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Pride on the screen

 by Gary Boyle

Read the following story by Melalin Mahavongtrakul from the *Bangkok Post*. Then, answer the questions that follow.



Photo courtesy of Netflix

Thailand and the world have come a long way when it comes to showing different sexualities and gender identities on our screens. For Pride Month, Netflix hosted a talk with filmmaker Chookiat Sakveerakul (*Love Of Siam* and *Dew*) and Sanchai Chotirosseranee, deputy director of the Thai Film Archive, where they discussed today's LGBTI content.

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Some of Netflix's shows include *The Politician* with its bisexual lead character, and *Sex Education*, which features many young LGBTI characters. The comedy series focuses on a group of high school kids dealing with sexuality and relationships.

To Sanchai, *Sex Education* treats its characters as ordinary people. It targets all teenagers as its audience and not just LGBTI kids.

"I think it's very interesting. It's something that Thai dramas have yet to progress to. We have yet to see content which targets the general public in a way that also presents LGBTI as just people, just like everyone else," said Sanchai.

Looking back at Thai content, Sanchai said that Chookiat's *Love Of Siam* is important. The film sees a childhood friendship become a romance. Sanchai called this 2007 film a landmark in the country.

"Before that, I never thought I'd see two young, good-looking actors holding hands on a big screen," he said.

NO BULLYING

The current availability of LGBTI content and characters, especially for teens, has a positive impact on the younger generation in helping them accept LGBTI people and understand gender diversity in real life, said Chookiat.

"Content can be very influential for the younger generation," said the filmmaker. "Before, networks chose programmes to show on TV and audiences believed what was chosen had to be good. Now, as we move onto digital platforms like Netflix, today's kids are seeing many queer characters and they may feel that such co-existence is normal and that this diversity is acceptable. As a result, they will not go around bullying or teasing each other about gender."

Making LGBTI content does have its own challenges. The two agree that being overly politically correct could be a problem. Moreover, with people sometimes getting very sensitive and critical about representation, it may feel as though these LGBTI characters and storylines are untouchable, which Sanchai deems "scary".

"If we were to present something and people criticised it all the time, then some may just decide not to present or touch these characters at all [to avoid trouble]. Things would become silent that way," said Sanchai regarding how this could affect the visibility of LGBTI people on screen.

"Before, LGBTI characters weren't accepted and we never really got to see how they live. Featuring LGBTI characters can be a form of courage. Whether it's positive or negative, it still gives space to them. We start from watching and then we move on to acceptance," he said.

VIEWING AND UNDERSTANDING

How diverse must content be? To Sanchai, it may be difficult to decide.

"Diversity is about individuals. LGBTI people are also individuals. So, it'd be impossible for the media to cover and represent every single person. However, we are seeing more of this type of content," Sanchai said. "At one point, we used to see LGBTI characters only suffering from heartbreaks or even suicide. However, now we're seeing happier LGBTI characters."

Sanchai said he wishes to see more content about LGBTI history in the country. He mentioned Netflix documentaries such as *Circus Of Books* (about a gay porn shop in Los Angeles) and *A Secret Love* (two women who keep their six-decade-long love a secret), saying that Thailand could use similar content. Viewers could learn how the situation regarding LGBTI people was in different eras and the direction it has taken, which could help promote equality.

Chookiat feels that although LGBTI content is important, the way mass media presents it to society also matters equally.

"We could make an LGBTI film that addresses social issues. However, if the media covers it negatively that just downplays its values. So, everything has to go together to help shape how people view and understand this kind of content," he said.

Section 1: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. Who is a film director - Sanchai or Chookiat?
2. Who talked about Sex Education?
3. Who said Love of Siam is an important film?
4. Seeing queer characters on screen can help diversity and understanding. True or false?
5. Sanchai thinks LGBTI characters are scary. True or false?
6. LGBTI characters on screen are happier now. True or false?
7. Which show is set in LA?
8. Chookiat thinks media should be more positive about LGBTI content. True or false?

Section 2: Write the noun form of the following words in the space provided.

9. long
10. interesting
11. progress
12. decide
13. social

Section 3: Read the following passage. Then, fill in the blanks with the correct words from the choices given.

...14... to a 2019 report which ...15... diversity and inclusion of LGBTI characters on US TV and streaming services, Netflix ...16... the highest number of LGBTI characters among streaming services, with 121 characters counted last year. In ...17... , Hulu only had 24, while Amazon had eight LGBTI characters. As a result, the report ...18... on the entertainment industry to include more LGBTI characters regularly to better ...19... reality to audiences.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 14. A. Listening | B. Reading | C. According |
| 15. A. analysed | B. counted | C. watched |
| 16. A. was | B. has | C. does |
| 17. A. compare | B. comparing | C. comparison |
| 18. A. called | B. asked | C. told |
| 19. A. be | B. improve | C. reflect |

Section 4: Find words that match the following definitions.

20. the physical and social conditions of being male or female
21. an important place or event
22. the effect that something has
23. a variety of different elements
24. the state of being equal

For the answers, find the story online at www.bangkokpost.com/learning. If you have any questions or feedback, please contact the Editor at garyb@bangkokpost.co.th