

Filial Piety in Thai-Chinese Communities: A Cultural Analysis through the Film *LAHN MAH*

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Abstract

This study investigates the cultural representations of filial piety in Thai-Chinese communities through an analysis of the 2024 film *LAHN MAH*. Using qualitative methods that combine film content analysis with in-depth interviews of six Chinese viewers across different age groups (10-25, 26-40, and 41+ years) with two interviewees per group, the research explores how contemporary cinema mediates between traditional values and modern realities. The findings identify three primary expressions of filial piety: ritual practices including ancestor veneration and Qingming Festival (清明节) observances, daily intergenerational care practices, and the integration of Confucian ideals with Thai Buddhist traditions. Generational differences emerged in audience interpretations, with younger viewers highlighting technological adaptations, working-age adults emphasizing cultural preservation, and older respondents focusing on foundational Confucian principles. The research contributes to intercultural media studies by demonstrating how cinematic narratives facilitate cross-cultural dialogue while preserving ethnic identity in diaspora communities. The study advances understanding of

cultural hybridity in transnational contexts through its examination of cinema as both a reflective medium and dialogic space for traditional values in contemporary society.

Keywords: Filial Piety, Thai-Chinese Communities, *LAHN MAH*

Introduction

Filial piety, as a fundamental virtue in both Chinese Confucianism and Thai Buddhist traditions, has long served as a cultural cornerstone in Thai-Chinese communities. The concept's dual heritage—rooted in Confucian familial hierarchy and Buddhist gratitude principles—creates a unique cultural hybridity that warrants scholarly attention. Lin's (2021) case study on Thai-Chinese families reveals a three-generation assimilation pattern: first-generation immigrants retain traditional practices, the second generation shows gradual acculturation, and the third generation nears complete assimilation. Concurrently, Chinese traditions undergo localized adaptation, integrating into Thailand's cultural fabric through bidirectional negotiation. Sa-Nguanklang (2021) highlights how Confucian gratitude—expressed through filial devotion to parents and ancestors—persists among Thai-Chinese communities, particularly in Pak Phanang, Nakhon Si Thammarat. Key festivals like Chinese New Year (春节), Tomb Sweeping Day, and the Spirit Festival reflect two Confucian principles: gratitude to parents and gratitude to ancestors, while also incorporating Thai Buddhist values.

This study selects the 2024 film *LAHN MAH* as its primary case study due to: (1) its commercial success as Thailand's highest-grossing family drama (469 million baht), demonstrating mainstream cultural resonance; (2) its unique thematic focus on third-generation Thai-Chinese identity

negotiation; and (3) its rare simultaneous release in China and Thailand, signaling transnational cultural relevance. The film's portrayal of filial piety in Thai-Chinese families offers particularly rich material for analyzing how traditional values adapt to modern contexts through intergenerational conflicts, ancestral rituals, and contemporary family dynamics.

While previous research has explored filial piety through traditional festivals like Qingming (清明节) (Chitwiboon & Tepsing, 2017) or literary texts, cinematic representations remain underexplored, a gap this study addresses. The research builds upon Khamphuang's (2020) work on Chinese proverbial expressions of filial duty and Chayangkura Na Ayutthaya (2022) findings on Thai youth's ethical development, while extending the conversation to visual media's role in cultural transmission.

LAHN MAH's narrative about a Thai-Chinese grandson's journey from self-interest to genuine filial devotion offers rich material for analyzing how traditional values adapt to modern contexts. The film's exploration of intergenerational conflicts, ancestral rituals, and contemporary family dynamics provides insights into the evolving nature of filial piety in Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora communities. This study employs qualitative content analysis of the film alongside audience research with Chinese viewers across three generations (10-25, 26-40, and 41+ years), revealing how different age groups interpret these cultural representations.

The investigation holds particular relevance as Thai-Chinese communities navigate the tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to globalization. By focusing on cinema as a medium that both reflects and shapes cultural values, this research contributes to broader discussions about cultural preservation in transnational contexts. The findings

will illuminate how shared Asian values like filial piety facilitate intercultural understanding between China and Thailand, while offering new perspectives on the mediation of traditional virtues through popular media.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze filial piety representations in *LAHN MAH*, focusing on ritual practices, intergenerational care, and Confucian-Buddhist hybridity in Thai-Chinese contexts.
2. To examine how Chinese audiences of different generations interpret the film's portrayal of filial values.

Research Questions

1. How does *LAHN MAH* represent filial piety through cultural rituals (e.g., ancestor worship, Qingming Festival (清明节)) and daily family dynamics in Thai-Chinese communities?
2. What are the key differences in how younger (10–25), working-age (26–40), and older (41+) Chinese audiences perceive filial piety in the film?
3. To what extent does the film reflect the hybridity of Thai-Chinese filial values, combining Confucian ethics with Thai Buddhist influences?

Research Scope

This study examines the cultural representations of filial piety in the Thai-Chinese community through an analysis of the 2024 film *LAHN MAH*, focusing specifically on the portrayal of Thai-Chinese characters to explore how traditional values are negotiated in contemporary cinematic narratives.

The investigation is confined to the film's 2024 release version, analyzing its narrative content and socio-cultural implications without comparative analysis with other media or historical contexts. This study does not include comparative analysis with other films or historical depictions of filial piety.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design implemented through three sequential phases. In the preliminary phase, a systematic literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical foundation, examining scholarly works on filial piety concepts within both Thai and Chinese cultural contexts. This review encompassed academic articles, books, and relevant media analyses to identify key theoretical frameworks and research gaps.

The second phase involved dual data collection methods. First, a comprehensive content analysis of *LAHN MAH* (2024) was performed, employing a three-stage viewing process with timecode documentation of key scenes. The film was examined through the lens of Hybridity Theory, focusing on: (1) symbolic narratives (e.g., character transformation), (2) visual motifs (ritual objects/color schemes), and (3) dialogues, with findings later integrated with audience interview data. Particular attention was given to scenes depicting ritual practices, intergenerational interactions, and cultural hybridity.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Chinese participants purposively selected based on predetermined criteria: (1) Chinese nationality, (2) having viewed *LAHN MAH* in its entirety, and (3) representing three generational cohorts (10–25, 26–40, and 41+ years). The interview protocol was validated by three experts in cultural studies prior to implementation, achieving an Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) of 0.948, confirming robust content

validity. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling without restrictions on gender, education level, or occupation to ensure diverse perspectives.

The final phase employed thematic analysis to identify patterns across both film content and interview transcripts. Data were coded inductively and categorized into themes related to filial piety manifestations and generational interpretations. Findings were interpreted through descriptive analysis aligned with the established theoretical framework.

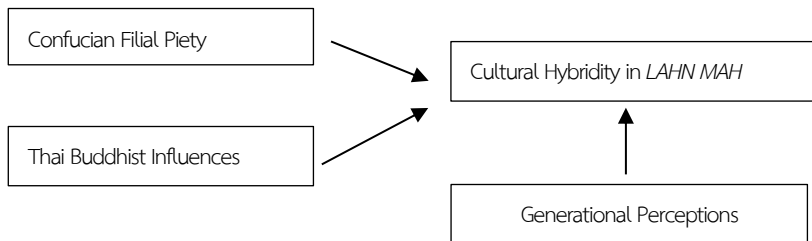
This study has three main limitations: 1) The small interview sample size (*n*=6) may limit the generalizability of the audience perspectives. 2) The participants consisted exclusively of Chinese viewers, excluding Thai-Chinese audiences who might offer distinct cultural interpretations. 3) The focus on a single film restricts comparative analysis with other media representations of filial piety.

Literature Review and Research Framework

The study of filial piety in Thai-Chinese society is unique due to its blending of Confucian philosophy from China and Buddhist principles from Thailand. Previous research indicates that filial piety in Chinese culture emphasizes being the “foundation of virtue” (Khamphuang, 2020) and maintaining family relationships (Lin, 2021). In contrast, Thai interpretations of filial piety rooted in Buddhism regard it as both an “auspicious blessing” and a “mark of good character” (Sa-Nguanklang, 2021). However, modern societal changes have led Thai youth to drift away from traditional values due to materialistic influences (Chayangkura Na Ayutthaya, 2022), necessitating adapted approaches to moral cultivation through integrated methods such as community-based practices and social interaction.

From a media and cultural perspective, research on television dramas and films reveals their role as “negotiative spaces” between traditional values and modernity (Rujsawat Krongbhumin & Hinviman, 2023). Meanwhile, studies on

festivals like Qingming (清明节) and Chinese New Year (春节) demonstrate how these traditions preserve ancestral filial piety despite ritual adaptations to contemporary lifestyles (Chitwiboon & Tepsing, 2017). Nevertheless, research examining filial piety through film remains limited, particularly regarding Thai-Chinese cultural representations in movies like *LAHN MAH* - a modern medium reflecting the dynamics of filial piety amid social transformation.



Conceptual Framework

Research Results

The analysis of the film *LAHN MAH* and interviews with viewers from different age groups reveal distinct manifestations of filial piety within Thai-Chinese communities, demonstrating a dynamic process of cultural hybridity that evolves through three interconnected dimensions: ritual adaptation, behavioral synthesis, and generational embodiment.

1. Manifestations of Filial Piety among Thai-Chinese Descendants in the Film

The film *LAHN MAH* portrays various dimensions of filial piety in Thai-Chinese culture through its unique cultural hybridity:

1.1 Respect for Elders as Depicted in the Film



Scene from the film depicting ancestor worship and tomb cleaning (02:06)

In *LAHN MAH*, ancestor worship and tomb cleaning rituals reflect deep reverence for ancestors and the maintenance of familial harmony. The act of making offerings—such as rice, fruits, or the deceased’s favorite foods—serves both to seek blessings and express gratitude while reinforcing family bonds. Tomb cleaning symbolizes the removal of misfortune, paving the way for prosperity and happiness. These practices are prominently observed during significant occasions such as the Qingming Festival (清明节), a traditional Thai-Chinese custom involving grave cleaning, ancestor veneration, and incense burning to honor departed family members.

1.2 Care for Parents and Family in the Film



Scene from the film *LAHN MAH* depicting elderly care (09:29) and (29:34)

The film's portrayal of elderly care demonstrates behavioral synthesis, blending Chinese filial duty with Thai cultural norms. The physical care and financial support characteristic of Chinese tradition merge with the Thai concept of “kreng jai” (consideration), seen in the gentle speech and emotional attentiveness shown toward elders. This hybrid caregiving model strengthens family bonds while respecting both cultural frameworks.

1) Elderly Care in *LAHN MAH* The film highlights elderly care as a central theme, emphasizing respect and devotion toward aging family members, particularly the grandmother. Close attention is given to both physical and emotional well-being, ensuring comfort and warmth in their later years. The portrayal of intergenerational relationships underscores the transmission of respect for tradition and the continuity of familial love.

2) Visiting Elders in *LAHN MAH* Visiting elders, especially during festivals or significant events, is depicted as an essential gesture of respect and gratitude. These visits go beyond mere formality, involving gift-giving, shared meals, and meaningful conversations that strengthen emotional ties. Such interactions bridge generational gaps and reassure elders of their valued place in the family, reflecting the deep cultural significance of maintaining kinship in Thai-Chinese communities.

3) Assisting Elders in Daily Life in *LAHN MAH* The film illustrates practical support for elders through tasks such as cooking, grocery shopping, and household chores. These acts of service foster intimate familial bonds and demonstrate love and concern. Beyond mere routine, these actions embody emotional solidarity, responsibility, and the preservation of moral traditions. Such caregiving reduces stress for elders, promotes family unity,

and nurtures mutual understanding and respect across generations, creating a supportive and harmonious domestic environment.

1.3 Religious Influences on Filial Piety in the Film



Scene from the Film Depicting Funeral Rites for Elders (01.13.28)

Funeral Arrangements for Elders in *LAHN MAH* The film depicts funeral rites as a profound expression of respect and gratitude toward the deceased. The meticulous preparation of ceremonies and reverence for the departed highlight the cultural importance of honoring ancestors. In Thai-Chinese families, funeral customs not only pay homage to the dead but also reinforce family cohesion, reminding members of their duty to uphold filial values and transmit them to future generations.

This analysis demonstrates how *LAHN MAH* serves as a cultural text that articulates the enduring significance of filial piety in Thai-Chinese communities, blending traditional practices with contemporary familial dynamics.

2. Audience Perspectives on Filial Piety Culture

This study conducted in-depth interviews with six viewers of *LAHN MAH*, divided equally across three age groups: adolescents (10-25 years),

working-age adults (26-40 years), and middle-aged respondents (41+ years). The research aimed to examine perceptions of filial piety within Thai-Chinese familial contexts and compare them with traditional Chinese filial values.

2.1 Age-Specific Interpretations of Filial Piety as Portrayed in *LAHN MAH*

The analysis revealed distinct generational perspectives. Adolescent viewers (10- 25 years) focused on protagonist M's character development from self-interest to genuine filial devotion. As Lee (15/01/2025) noted, "When the grandmother fell ill, M's anxiety and tension... showed his transformation from profit-driven to truly understanding and respecting elders". This group particularly valued daily expressions of filial piety - accompanying elders to the bank or playing cards - interpreting these as "reflections of emotional care" (Lee, 15/01/2025). They also emphasized participation in traditional festivals as crucial for cultural transmission.

Working-age respondents (26 - 40 years) discerned deeper cultural systems through ritual practices. Lin (18/01/2025) observed, "The Qingming Festival (清明节) tomb visits... represent integral components of filialpiety systems". This group appreciated M's gesture of "using his grandmother's savings to purchase her luxurious burial plot" as embodying profound cultural respect that bridges living and ancestral relationships.

Middle-aged participants (41+ years) emphasized Confucian filial foundations. Wang (14/01/2025) stated, "The grandmother epitomizes traditional filial culture... reflecting descendants' duty to care for parents". They praised M's "exhausting effort to buy the fried fish his grandmother desired" as exemplifying action-oriented piety over verbal expressions, while

valuing ancestral rites like Qingming (清明节) ceremonies as cultural preservation mechanisms.

All groups concurred that the film authentically portrayed filial piety's multidimensional nature through age-specific lenses: adolescents focused on character arcs, working adults on cultural systems, and older respondents on foundational principles - demonstrating the film's cross-generational communicative efficacy.

Table 1
Generational Perspectives on Filial Piety in LAHN MAH

Category	Adolescents (10-25 years)	Working-age (26-40 years)	Middle-aged (41+ years)
Primary Focus	Character transformation	Cultural systems	Confucian foundations
Key Quote	M's anxiety showed his transformation (Lee)	Qingming visits represent filial systems (Lin)	Grandmother epitomizes tradition (Wang)
Ritual Emphasis	Technology-enabled practices (video calls)	Hybrid Thai-Chinese rituals	Traditional Chinese ceremonies
Daily Piety	Emotional care (accompanying elders)	Action-based respect (financial support)	Duty fulfillment (specific tasks)
Cultural Hybridity	Accept modern adaptations	Analyze synthesis mechanisms	Preserve core values

2.2 Comparative Views on Chinese-Thai Filial Culture

Analysis of audience perspectives revealed Adolescents recognized filial piety's modern adaptations, noting “While Thai-Chinese communities maintain filial traditions, their forms and degrees of practice vary” (Lee, 15/01/2025). They valued technology-enabled care (e.g., video

calls) alongside traditional rituals that “strengthen family bonds”, while acknowledging modernization challenges like geographical dispersion.

Working adults highlighted cultural roots, with Lin (18/01/2025) noting “We share Asian commonalities whether in China or Thailand”. They identified filial piety as “society’s tacit norm”, observing similar Chinese and Thai-Chinese tendencies toward action-based (versus verbal) expressions, alongside generational shifts toward “more cautious elder treatment”.

Middle-aged respondents affirmed core Confucian continuities: “The fundamental values remain identical whether in Thailand or China- respect, love, and parental care” (Wang, 14/01/2025). They noted the evolution from financial support to emotional companionship, exemplified by M “conversing with and comforting his lonely grandmother”, and recognized the film’s role in stimulating “emotional and cognitive reflection” about filial duties.

Key consensus points included: 1) continuity of Chinese filial culture in Thai-Chinese society, 2) traditional-modern hybridity, 3) cinema’s role in filial consciousness-raising, and 4) fundamental Chinese-Thai cultural similarities. However, each group’s distinct focus - digital adaptation (adolescents), cultural roots (working adults), or traditional principles (middle-aged)- revealed the dynamic complexity of filial piety in transnational contexts.

Discussion of Results

This study reveals that *LAHN MAH* transcends its role as mere entertainment, functioning as a cultural bridge between Chinese and Thai value systems. Particularly within the cultural exchange framework of the

Belt and Road Initiative, the film's portrayal of filial piety illuminates key intercultural commonalities as interpreted through generational lenses:

1. Adolescent viewers (10- 25 years) perceived the dynamic adaptation of filial piety in the digital age. As Lee (15/01/2025) observed, "Technology enables filial expression across distances", yet this group simultaneously valued traditional rituals. Their perspectives demonstrate the emerging hybridity between ancestral values and modern lifestyles.

2. Working-age respondents (26-40 years) interpreted the film through cultural preservation frameworks. Lin (18/01/2025) emphasized that "Chinese and Thai-Chinese similarities lie in action-oriented rather than verbal expressions of filial duty". Their focus on familial rituals as value-transmission mechanisms aligns with Jankrajangaeng and Phuetphum (2020) research on tradition maintenance in Thai-Chinese communities.

3. Middle-aged participants (41+ years) applied classic Confucian paradigms, with Wang (14/01/2025) asserting that "Filial piety constitutes a fundamental duty" - an interpretation that not only resonates with Lin's (2021) scholarship on Confucian philosophical foundations, but importantly extends beyond Chitwiboon & Tepsing's (2017) focus on ritual economics by uncovering deeper philosophical continuities underlying surface-level ritual adaptations.

The research confirms the cultural hybridity of Thai-Chinese filial piety, blending Confucian ethics with Thai Buddhist influences as documented by Sa-Nguanklang (2021). Significantly, the film serves as a negotiative space between tradition and modernity, particularly evident in three transformations that is The shift from material to emotional support,

The adaptation of rituals for urban lifestyles and The incorporation of technology in intergenerational relationships.

These findings significantly advance transnational scholarship on filial piety, a critical yet under-researched dimension in cross-cultural studies. The study makes three substantive contributions: first, it addresses a critical gap in media studies by examining contemporary cinematic representations of filial values; second, it develops practical frameworks for cultural preservation in an era of globalization, with particular relevance to strengthening Sino-Thai relations; and third, it demonstrates how the film serves as both a cultural mirror reflecting societal values and an innovative platform for intergenerational dialogue. This dual functionality positions cinema as a potential policy instrument for enhancing intercultural understanding among Belt and Road Initiative member states, while providing empirically grounded strategies for safeguarding traditional values amidst rapid modernization.

Recommendations

This study offers several practical suggestions worth considering. For educational purposes, films like *LAHN MAH* could be used as teaching materials to show real-life examples of filial piety and encourage intergenerational discussions. Filmmakers might want to portray filial piety in more relatable ways, blending traditional customs with modern lifestyles to help younger audiences connect with these values. Relevant organizations could support collaborative Thai-Chinese film productions that explore filial piety from contemporary perspectives, serving as cultural bridges. Future research could examine how Thai-Chinese communities in

different regions practice filial piety, and how modern technology affects family relationships.

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