressing health issues faced by LGBT individuals to be conducted outside the realm of HIV. Not to mention, a report on the rejection of treatment after the patient is identified as LGBT is found in the field (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

**[Legal Review Concerning the LGBT Community]** The LGBT community in Thailand has long been fighting to create a draft of the same-sex union. Not only at the national level but Thailand has also been known to quite actively participate at the international level, as can be seen through the number of ratified human rights resolutions and conventions that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

Recalling on the road to institutionalizing the human rights of LGBTQ people by ratifying Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IESOGI) back in 2016, the delegation of Thailand was the only ASEAN mem-

ber-state to be given the chance to voice out during plenary meeting which they wisely explained that in hoping for a more fruitful engagement, it could give more support on the exercise of human rights issues (ASEAN SOGIES Caucus, 2017)

Thailand is known for its vocal action. It adopted the Gender Equality Act of 2015, which includes the definition of unfair gender discrimination. This policy has since become the pillar of the aftermath policies on gender equality in Thailand (ASEAN SOGIES Caucus, 2017).

The aftermath of 2016 also came along with the focus of the movement on the passing of the Civil Partnership bill, which draft was constructed in early 2014 and just around a half year into 2020, the bill was approved by the Thai Cabinet after being proposed by the Ministry of Justice (English, 2020). Despite the contradiction of the advantages of this bill, it has still become the main focus as it allows a union between two people regardless of gender. The union will enable rights that previously only been given to the hetero couple, some of the rights including the right of the civil partners to adopt children, to decide on behalf of their injured/dead partners, the right to own shared property after entering the union, etc. moreover, apart from pushing for same-sex marriage, another sector has been putting more efforts in widening the opportunity in other sectors. The Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development unofficially introduced the Gender Identity Bill to the public in 2017 (Nishrat, 2021); however, the drawback on the eligibility criteria has drawn

criticism and become quite a hindrance. This bill, however, was renamed the Gender Recognition Bill, which was tabled by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security for consideration by parliament in October 2020. The proposed bill will establish the rights of a transgender who has been denied access due to the mismatch between current gender identities and one written on the birth certificates (Boonlert, 2020).

As for the pertaining laws and constitution that existed, Thailand has also ratified and legalized several international laws that are also being adopted as national laws for the protection of LGBT individuals in order to limit discrimination and expand the access given towards the community, some as mentioned; The Criminal Code Amendment Act (No. 19) BE 2550. This was a huge change considering the act worked to change the definition of a rape case, which previously only referred to a vaginal rape by a man on a woman (ILO, 2014). The series involved a loose LGBT ad hoc campaign group that included the now-disbanded Anjaree, Nada Chiyajit, and other independent activists collaborating with the women's movement. Later on, the definition was changed by the parliament to include marital rape and other forms of rape between two people (ILO, 2014). This has also worked in covering transgender rights (Sanders, 2011). There is an opportunity to increase the use of laws to gain advantages. The struggle within politics could also come from lawmakers who tend to be conservative (UNDP & USAID, 2014).

## Boys Love Series as a Tool of Change

The phenomenon of the Boys' Love genre in reshaping Thai society and pushing recognition towards Thai LGBT rights acceptance will be further analyzed within the time framework from 2016 to 2021 through Clark's stages of media representation that will determine the progress of representation in the media. It will see how far the cinematic queer has been portrayed in society and if it is well enough to stand as a platform for representation. In addition, another framework from Dembour's discourse school will examine the impacts of the shifted discourse, which allows LGBT individuals to gain their voices and push their rights agenda.

**[The Role of TV Series in Determining the Stage of Representation]** LGBT individuals have been increasingly portrayed in various types of media and have gained attention as a category of social and cultural identity (Gray, 2009). Clark (1969) argued that the aim of a certain thing being communicated through mass media is to gain recognition, and due to its ability to offer a source of information, it can increase the value of social groups through the recognition and respect it presently. Nowadays, it is shown how Thai entertainment has broadened its way of broadcasting a representation in comparison to the past, where the LGBT community would be depicted in a deviant way, physically, sexually and mentally (Burapha University, 2017). Brett Farmer (2000), a scholar with familiarization in Thai queer study, describes the cinematic queer era as a boost to famil-

iarize the new identity within sexual and gender identity. Moreover, a queer cinema that is accompanied by the potential erotic queerness has humanized LGBT individuals, breaking the stigmas and lifting them from a mere comedy skit (Farmer, 2000). The focus will be narrowed to the *Boys Love* (BL) genre, which refers to a specific genre that depicts the arc of a male-to-male relationship. This connection further attracts people to the storyline, which depicts the semi-realist LGBT community's experience in society. For example, the drama *Dark Blue Kiss* raised the issue of discrimination and coming out-to-parents scenes, which appealed to the audience and naturally led them to support the main couple (Kimie, 2020).

Thailand's entertainment industries then began to produce Boys' Love in numbers when the market began to enlarge due to the enthusiasm of audiences from local to international scale and potential customers said to constitute economic and business opportunities.

If looking at the chronological progress of LGBT representation in the media, following Clark's theory, it can be illustrated as such in the following passage: Prior to the popularity of the Boys Love genre series back in 2016, the progress of cinematic queer believed to pass the second stage which is the **ridicule** stage. As the stage referred to the representation being portrayed in a skit, it is proven to be shown around the 1960s to the 2000s, whereas the representation was portrayed as 'the clown of the show'. This period has further led to the stigma that all LGBT individuals have fun and a come-

dic personality (Jackson, 2011). Truthfully, looking at how the progress has been going so far, there is a blurred line to how far the stages have been reached. Seeing the development started in 2016, with the regular airing of the Boys Love genre series, proves the third stage, **regulation**. In this stage, the continuous representation being shown to the wider audience may create a new image that replaces the stigmas that were previously around. Poowin Bunyavejchewin stated how the Boys Love genre series created a new normal in Thai pop culture with the portrayal of male homoerotic relations, and it is certainly a development that was very unlikely to be agreed upon years ago (Watson & Jirik, 2018). In addition to this, Maneerin, BL viewers and LGBT-identified individuals shared how a few years ago, the talk of the topic of LGBT was not really open and that Boys Love series that existed prior to 2016 mostly only consumed by *wai fans* – referred to the person who watches Boys Love genre series in Thailand – but after it received a huge exposure and LGBT people start to be in the mainstream, it just keeps growing and getting bigger, assuming the growing as the representation being represented thus widening the audience who acknowledge LGBT people.

Progressing from there is where the line between the third stage, **regulation**, and the fourth stage, **respect**, which refers to the character being represented in both positive and negative notions, is blurred. This is due to the subtle changes within the plotline, which are drawn more realistically than the fantasy ones. Around 2019 and until the cur-

rent year 2021, several Boys Love genre series hits have been acknowledged due to the interesting and progressive plotline within. Together, the series, as the biggest hit series in 2020, inserted a relatable theme of love and a genuine portrayal of what LGBT youth experience, while the show is still accompanied by a good proportion of romance series attributes (Wang, 2020). One of the highlights is coming from the display of the bisexual community, a group circle that previously often being overlooked. In addition, Gontorn, BL viewer, when asked how Boys Love has progressed, shared how the progress happened at some point. He further hit the point by saying, “With the changing of progressing like Tharntype the Series, Manner of Death, and I Told the Sunset About You. It is not only a love scene anymore; it is also how the story progress, on how you have a good plotline. In addition, it also raising the standard and moving forward” The interpretation is that progress is still continuously increasing, yet with how it is going now, there is also still a small number of BL series categorized with the uncommon arc that focuses more into the normalization of LGBT portrayal instead of only giving a glimpse.

**[The Impacts of Boys Love Series from 2016 – 2020]** Following the success of several BL genre-based series released from 2016 to the current year, namely SOTUS, Love Sick, Tharntype, and so on, the Thai Boys Love entertainment industry carved a path towards wider exposure within the country and globally. This new genre is considered to be interesting due to the representation



of a watershed moment in the depiction of queer sexualities within Thai popular media (McLelland & Welker, 2015). As for now, the fact that the Boys Love series can easily be accessed both on national TV channels and online platforms creates the opportunity for audiences to keep up with the latest releases. Although the initial production of the Boys Love series may not entirely aim to showcase representation of the LGBT community, with how it is going right now, it also opens the opportunity to spread awareness and informative messages towards the audiences. In the process, the series tends to be a huge hit when the plotline sympathizes with the realistic situation, and nowadays, many BL productions are shifting their way of screenwriting to keep up with the market demands (Koaysomboon, 2020). The progress could again be related to Clark's last stage of representation, Respect.

While it is partially a business matter, the fact remains that the improvement was made within the plotline. Gontorn, the BL viewer, expressed his view by reasoning both the good and bad sides of the current BL series, "I'd say that on the good side, it spread the normality of the same-sex relationship, especially guy and guy relationship (...) if the government sees the potential, they can make it a selling point." As for the bad sides, he argued that since the BL genre is packed into a series with a targeted audience, there is still much romanticization in portraying gay relationships. Another respondent, Lalin, a BL viewer, shared that BL projected the LGBT theme, giving a positive glimpse of society that enabled the viewer to understand

more. Overall, the Boys' Love genre series can be considered a promising platform that spreads the normality of the LGBT community by the progressing plotline it offers.

Looking at the inside of the industry, there are still several debates concerning the production of the BL genre series. Aam Anusorn, a director of several BL series, namely Present Perfect, Call It What You Want, and so on, shared his view from the director's point of view that has been working directly within the Thai entertainment industry. He confessed that within the BL genre series industry, there may still be slow progress in casting a real LGBT individual. While it does not enclose the opportunity, Aam predicted that around 30% of LGBT individuals would get cast for the roles. While it is unfortunate enough how slow the progress can be, without denying the excuse that the Thai industry shall do better, it is still an improvement if it is to compare prior to the event. In contrast, LGBT is poorly underrepresented in the media, let alone casting real LGBT people.

This creates a negative notion that there's an implication for the monetization of the advantage of the fantasy-selling Boys Love Series.

With his identification being related to the community, Aam himself is also trying to advocate in his own way; he claimed that his work will have no gender. By this, a similar initiative taken from the production crews is also growing. In another case, Backaof Nopharnach, usually known as Aof, the pioneer of GMMTV's LGBTQ production that has been highly involved in producing famous BL genre series, is eager to explore

new possibilities in the Boys Love landscape. As an LGBTQ advocate, he tried to deliver a message about gender acceptance in the BL series he produced (Koaysomboon, 2020). Aof has seen the possibility of further turning the media into a proper platform to widen media utilisation as a source of public discussion.

From 2016 to the present, the Boys Love genre series has spread its influence with its steady progress from the continuously improved plotline, which has sent messages to clear up some stigmas. Prior to its popularity, there was only a glimpse of discussion about the realities of one identification to attain. Is it because in Thailand, such a topic is considered to be a personal affair that must be kept, but this limitation is also what restrains the people from gaining any proper understanding (Ocha, 2013) but now that it is exposed and framed in a media accompanied by interesting traits, has turned the limitation into a prospect. Improving people's understanding has also widened the chance to raise voices from NGOs and activists and gain support from most groups of society, predominantly the younger generations with their high consuming media (Koaysomboon, 2020). Another visible impact of the additional support can be seen from the conduct of the first Bangkok Pride back in 2017. The parade, usually in Phuket, is being returned to the capital as a celebration to unify the local LGBTQ community. Not only was it the first time it was held within the capital, but the Bangkok Pride 2017 was also organized as a collaborative effort under many LGBTQ organizations instead of being managed

by the business sector, which only focuses on capitalization (The Jakarta Post, 2017). Moreover, following the event, back in 2019, another first pride celebration of the Chiang Mai Pride Parade was held after it was cancelled on February 21 2009, due to the threat and forces to shut down the event (Prachatai, 2019). So, while there is a lack of numeric data regarding the increase of support from society, witnessing the turning of the drawback prior to the rise of the BL genre and seeing the change, such as the joint support in the events as well as the more positive view from the society determine the rise of influences as the direct impact of the media role in depicting the LGBT representation in the form of BL genre series.

**[The Reshaped Discourse towards the LGBT Community]** Dembour's (2010) theory regarding her Four Schools of Thought, in which she initiated the discourse school, referred to the argument that human rights exist only because people talk about them and that it is neither given nor they are an answer to the wrongdoings. Furthermore, discourse schools believe in the express political claims done by the language, which is assumed to be the acknowledgement of human rights from the collective group towards a certain thing, and the position does not blatantly regard human rights as a good thing only, rather it is balance based on its merits.

In line with the discourse school is the perspective of Thai society towards their LGBT community, which has been progressing for a few decades now. Believing that human rights exist only when people talk about

them and are not given led to the idea that the people in the surroundings determine rights. When imbued into a society where a particular trait's social structure exists, a group's rights need to reach a certain standard for it to be considered. Taking the LGBT community in Thai society as an example, even prior to the rise of the BL genre series, being part of the LGBT community was not illegal by law. However, the lack of understanding due to several factors, the biggest factor likely to be the poorly received information being shared in society, has resulted in people being wary of their identity and indirectly denouncing their rights. However, when the lack is mended, and the information is shared, it is possible to change the stigmas and receive acceptance. Now that Thai society has begun to open up and accept the display of sexual identities, there appears to be a high number of people who reveal themselves (Phoovatis, 2019). This is also related to other thoughts that human rights are not the answer to wrongdoings. Despite claiming to have a human right, the discrimination that might prevail for the community does not stop altogether. Freedom S, BL viewer and LGBT-identified individual shared how some people will open their hearts and accept, but there are also still unaccepting people. This statement is similar to almost all other respondents, too, confirming that the progress of acceptance is still ongoing and that people should put efforts into changing.

Much development can be traced back to a couple of past years in line with the discourse school regarding the express political claim. Before the growing support, society

generally tolerated the existence of the third gender. However, due to the stigmas and the social punishment, many LGBT people are pressured to hide their identity. However, with the growing community and the development within the society perspective, the opportunity for LGBT people to express and advocate for their rights has become bigger. The event marked with the growing movement such as Free Gender TH, which was created back in 2020, led to several impacts; in 2019, within the same period of election, Nook, LGBT Identified and BL viewer shared, "In the past election, prominent figures show the fully political position and they want to support for the LGBT rights, it seems we have the bigger chance right now" Nook statement assumed to be referring to the first time two transgender representatives was elected to parliament (Pawa, 2021) and with the more awareness on the current generations it opens the chance from the top as well as the bottom side.

In 2020, several chances led the LGBT community to be under the highlight. Following the outbreak of the pro-democracy protest in Bangkok, one led to another. In the entertainment industry, a particular BL genre series entitled *2Gether* rose as Thailand's biggest hit show, with it being aired on both primetime television and online channels (Wang, 2020). With the growing awareness, many young Thais launched a campaign on social media to gain a wider audience on the acceptance of the LGBT community. One of the campaigns was done by posting a certain rainbow colours theme. One person painted the rainbow flag on a forearm as an act

of expression (UCA, 2020). The peak is the marked historic milestone on July 8, on the approved draft of the Civil Partnership Bill by the Thai cabinet that would make same-sex marriage legal in Thailand. It is certainly one step closer to the approval by the parliament. If it passes, it will be a major step toward the liberation of the LGBT community in Thailand (Phoonphongphiphat, 2020). Certainly, it will be a huge reflection for the neighbouring Asian countries.

## Conclusion

Catching its momentum back in 2016, the Boys Love genre, which once was carefully being aired, has now become one that the public has been eagerly waiting for its release. It has progressed since then and is considered a well-developed genre. This catches up with the plotline that has been produced to meet the demands of the audience. Assessing Clark's Four Stages of Media Representation, prior to the event, it is highly believed that the situation at that time has passed the first stage, non-representation, and the second stage, ridicule. This is marked by the existence of LGBT characters in the media aiming for mockery. However, before catching the momentum, the progress has slowly shifted into the third stage, becoming more noticeable after the BL genre series released in 2016 succeeded. Still, the progress shown within the years has proved there is an increasing representation in the mainstream that is highly beneficial both for the LGBT community, with their voices spreading thoroughly, and the society, to create a normalization and to contribute to the straightening

of the stereotypes and stigmas.

This opportunity related to the second framework gained from Dembour's Discourse School. The school identified the lack of esteem towards human rights. It regards human rights as part of people's beliefs and does not justify the answer to prejudice. Concerning the case of the LGBT community in Thailand, previously, due to the lack of understanding in society towards the LGBT community, resulting in various stereotypes and stigmas have been created that hinder them from achieving equal rights. Nevertheless, now that the positive images have been continuously normalised in the media in the form of the Boys Love genre series, it gradually pushes the growth mindset in society. Through it, the opportunity for LGBT people to attain their rights becomes reachable. The opportunity to widen the voices of the activist-led to stable advocating progress that displays a proper understanding will make people acknowledge the existence and rights of the people.

To conclude, based on the analysis of the two theoretical frameworks resulted in the turning of the discourse in the society on how they view LGBT rights acceptance. The limitation of the LGBT topics has been erased, and in return, an abundance of understandings framed as a TV series being aired continuously; the same can be said that the representation once shown as a skit has now progressed into a more respectable manner and meant to show a realistic portrayal. In addition, this thesis acknowledged the limitation of the research, as the study target was taken from Thailand. There is a limit

to gaining further data due to the language, as well as a limit to the people fulfilling the criteria to be the interviewees. For further development, it might be more objective to indulge with the locals directly to ensure accurate data.

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