

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE
IN THE SONG OF SONGS: READING WITH/INTO
A VIETNAMESE CHURCH CONTEXT

by

Thi Ly Tran

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degree of Doctor of Theology

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Australia

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I affirm that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The interrelation of the Bible texts with the culture of its readers has opened an important avenue for biblical interpretation in the Vietnamese context. This thesis began with a reading of the Song of Songs through Vietnamese eyes to discover the love language as found in the Song and convey it to the Vietnamese society and church.

As a book in the Bible, the Song is a dialogue between a man and a woman who show their passionate love relationship to each other through various terms. The book is a celebration of the joys of physical intimacy of the lovers, and invites readers to discover diverse expressions of their love relationship as studied in the first chapter of the thesis. The study affirms that the primary meaning of the Song is no more than a human love relationship and sexual desire.

However, a historical survey of interpretations of love in the Song, studied in Chapter Two shows that the Song has a rich interpretative tradition with diverse meanings throughout the past two thousand years. The traditional interpretation brings some significant understandings for a spiritual walk with God to the Vietnamese church, such as the love of God for his people or Christ for His church, or personal believers. At the same time, the study also shows that the traditional interpreters are unwilling to recognize the love relationship of the lovers in the Song and thus reject the primary meaning of the text. As discovered in Chapter One, the literal meaning allows the Vietnamese church to compare it with love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. Therefore, the study of Chapter Three discovers similarities through themes of love in which the lovers in both poetries share the same joys of human love and sexuality under various images. The similarities are a bridge to

bring together the love language of the Song in the Vietnamese cultural context, in the past and present.

Finally, the study in Chapter Four explores the love language in the Song in relation to the Vietnamese cultural context and interprets it contextually to seek the cultural theological implications and applications of the language in the present Vietnamese society and church. The exploration provides a good love-relationship paradigm for all lovers to enjoy love and understand its value, also to appreciate the love relationship as in God's design which is relevant to the real-life situations of the Vietnamese people. It also contributes important knowledge of how to interact directly with the biblical text in their own traditional culture for thousands of years.

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All glory belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ABBREVIATIONS

General Abbreviations

A.D. (Lat. <i>Anno Domini</i>)	in the year of our Lord
B.C.E., B.C.	before the Common (or Christian) Era, before Christ;
C.E.	Common Era
Cf. (Lat. <i>confer</i>)	compare
e.g. (Lat. <i>exempli gratia</i>)	for example
ed., eds.	editor, edited by, editors
i.e. (Lat. <i>id est</i>)	that is
ibid. (Lat. <i>ibidem</i>)	in the same place
idem, (Lat. <i>idem</i>)	the same (referring to the same person)
no. (Italian <i>numero</i>)	number
NXB (<i>Nhà Xuất Bản</i>)	Publisher
Sup	supplement
trans.	translator, translated by
v(v)	verse(s)
vol., vols.	volume, volumes

Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Ecc1	Ecclesiastes
Exod	Exodus	{ Song	Song of Songs
Lev	Leviticus	{ Cant	Canticles
Num	Numbers	Isa	Isaiah
Deut	Deuteronomy	Jer	Jeremiah
Josh	Joshua	Lam	Lamentations
Judg	Judges	Ezek	Ezekiel
1-2 Sam	1-2 Samuel	Dan	Daniel
1-2 Kgs	1-2 Kings	Hos	Hosea
2 Chron	2 Chronicles	Mic	Micah
Neh	Nehemiah	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Hab	Habakkuk
Ps(s)	Psalms	Hag	Haggai
Prov	Proverbs	Zech	Zechariah

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians
Rom	Romans	Phil	Philippians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Col	Colossians
Gal	Galatians	2 Tim	2 Timothy

Texts and Translations of the Bible

BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
CGKPV	<i>Các Giờ Kinh Phụng Vụ</i> (Liturgy of the Hours)
KJV	King James Version
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NVNB	New Vietnamese Bible
OVNB	Old Vietnamese Bible
REV	Revised English Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNK	Jewish Publication Society <i>Tanakh</i>

Versions

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Syr	Syriac
Tg	Targum
Vg	Vulgate

Other Works Cited

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AJT	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
BCTP	A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

- BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907.
- Bib* *Biblica*
- BibInt* *Biblical Interpretation*
- BST Bible Speaks Today
- BTB* *Biblical Theological Bulletin*
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CCA News* *Christian Conference of Asia News*
- DBI* *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Eds. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman. Downers Grove: Inter-varsity press, 1998.
- DBT* *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Ed. Xavier Leon-Dufour, S. J. New York: Desclee Company, 1967.
- DCH* *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Ed. David J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993-
- DOTTE* *Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Ed. Willem A. Vangemeren. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.
- DTIB* *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Ed. K. J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- EAPR* *East Asian Pastoral Review*
- EDB* *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
- EDBT* *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Ed. Walter A. Elwel. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996.
- EJ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 6 vols. Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972.
- EM *Ephemerides Mariologicae*
- GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Ed. E. Kautzsch. Revised and translated. A. E. Cowley, Oxford, 1910.
- HALOT* Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999.
- HBOT* *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*. Ed. Magne Sæbø. 3 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000.
- HCBD* *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- IB* *Interpreter's Bible*
- IDB* *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962; *sup*, ed. K. Crim. Nashville, 1976.
- ISBE* *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Ed. G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: 1979-1988.
- JAAR* *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>The Journal of Pastoral Theology</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Ed. L. E. Keck et al. 12vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-2002.
<i>NCBC</i>	<i>New Century Bible Commentary</i> , Grand Rapids and London
<i>NICOT</i>	<i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . Eds. R. K. Harrison and R. L.
<i>NIVAC</i>	<i>New International Version Application Commentary</i>
<i>NTDT</i>	<i>New Testament Dictionary of Theology</i> . Ed. Colin Brown. Exter: The Paternoster Press, 1976-
<i>NUBD</i>	<i>The New Unger's Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. 9 vols. plus index vol. Grand Rapids, 1964-76.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Eds. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. -J. Frag. Grand Rapids, 1974-
<i>TOTC</i>	<i>The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. Bruce, K Kaltke. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

Love has been an attractive and everlasting topic close to the heart of all. Millions of books, songs, poems, magazines, and films, both non-religious and religious, and in different languages, have been circulated on the subject of love. Love is also one of the main topics of the Bible. At least, the Bible reserves a whole book called “Song of Songs,” to talk about love. In the Hebrew Bible, the Song is placed in the third part, called *כתביו* (Writings) which includes books such as Daniel, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Five Scrolls (Megilloth) which are the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. In the LXX and modern translations, the Song is placed within the five poetic books of Wisdom such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

The Song of Songs of the Protestant Bible was translated into the Vietnamese language in 1926.¹ This translation belongs to the Protestant Church or the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) which was the work of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). The first missionaries in Vietnam were Robert A. Jaffray, Paul M. Hosler, and G. Lloyd who landed in 1911 in Tourane (Da Nang) where the C&MA spread to Hai Phong and Hanoi in the north, Saigon and My Tho in the south, and to the whole country including the tribal peoples.² A Bible school was established in 1921 in Tourane to train the Vietnamese leaders to preach the Gospel to the people in their own languages. The school was the most important contribution of the C&MA ministry and patterned after

¹ The Protestant Bible 1926 is called Phan Khoi’s version. There was the Catholic Bible translated in 1934 and called Cadman’s version.

² Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm Chức Vụ* (Forty six years of ministry) (Sài Gòn: NXB Tin Lành, 1970), 80-84.

Simpson's Missionary Training Institute in Nyack, New York.³ Gradually, the ECVN has become fully self-supporting, self-governing, and independent.

Beside the Song in the Protestant Bible, there is only one Vietnamese version of *Commentary on the Song of Solomon* - of Burrowes, who interprets the Song as "the love of Jesus."⁴ Yet, the Song has been seldom used in preaching and general teaching in the church. The reasons why this book is rarely spoken of in the church could be as follows.

First, the language, tone and imagery which appear in the Song such as kisses, embraces, breasts, navel, belly, legs, and waist are seen as taboo and seldom mentioned openly by Vietnamese Christians. Especially is this so, within the context of the Vietnamese Protestant Evangelical Church, where speaking of love in erotic language is deemed profane, considered sexually explicit. The reason is that many people think that speaking about human love or sexuality in the church could encourage teenagers or young people to discover aspects of sexual activity between men and women before getting married and opens the way for them to run into temptations of sex.⁵

Second, the commentary called "Chú Giải Nhã Ca của Sa-lô-môn" is a factor leading many church leaders who feel more comfortable with the allegorical reading of the Song to interpret the Song as the love of Christ and His church or the individual Christian. We cannot deny the fact that the traditional interpretation of the Song through the centuries focuses mainly on the spiritual meaning rather than the literal meaning.⁶ However, most scholars in the twentieth century interpret the Song as love poetry rather

³ Peter C. Phan and Violet James, "Vietnam," in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 878-880.

⁴ George Burrowes, *The Commentary on the Song of Solomon* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 7-12; The Commentary is translated into Vietnamese as "Chú Giải Nhã Ca của Sa-Lô-Môn" and published by Nhà Sách Tin Lành, 1967.

⁵ Đào Xuân Dũng, *Giáo Dục giới Tính Về sự Phát Triển Vị Thành Niên* (Sexual education of the development of minor) (Hà Nội: NXB Đại Học Quốc Gia, 2003), 12-13.

⁶ Cf. for example, Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), 89-229; Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 11-41; Tremper Longman, *The Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-47; Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 59-91; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2005), 73-86. These commentaries do not hold this view themselves but rather discuss it alongside other theories of understanding.

than spiritual meaning and understand the Song is nothing more than love poetry and its text is full of innuendo, and double meaning.⁷

Third, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the book because it is one of the most enigmatic in the Bible. There is a large number of rare words⁸ with uncertain meaning and can be only guessed in such a context as *בְּמִגְדַּל דָּוִד*; *בֵּית הַיַּיִן* (2:4); *לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת* and *שְׁלֵטִי* (4:4). Many words, phrases and wordplays in the Song are problematic to understand, which results in different translations such as *שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים!* (1:1); *לְסִסְתִּי בְּרִכְבִּי פָרְעָה* (1:9); *דָּגְלוּ* (2:4); *תּוֹכּוּ רְצוּף אֶהְבֶּה* (3:10); *לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי שְׂמִתָּנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמֵּי נְדָיִב:* (6:12); etc. In addition, it is often difficult to determine who the speaker of each poem in the Song is.

As love poetry, the Song gives a wonderful picture, in various scenes, of intimacy and longing in the relationship of the lovers. Both celebrate their love in joy, sometimes fall into moments of disappointment, and then rise to the climax of joy and satisfactions in love. The lovers show the excitement and pleasure of fulfillment in their sexual relationship which is the precious gift of God given to men and women to enjoy within marriage. In this way, this thesis will try to convey the message of the love relationship between a man and woman in the Song into the Vietnamese church context by reading the language of love of the Song from a Vietnamese point of view culturally and by celebrating one's ethnocentrism to show the worth of a Vietnamese reading that might not be the same as a Western reading.⁹ The Vietnamese reading is important and necessary because it will demonstrate a similarity between the love language of this

⁷ See the study of "The literal interpretation" in point 2.2 and "The principles of discovering the meaning of love in the Song" in point 2.3 of Chapter Two. See also Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *Song of Songs* (New York: United Bible Society, 1998), 4.

⁸ The words appear only once in the Bible called *hapax legomena*.

⁹ Craffert affirms that certain aspects of reading are inevitably ethnocentric, and rightly so. His argument would suggest that no special apology is needed for a Vietnamese reading of the Hebrew Bible (Pieter F. Craffert, "On New Testament Interpretation and Ethnocentrism," in *Ethnicity & the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 449-451). According to Minh, the Eastern values focus on human heartedness, noninterference, selflessness, enlightenment, compassion, and moderation which are different from the Western values of the enlightenment such as science, reason, organization, wealth, and technology (Marcel Doan Minh, "Christian Faith and Culture in Vietnam," *EAPR* 43 [2006]: 63).

biblical text and Vietnamese love language; hence show the relevance to contemporary Vietnamese life of studying the Song and draw out the significant of the theology and application of the language to the culture milieu of the Vietnamese Church. Such reading will build upon the studies employing Asian hermeneutics and theology, and also show how other Vietnamese readings are available.

Studying the Song with other literature in other contexts is not new. There are a number of studies on cross-cultural comparisons observed. For instance, Cooper presents a comparison between Mesopotamian love songs and the Song; Pope surveys the Song's many parallels to the Ancient Near Eastern literature, especially to the Egyptian and Sumerian; White and Fox study the relationships between the Egyptian love poetry and the Biblical Song; Mariaselvam compares the Song in its culture to the ancient Tamil love poems; Watson identifies the similarities and differences between the Song and the cultural variety of the ancient Near East; Garrett and Exum make comparisons of the Song with both Egyptian and Mesopotamian writings in the Ancient Near Eastern love poetry.¹⁰ Despite a large number of comparative studies of the Song and other literature, there have been, as far as I know, no studies on comparing the language of love of the Song with the language of love in Vietnamese literature.¹¹

The purpose of this study is to explore the biblical love language as found in the Song through examining terms of love in the Hebrew Bible and specifically within the

¹⁰ Jerrold S. Cooper, "New Cuneiform Parallels to the Song of Songs," *JBL* 90 (1971): 157-162; Pope (1977: 252-288); John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978); Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* (AnBib 118; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988); Wilfred G. E. Watson, "Some Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Song of Songs," in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed*, ed. J. Davies (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 253-271; Duane Garrett (2004), 47-57); and Exum (2005), 47-63. Furthermore, there a large number of comperative studies of Wisdom Literature and other literature such as in Hannibal Hamlim, *Psalms Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Mitchell Dahoo, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philosophy* (Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1963); and Harry Ranston, *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature* (London: Epwarth Press, 1925).

¹¹ Except an appendix about the comparison of Vietnamese proverbs with Prov. 23: 15-28. See in Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen, *Figlio mio, se il tuo cuore è saggio: Studio esetico-teologico del discorso paterno in Pro 23, 15-28* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2006), 329-333.

Song, surveying interpretations of love in the Song, then comparing these with Vietnamese literature and proposing cultural and theological implications and applications adapted for the Vietnamese society and church context. This thesis will not try to translate the Song into Vietnamese, or exegete the whole of the Song. It is, rather, limited to (1) exploring the meaning of love in the Song, and in its literary and cultural contexts through various phrase-level semantics of love (the study is limited to chosen verses in the expressions largely because of the appearance of particular terms of love); (2) studying traditional and modern interpretations to explore the fields of the meanings of love, especially focusing on the work of prominent interpreters; (3) providing a comparison of the love themes underlined in the Song with those of Vietnam literature; and (4) proposing the cultural and theological implications and applications of the Song.

The process of the study is conducted in four chapters and the texts of the Song based on the Hebrew Bible. For the methodology, I am using grammatical, textual, literary and historical criticisms to analyse the possible meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and particularly in the Song. With regard to a historical survey, I will examine various interpretations of love within the Song and assess the interpretations based on the study of Chapters One and Two. Then the study will continue to read the language of love in the Song in the Vietnamese context by comparing specific themes in the Song with those in Vietnamese literature which focuses specifically on folklore, classical poetry and the new poetry movement. Finally, the method of the study will also focus on cross-textual studies and arguments in the previous studies to show how the language of love in the Song is relevant to the society and church context in Vietnam.

In Chapter One, I will discover the meaning of love in the Song, by examining the meaning in the Hebrew Bible and the Song. In order to clarify the meaning in the Song, I will examine various terms of love in the Hebrew Bible such as the two important terms: אָהַב “to love” and חֶסֶד “kindness”; and other terms: רָחַם “to love/to have compassion,” הוּד “beloved, lover, uncle,” רֵעַ “companion,” יָדוּד “beloved,” and the verb חָשַׁק “be attached to, love” in three general aspects such as human love, human love for God, and divine love. Then I will also examine particular terms of love in the Song such as אָהַב,

דוֹדִי, and רַעֲיָתִי and its parallels as כַּלָּה “bride” and אָחֹתִי “my sister” and their meaning as they appear in different phrase-level semantics of love. The particular terms are examined in different expressions such as the term אָהָב through the intimacy and passion, insatiable desire, warnings, seeking and not finding, and the power of love of the two lovers, the term דוֹדִי through kisses and mutual belonging, and כַּלָּה, רַעֲיָתִי, “bride” and אָחֹתִי “my sister” through attraction of beauty, marriage, and the erotic and sensuous facility.

In Chapter Two, in order to find how the language of love in the Song should be understood in the Vietnamese Church context, I will review ‘the love’ in traditional interpretation and the natural interpretation of the Song. Regarding traditional interpretations which have been imbedded in the Vietnamese Protestant Evangelical Church, I will select prominent Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations of the Song. The traditional interpretations understand that love in the Song is not about passionate human love, but the love of God for his people, or of Jesus Christ and his church, or the individual believer. Then, in the literal interpretation I will review the precursors and contemporary literal interpretations of the Song. The literal interpretations understand the love of the Song naturally as appearing in the text which expresses a human love relationship between the woman and the man. Of the interpretations, the love poetry could be the best way to introduce the Song into the Vietnamese society and church context before reading on other levels of meaning. Thenceforth, I will suggest some principles to discover the language of love in the Song.

Therefore, to bring the language of love in the Song effectively into the cultural milieu of the Vietnamese church context, I will give some general observations of the love relationship in Vietnamese culture and literature. Then, I also underline some themes about love in the Song such as the nature imagery, lovesickness, the dialogue of the lovers, the heart and passion of love, and the signs of love, and compare them with the corresponding themes about love within Vietnamese literature, especially focusing on folklore, classical poetry and the new poetry movement. By doing so, it is hoped that similarities can be found between the language of love of the Song and the Vietnamese

literature. The similarities show that the language of love in the Song is close to that of the Vietnamese culture and literature, and shares the common milieu of the expression of love with Vietnamese people, even though there are also differences between them.

Finally, to show how the language of love found in the Song is relevant to the daily life of Vietnamese society and church, I will provide cultural and theological implications and applications in detail in Chapter Four. To do this, I will discuss the theological implications and applications of the Song in topics such as exclusive commitment, the erotic nature of the sexual love relationship, intimate relationship and warning, full realization of love, and beauties of love. The topics are chosen according to the study of themes about love between the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics in Chapter Three. The discussion will show the Song as a great message of love in which God has the purpose of bringing human beings a lifetime of pleasure, enjoyment and holiness, intended to bless and bring a man and woman into oneness. As lovers, their responsibility is to fulfill the purposes of life given by God through their marriage. The discussion also includes the Vietnamese Church which strongly holds the ideals of monogamy and sex within a life-long marriage as found in the Song. As a result, it is hoped that this will enable the people to understand the Song better, especially helping Vietnamese church leaders to teach and preach it meaningfully and also 'see the cultural impact' of the Song in Vietnamese culture.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEANING OF LOVE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND PARTICULARLY IN THE SONG OF SONGS

The word ‘love’ in English or ‘tình yêu’ in Vietnamese is used in general to show one’s longing or feeling toward persons or things which gives specific delight and satisfies. The meaning of ‘love’ or ‘tình yêu’ in both languages is described in various terms as liking, affection, adoration, attachment, friendship, fondness, passion, and feeling.¹² In the Hebrew Bible, the word ‘love’ also conveys very broad meanings in various terms. Both ‘love’ and ‘tình yêu’ may represent one of the various Hebrew terms.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and in the Song in its biblical, literary and cultural contexts. For my examination of the meaning of love in this chapter, I am taking an exegetical approach. Hence, I am using grammatical and textual criticism to study the etymology of special terms relating to the meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and the Song. I am also using historical criticism if it affects the examination. This chapter does not explore the entire meaning or concept of love in the Hebrew Bible or exegete the whole chapters of the Song. It is rather limited to exploring the meaning of particular terms of love in the Hebrew Bible including the Wisdom Literature and the Song, especially focusing on phrase-level semantics of love in which I will study the vocabulary of specifically chosen texts in the Song in its original language (the Hebrew text).

¹² Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Love (OT),” in *ABD*, vol. 4 (1992), 375.

1.1 Love in the Hebrew Bible – Semantic Field

Love in the Hebrew Bible is expressed by various shades of meanings and by various terms. The most important term is the verb אָהַב “to love” and the second in importance is the noun חֶסֶד “kindness,”¹³ used frequently in the Hebrew Bible. Next, another parallel is the denominative verb רָחַם “to love/to have compassion.”¹⁴ Finally, there are other terms such as the nouns הוֹר “beloved, lover, uncle,” רֵעַ “companion,” and the adjective יָדוּר “beloved” used less commonly in the Hebrew Bible; and the verb חָשַׁק “be attached to, love” is used infrequently.¹⁵

The meaning of love in various terms in the Hebrew Bible basically refers to the quality of relationship between persons in devotion, loyalty, intimate knowledge and responsibility,¹⁶ but they are not entirely synonymous.¹⁷ Therefore, each term is studied separately and regarding the first two important terms as אָהַב and חֶסֶד including the verb חָשַׁק, each term can be understood in three general expressions such as human love; human love for God; and divine love.

1.1.1 אָהַב “to love”

The term אָהַב “to love” and its cognate nouns occur about 251 times in all types of literature in the Hebrew Bible and are used in all periods. The term אָהַב occurs 231 times in qal and sometimes meaning “friend,” once in niph'al participle, and 16 times in piel participle meaning “paramour,” and twice as אֲהַבִּים (Hos 8:9; Prov 5:19), and once as אֲהַבִּים (Prov 7:18).¹⁸ There are other substantive forms also expressed as אֲהַבָּה which

¹³ The noun חֶסֶד is translated in various terms in English, but the most appropriate translation of it is “grace, goodness, kindness, or loyalty.” H. J. Zobel, “חֶסֶד *hesed* kindness,” in *TDOT*, vol. 5 (1986), 51.

¹⁴ *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, “רָחַם,” (2146); *BDB*, “רָחַם,” 933b.

¹⁵ There is another synonymous term as the verb עָנַב which expresses inordinate extreme affection of sensual love in Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:5, 7-9, 12, 16, 20.

¹⁶ E. M. Good, “Love in the OT,” in *IDB*, vol. 2 (1989), 168.

¹⁷ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 375.

¹⁸ E. Jenni, “אָהַב *hb* to love,” in *TLOT*, vol. 1 (1997), 46.

occurs 50 times, אָהַב twice, and אֶהֱבֶה “pleasure of love” twice.¹⁹ However, the original meaning of the term is uncertain.²⁰

According to Wallis’ statement, the breadth of meaning and the linked broad dominance of the term אָהַב used in the Hebrew Bible and the emotional feeling of אָהַב “to love” contrasting with שָׂנֵא “to hate,” occur quite regularly, more than 30 times in the Hebrew Bible²¹ which determine the meaning of אָהַב as similar to English “to love.”²² The description and implications are not restricted to either sexual love or non-sexual love.²³ Therefore, the term אָהַב meaning “to love” is a general term understood in all senses,²⁴ the specific and non-specific,²⁵ which can be expressed in three general meanings - as human love, human love for God, and God’s love.

1.1.1.1 Human love

The source of love is God, whether it is used toward God or toward fellow humans.²⁶ In the sense of human love, the term אָהַב is used to refer to sexual love and to the marital relationship; to partiality of parents and affection among friends; to socio-ethical behavior of the community; and to love for neighbors.²⁷

¹⁹ Gerhard Wallis, “אָהַב,” in *TDOT*, vol. 1 (1974), 102. *HALOT*, אֶהֱבֶה “pleasure of love,” 18.

²⁰ According to Thomas, the term אָהַב is assumed from the Arabic root *habba* meaning “to blow, breathe heavily, to be excited” (D. W. Thomas, “The Root אֶהֱבֶה love in Hebrew Bible,” *ZAW* 57 [1939]: 57-64). On the other hand, Driver explains that אֶהֱבֶה in Hos 11:4 and the Song 3:10 is from an Arabic root *ihab* meaning “skin, raw leather” (G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Notes on ‘Song of Songs and Lamentations’” in *Festschrift A. Bertholet*, ed. Walter Baumgartner [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950], 135). White also links the verb root אָהַב to the Ugaritic root אֶהֱבֶה meaning “leather” and argues that this meaning fits well in the context of the Song 3:10 by the evidence of the noun in Northwest Semitic lexicography (White, *Language of Love*, 45). But, Wallis states that “Accordingly, an affectionate feeling in the physical really was applied to the emotional stimulation which produced it. If this supposition is correct, the emotional experience is the germ cell for the development of the concept of אֶהֱבֶה” (Wallis, “אָהַב,” 102).

²¹ For example, Gen 29:31f; 37:4; Exod 20:5f; Lev 19:17f; Deut 5:9f; etc.

²² Jenni, “אָהַב,” 47.

²³ Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and ‘Sexuality’ in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Brill, 1997), 13.

²⁴ Bernard V. Brady, *Christian Love* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 1.

²⁵ Brenner, *Intercourse of Knowledge*, 13.

²⁶ W. Evans, “Love,” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, (5271).

²⁷ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 107, 112.

The term אָהַב is used normally to express the desire or attraction of a man and a woman which ends in marriage, or sometimes with sexual encounter in a positive sense.²⁸ For example, in marriage, Isaac's love for Rebekah (Gen 24:67); Jacob's love for Rachel (Gen 29:18, 20, 30); Michal's love for David (1 Sam 18:20). The motif of marital love is seen in Hos 1:2, throughout Hos 2, 3 and in Hos 5:7.²⁹ However, the love in Hosea is used as a marriage metaphor to describe the relationship between YHWH and Israel with YHWH as the subject of אָהַב (3:1; 9:15; 11:1; 14:5).³⁰

In Wisdom Literature, the term אָהַב occurs in the erotic sense to express a description of the beloved's love in Prov 5:19, the time which a man enjoys with his wife whom he loves (Eccl 9:9).³¹ As could be expected, it occurs 18 times in the Song to refer to sexual love of the lovers.³² The term אָהַב in the Song is also used to refer to sexual love and expression of physical desire in a positive sense,³³ and the woman is more frequently the subject and sometimes also the object of אָהַב.³⁴

In a family set up, the term אָהַב refers to personal relationships and focus on affection, care, and delight such as a husband's love for his wife (1 Sam 1:5); the love of father or mother for a child (Gen 22:2; 25:28); love of daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law (Ruth 4:15).³⁵ It is used for love between human beings: David is loved by Saul (1 Sam 16:21), Saul's servants (1 Sam 18:22), all Israel and Judah (1 Sam 18:16, 28), and by Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1, 3; 20:17; 2 Sam 1:26).

In social relationships, the term אָהַב is used to describe the relationship between the generations; master and servant; and the relationship of persons in emotional

²⁸ Sakenfeld, "Love," 376.

²⁹ Bernhard Oestreich, *Metaphors and Similes for Yahweh in Hosea 14:2-9 (1-8)* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1997), 91.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Jenni, "אָהַב," 48.

³² Such as the Song 1:3, 4, 7; 2:4, 5, 7; 3:1; 2; 3; 4; 5, 10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4, 6, 7 (twice).

³³ Wallis, "אָהַב," 107-108. I will analyse more in details this affirmation in point 1.2 of this chapter.

³⁴ But elsewhere in Hebrew Bible, males are certainly the more frequent subjects of אָהַב and females are designated mostly as love objects or recipients, especially in the areas of sexual activity (see in Brenner, *Intercourse of Knowledge*, 18, 29).

³⁵ Sakenfeld, "Love," 376.

feeling.³⁶ For example, the personal relationship of master and servant (אָהַבְתִּי אֶת־אֲדֹנָי) “I love my master” in Exod 21:5; Deut 15:16); Saul loves David greatly (1 Sam 16:21); the friendship of Jonathan and David (1 Sam 20:17); Abraham has a particularly deep love for Isaac (Gen 37:3).

The term is also used as a description of community relationships in a more general sense in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature.³⁷ For example, Job’s intimate friends whom he loves have turned away from him (Job 19:19); the psalmist complains that YHWH takes away his companions and loved ones (Ps 88:19); Proverbs mentions that the wise man loves the one who reproves him (Prov 9:8) and loves discipline (Prov 12.1); the Preacher in Ecclesiastes mentions that there is a time to love and a time to hate (Eccl 3:8), people cannot know whether love or hate awaits them (Eccl 9:1), and love and hate have long since perished (9:6).

Finally, the term אָהַב is used to refer to love for neighbor and love for enemies. There are passages which require the people to love their neighbor וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ “but love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18),³⁸ and love a stranger, considering the stranger as a native Israelite and אָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כְּמוֹךָ “love him as yourself” (Lev 19:34) or וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר “And you also love the stranger” (Deut 10:19). Love of neighbor and stranger is rarely mentioned, but Israel’s tradition strongly emphasises practical action to others who are weak and disadvantaged,³⁹ and it is not an act of humanitarianism.⁴⁰

1.1.1.2 Human love for God

There are a number of texts commanding Israel to love God, especially in Deuteronomy which shows that the meaning of love is based on the knowledge of God. Deuteronomy depicts God’s relationship to the people as a father to his children. God has cared for

³⁶ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 109.

³⁷ Jenni, “אָהַב,” 49.

³⁸ In the NT, Jesus cites Duet 6:5 and Lev 19:18 to require the Jew to love God along with to love their neighbor (Mark 12:29-31 [Matt 22:37-39; Luke 10:12]).

³⁹ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 377.

⁴⁰ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 111.

Israel's forefathers from the time of the patriarchs. He has brought his people out from Egypt to the promised land and given them fruitfulness. God desires his people to love him alone and demands of them "and you shall love (וְאַהַבְתֶּם) the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6:5). Love here is not only an emotional feeling but also involves obedience to God's commandments, serving and showing reverence of God, and being loyal to him alone (Deut 10:12; 11:1, 22; 30:16).⁴¹ The Deuteronomist is a teacher who instructs Israel to keep, to obey and to love God's commandments in order for Israel to live in blessing in the promised land and multiply (Deut 5:10; 7:9; cf. Pss 119:47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167).⁴² Israel is also instructed to serve God faithfully (Deut 10:12; 11:13), to obey his voice (Deut 30:20), and to walk in his way (Deut 11:12; 19:9). In Deuteronomy, the concept of love requires Israel's responsibility and obedience to God's commandments. God takes the first step to show his love. In addition, the term אַהֲבָה is extended to show the people's love to God through Jerusalem, YHWH's sanctuary, Zion (Isa 66:10; Lam 1:2; Ps 122:6); or for God's name (Pss 5:11; 69:36; 119:132).⁴³

Thus, the term אַהֲבָה is used in human love for God, not as a matter of intimate devotion, but as obedience to God's commandments to love and serve God and also to love others in terms of practical actions rather than of personal feeling.⁴⁴

1.1.1.3 Divine love

The term אַהֲבָה and its cognates are used to describe God's love for his people or for an individual and is mentioned less than 25 times in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁵ The meaning of God's love is an important aspect of the OT, especially related to the term חֶסֶד which will be studied later. In the context of the divine love and marriage metaphor, אַהֲבָה is

⁴¹ Sakenfeld, "Love," 376.

⁴² Wallis, "אַהֲבָה," 115.

⁴³ Ibid., 105-106.

⁴⁴ Sakenfeld, "Love," 377.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

translated chiefly in Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.⁴⁶ There are a number of examples of God's love to his chosen people through redemption from their enemies as follows.

Hosea gives a new understanding of God's love to his people and of their response to his love through his own marriage which is understood as a type of a marital bond between God and his people.⁴⁷ In this understanding, Hosea expresses the imagery of the love of God by using for the first time the term אָהַב as the love between husband and wife in 3:1. The purpose here is not to study אָהַב through the book of Hosea, but rather to focus on a few points to see how Hosea presents God's love through the marriage metaphor. Examples are God's frustration because Israel always pursues other "lovers" (מְאַהֲבִים) as an unfaithful wife rather than God the one who truly loves.⁴⁸ Therefore, there are several complaints and accusations of the husband, Hosea, against his unfaithful wife (2:4, 7, 9, 15).⁴⁹ Other lovers of Israel are other gods associated with the worship of Canaanite fertility deities which present the imagery of the adultery and harlotry of Israel.⁵⁰ Hosea mentions hired "lovers" (אַהֲבִים) in 8:9 as other nations which are sources of military help to replace the help of God. The imagery of marital unfaithfulness continues to be expressed by Israel who departs from God, and the result is God's judgment on this infidelity (9:10). However, God's love is no longer shown to Israel because of Israel's infidelity, expressed as that of an unfaithful son to his father in 9:15. Finally it is God's love which restores the family relationship of God to his people. God loved Israel when he was a child (11:1), binds him with love (11:4), and loves him generously without any condition (Hos 14:5; Jer 31:1).

Therefore, the term אָהַב in Hosea has a wider range meaning than just "to love" in the English. It denotes not only the senses of "love romantically, prefer/like" but also

⁴⁶ Brenner, *Intercourse of Knowledge*, 14.

⁴⁷ Wallis, "אָהַב," 113.

⁴⁸ T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. A. Brenner, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 151-154.

⁴⁹ Oestreich, *Metaphors and Similes*, 96.

⁵⁰ Sakenfeld, "Love," 377.

“do acts of love for,” “be loyal/compassionate towards” and even “be allied with.”⁵¹ It involves different aspects of love such as a sexual love relationship, parental love, human social love, and God’s love.⁵²

After Hosea’s time, Jeremiah also expresses God’s love through the imagery of marriage with Israel as a bride who has followed her husband faithfully through the desert (Jer 2:2). But after entering the promised land of Canaan, Israel is accused of marital unfaithfulness because she goes after other lovers (2:20, 23, 25; 30:14). Israel betrays God in many ways, from bowing down as a prostitute on every high hill and under a spreading tree (2:20; 3:6, 13). Indeed, Israel’s false love is shown by her sexual desire for the world with the god of fruitfulness but not by her grateful submission to and love for God, and by acceptance of the star cult (8:2) and serving the queen of heaven (7:18; 19:13; 44:17).⁵³ Indeed, Israel deserves to bring devastation upon herself. But, God cannot forget his people forever. Therefore, he draws Ephraim to him again by his everlasting love. Thus, Jeremiah also uses the marriage metaphor to express the love of God to his people, but he describes Israel as a bride who is newly married to YHWH (2:2).⁵⁴

Ezekiel also describes God’s love to his unfaithful people through the marriage metaphor and expresses it in a harsh voice (Ezek 16; 23).⁵⁵ The people have turned away from God and forgotten what God has done for them, they have failed to keep the marriage to their Lord pure, and have submitted themselves to other lovers as a prostitute (Ezek 16:33, 36-37; 23:5, 9, 22).⁵⁶ God’s love in Ezekiel is shown to the people, Israel, by many ways as saving and providing for her abundantly, but she remains unfaithful to him. Therefore, God will bring disaster upon them.

⁵¹ Douglass Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 65. According to Oestreich, אֶהֱבֶה in Hosea means “commitment and dedication, which is expressed in decisions and actions even in incurring expenses” (see in Oestreich, *Metaphors and Similes*, 103).

⁵² Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 65.

⁵³ Wallis, “אֶהֱבֶה,” 114.

⁵⁴ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubledat: 1999), 252.

⁵⁵ Wallis, “אֶהֱבֶה,” 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; see also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapter 1-24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 13.

In short, there are specific passages in the Hebrew Bible as discussed above⁵⁷ that use the marriage metaphor to illustrate the love relationship between God and his people. In the metaphor, the husband represents God and the wife represents his people, Israel. God's love is described with a strong emotional component in Hosea through the redemption is essential to the object of love. And there is at least a hint of contract in the covenantal requirements.⁵⁸ The gracious characteristic of God is seen strongly through Israel's history.

In addition, it is necessary to study אָהַב in the LXX which describes various expressions in four terms such as ἀγαπάω, στοργή, *erōs*⁵⁹ and φιλέω.⁶⁰ The first, ἀγάπη is a noun meaning “love (primarily of Christian love); concern, interest; a sacred meal shared by the early church.”⁶¹ Its verb is ἀγαπάω “to love; one's love; long for; desire; place first in one's affection” and its verbal adjective is ἀγαπητός “beloved, dear one.”⁶² While ἀγάπη is pure and self-giving love, *erōs* is love of a thing for one's own fulfillment, “acquisitive desire, appetite which, as such, strives to obtain advantages.”⁶³ In the LXX, the noun ἀγάπη “love” is used to translate אָהַב in an overwhelming majority cases in the OT,⁶⁴ and its verb ἀγαπάω is used more frequently to translate אָהַב than the noun ἀγάπη, to refer to both persons and things and also to relationships with each other, and God's love to his people.⁶⁵ For example, אָהַב is translated as ἀγάπη in 2 Sam 13:15; Jer 2:2; Song 2:4, 5, 7; 3:5, 10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4, 7; Eccl 9:1; or ἀγάπησιν in 2 Sam 1:26; (Ps 109:5; Jer 2:33; 31:3 [LXX 38:3]; Hos 11:4.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ And other passages as Deut 32:19; Hos 2:16; 11:1; Jer 3:19; 31:32; Isa 42:14; 62:4; Ezek 16:8, 33; etc.

⁵⁸ Good, “Love,” 166.

⁵⁹ Its ancient Greek is ἔρως.

⁶⁰ W. Günther and H. Link, “Love: ἀγαπάω,” in *NTDT*, vol. 2 (1976), 538.

⁶¹ *UBS* Lexicon, 28.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 27, 29.

⁶³ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1953), 212.

⁶⁴ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 103.

⁶⁵ Gunther and Link, “Love: ἀγαπάω,” 539.

⁶⁶ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 103.

Regarding the next three terms, *στοργή* means love in the sense of affection, especially of parents and children;⁶⁷ *erōs* means “love; love for a thing; desire for it; the god of love,”⁶⁸ and even though *erōs* is frequently used to refer to sexual passion it occurs only twice in the LXX at Prov 7:18 and 24:26. The verb *φιλέω* means “love; have deep feeling for love; like (to do something); kiss.”⁶⁹ The verb and its cognates are used to translate the cognates of the term **אַהֲבָה** in special cases. For example, Gen 27:9 (cf. 27:14) refers to an inner affection for some tasty food; Isa 56:10 refers to sleep; Prov 8:17 and 29:3 refer to Wisdom; etc.⁷⁰ *Φίλος* is used to translate **חֵן** to describe the friendly relationships between persons such as in Jer 20:4, 6; Pss 38:12; 88:19; Prov 14:20.

However, it is clear that in the LXX, the Hebrew words are built from the term **אַהֲבָה** which is translated by forms of *ἀγαπάω* but also sometimes is distinguished by the use of *φιλέω*, *στοργή*, and *erōs* in Greek depending on context.⁷¹ The study of the noun **חֵן** shows that it refers not only to self-giving, non-sensual ‘love,’ but is also a word filled with all the Hebrew concepts of passion, sexual attraction, friendship, obedience, loyalty, duty, and commitment to the other person.⁷²

Summing up, the term **אַהֲבָה** “to love” has various usages and intensities of meaning in the Hebrew Bible. It is “to love,” used of persons or God to express an eager desire for one another in different degrees, situations, and relationships such as love between husband and wife, parents and children, siblings, relatives, friends, human love for God and neighbors, and God’s love for humankind.

⁶⁷ *φιλόστοργος*, *φιλόστοργον* (*φίλος*, and *στοργή* (Rom 12:10) the mutual love of parents and children; also of husbands and wives) cited in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon 5591, “*φιλόστοργος*”.

⁶⁸ Gunther and Link, “Love: *ἀγαπάω*,” 539; and see also in Liddell-Scott Lexicon, 16513.

⁶⁹ *UBS* Lexicon, 6382, 6399, 6388, 6383.

⁷⁰ Wallis, “**חֵן**,” 103.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 63.

1.1.2 חֶסֶד “kindness”

The noun חֶסֶד occurs in the Hebrew Bible 245 times, mostly in the singular and positive sense. It is found in Psalms 127 times, and also in 26 other books in the Hebrew Bible.⁷³ It does not occur in 12 books of the OT,⁷⁴ among which is the Song. Most of the occurrences of חֶסֶד are nouns with a positive suffix. For example, the suffix refers to Sarah as חֶסֶדְךָ “your love” or “your kindness” (Gen 20:13); to a man as חֶסֶדוֹ “his kindness” (Prov 20:6). The noun חֶסֶד is found only 16 times with the definite article which is considered a rule in referring to a certain specific expression of חֶסֶד in the context such as הַחֶסֶד (Ps 130:7; Deut 7:9, 12).⁷⁵ The adjective חֲסִיד is usually translated as “faithful, godly” and used 22 times in the OT to describe the one who practises חֶסֶד.⁷⁶ Glueck explains that the noun חֶסֶד is possibly derived from the Arabic root *ḥašada* to mean “to band together in order to render someone assistance.”⁷⁷ However, it is hard to draw a conclusion from this explanation and the etymology is obscure because of the change of ס (s) to š.

Even though חֶסֶד is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible, it is difficult to convey its precise meaning in one English word such as “kindness,” because חֶסֶד serves several shades of meaning such as “it is active, social, and enduring.”⁷⁸ Therefore, there are many English words used to translate חֶסֶד such as “grace, goodness, kindness or loving kindness, mercy, loyalty, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, faithfulness.”⁷⁹ The usage

⁷³ H. J. Stoebe, “חֶסֶד *ḥesed* kindness,” in *TLOT*, vol. 2 (1997), 449.

⁷⁴ Such as, Leviticus, 2 Kings, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi (H. J. Zobel, “חֶסֶד *ḥesed* kindness,” in *TDOT*, vol. 5 [1986], 45).

⁷⁵ Zobel, “חֶסֶד *ḥesed* kindness,” 46.

⁷⁶ For example, 1 Sam 2:9; 2 Sam 22:26; Ps 16:10; See also Stoebe, “חֶסֶד,” 462; *HALOT*, “חֲסִיד,” 337; and *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, חֲסִידָה (*ḥāsīdâ*) stork, (698c).

⁷⁷ Nelson Glueck, *Ḥesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk and Gerald A. Larue, ed. Elias L. Epstein (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 106.

⁷⁸ Zobel, “חֶסֶד,” 44-64.

⁷⁹ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 377.

of **חֶסֶד** is profound, diverse and sometimes very complicated in passages in the OT.⁸⁰ However, there are also the three general meanings of **חֶסֶד** studied as follows.

1.1.2.1 Human **חֶסֶד**

The term **חֶסֶד** is used in various stories of the OT prose narrative to express personal relationships, usually in a family, social relationships and in political relationship.⁸¹

The term **חֶסֶד** often goes with **עָשָׂה** “to do” and **עִם** “with” and almost half of its occurrences express aspects of human relationship.⁸² The expression of this formula can be recognized through relationships such as when Abraham asks his wife, Sarah, to render **חֶסֶד** to him (Gen 20:13); Abraham’s servant asks the family of Nahor, Abraham’s brother,⁸³ whether they are willing to render **חֶסֶד** to his master, Abraham (Gen 24:49); the mutual relationship of host and guest as Rahab shows her **חֶסֶד** to Joshua’s spies who are lodged in Rahab’s house (Josh 2:12, 14); etc. In addition, there are elements of usage of **חֶסֶד** such as rendering needed assistance, and all the elements are based on a free moral decision and commitment to the needy person.⁸⁴

In social relationships and usually in political relationships **חֶסֶד** is required to show non-intimate relationships. For example, Joseph asks the Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer to remember him and show him **חֶסֶד** when all goes well (Gen 40:14); David requests Solomon to show **חֶסֶד** forever to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead (1 Kgs 2:7); David’s relationship with Jonathan (1 Sam 20:8, 14-15; 2 Sam 9:1, 3, 7) in which **חֶסֶד** is used with **אַהֲבָה** to refer to both the personal and the political dimensions of the relationship between the two men; and in 1 Sam 18, David and Jonathan enter into a covenant relationship in which Jonathan shows **חֶסֶד** to David by telling David of Saul’s murderous plans and David also shows his **חֶסֶד** to Jonathan by bringing Jonathan’s son

⁸⁰ The noun is often used with other terms to express various aspects of love and also depends on each context in which the noun occurs to define the meaning of each aspect.

⁸¹ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 378.

⁸² Zobel, “חֶסֶד,” 46.

⁸³ Cf. Gen 24:15, 47-48.

⁸⁴ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 378.

Mephibosheth to live in the royal court.⁸⁵ In addition, חֶסֶד is used by a powerful person towards a less powerful person, e.g., 2 Sam 2:5 which describes David asking the men of Jabesh-gilead to demonstrate the חֶסֶד in their burial of Saul.⁸⁶

In Wisdom Literature, חֶסֶד is also used in the same profane manner as in Job and Proverbs. For example, there is usage of חֶסֶד (Job 6:14) in a regular human manner which one must practise toward friends and followers as the required condition to show his fear of God.⁸⁷ Proverbs praises the clever wife for she speaks with תּוֹרַת־חֶסֶד “the law of kindness” (Prov 31:26), אִישׁ חֶסֶד “the kind man” is contrary to אִכְזָרִי “a cruel man and women” (Prov 11:17). חֶסֶד is rarely used for human behavior in Psalms, the only usage being that the righteous individual should show kindness, with no evil doing as in Ps 141:5.⁸⁸

Therefore, a reason that חֶסֶד is not used in the Song is that in a personal relationship חֶסֶד does not refer to sexual or emotional love as אֶהְבֵּהּ which is used in the Song to show various expressions of love of the lovers.⁸⁹ But חֶסֶד refers to acts or aspects of love and usually involves commitment of some sort, whether marital, familial or political such as mercy, kindness, loyalty, etc., to one another. Moreover, the aspects of love of חֶסֶד are considered as moral requirements by God which must be practised in the daily life of a person.⁹⁰

1.1.2.2 Human חֶסֶד for God

The term חֶסֶד in religious usage is limited to the relationships of humans to God and neighbor. God’s חֶסֶד requires people to live חֶסֶד, as Sakenfeld states “from an OT point of view any human loyalty, kindness, love, or mercy, is rooted ultimately in the loyalty,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 157; England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 262.

⁸⁷ Stoebe, “חֶסֶד,” 456.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The expressions of love will be studied in part two of this chapter.

⁹⁰ Zobel, “חֶסֶד,” 50.

kindness, love, and mercy of God.”⁹¹ For example, a powerful description of **חֶסֶד** about the relationship among Israel and toward God is in Hosea. Israel shows **אֵין־חֶסֶד** “no loyalty” or no knowledge of God in the land (Hos 4:1). Her **חֶסֶד** “loyalty” is thin and temporary like the morning mist or the early dew (Hos 6:4) which contrasts to God’s desire (Hos 6:6).⁹² Therefore, **חֶסֶד** in Hosea is used as a demand in practising loyalty and righteousness; it is “the true expression of genuine religiosity.”⁹³ In Jer 2:2-3, **חֶסֶד** describes the loyalty of Israel following God in the wilderness, the place of trials, and she becomes the first fruit of God’s harvest and enjoys his protection. The usage of **חֶסֶד** here expresses that when God’s people practise it they will receive God’s commendation.

In Wisdom Literature, Prov 3:3-4 states that whoever practises **חֶסֶד** is supported by God and man and whoever practises the moral and religious obligations will be granted blessings. God’s **חֶסֶד** places a person in a new relationship with others ensuring the practise of righteousness and justice, kindness and mercy.⁹⁴

Glueck argues that **חֶסֶד** becomes the ethos of certain groups in reciprocal relationships of rights and duties to one another and this ethos is pleasing to God.⁹⁵ It is right for the people to show their **חֶסֶד** as a response to God’s **חֶסֶד**. However, Sakenfeld mentions that it is vital for one to help people in need out of his own freedom and willingness which is central to all the texts.⁹⁶ Therefore, the usage of **חֶסֶד** in the OT expresses not only mutual obligation to one another, but also the freedom and willingness of decision because God’s **חֶסֶד** is so important to his people and humankind.

1.1.2.3 Divine **חֶסֶד**

The noun **חֶסֶד** is used as a central term to express God’s relationship to Israel as recipients of God’s **חֶסֶד** in a covenant relationship in which God supplies all the needs of his people

⁹¹ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 379.

⁹² Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 109.

⁹³ Glueck, *Hesed*, 59.

⁹⁴ Zobel, “**חֶסֶד**,” 63.

⁹⁵ Glueck, *Hesed*, 56.

⁹⁶ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 380.

freely.⁹⁷ חֶסֶד is acts of love as well as the attribute of God,⁹⁸ and his חֶסֶד is shown to the Patriarchs, David and his house, to his people, and to his community.

To the Patriarchs, God's חֶסֶד to Abraham is asked for and expected by Abraham's servant because of the special relationship of God and Abraham (Gen 24:12, 14, 27);⁹⁹ God's חֶסֶד is in parallel with אֱמוּנָה and shows "faithfulness" toward Jacob and Israel (Ps 98:3). To David's house, God's promise is to show his חֶסֶד (2 Sam 7:14-16; Ps 89:29); God's חֶסֶד is identified with his בְּרִית "covenant" to David's house (Ps 89:29);¹⁰⁰ God grants his חֶסֶד to David because he was walking before God in loyalty, righteousness and uprightness (1 Kgs 3:6).¹⁰¹ To God's people, his חֶסֶד is granted to those who fear him and prove their loyalty to the covenant,¹⁰² to those who are loyal again after their defection, the passages in Hos 2; Isa 54; and Jer 16 describe how God desires for his people to be united with him in a new marriage after the people confess their sins.¹⁰³ To God's community, those who wish to gain God's חֶסֶד have to acknowledge him (Jer 9:24), for the king trusts in the Lord and will not waver (Ps 21:8), because of God's חֶסֶד.

In addition, God's חֶסֶד is expressed in formulas in various passages such as וַעֲשֵׂה-חֶסֶד "and show steadfast love!" (Gen 24:12, 14; cf. Ruth 1:8), חֶסֶד is used with עָשָׂה "to do" and לְ "to" (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10); there is a broad usage of YHWH as the subject and חֶסֶד as object (Mic 7:20; Jer 31:3; Ps 143:8) or YHWH's חֶסֶד as the object of human action (Pss 33:18; 147:11; 107:43).¹⁰⁴ In each context, God's חֶסֶד shows different aspects of love and different meanings as "life, care, harvest, salvation, justice, etc.," (Job 10:12; Pss 103:4; 119:88, 159).

⁹⁷ Ibid, 378.

⁹⁸ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, "חֶסֶד (ḥāsîdâ) stork," (698c).

⁹⁹ Glueck, *Hesed*, 71.

¹⁰⁰ Glueck mentions a pair of חֶסֶד and בְּרִית "Steadfast love" and "covenant," is used several times in the OT as Deut 7:9, 12; 1 Kgs 8:23; 2 Chron 6:14; etc., which express God's covenant, that He is willing to forgive his rebellious people when they return to Him, and His חֶסֶד is eternal. However, the usage of the pair is not common and debated by Zobel, "חֶסֶד," 52-53, and Stoebe, "חֶסֶד," 450. There are usages of חֶסֶד together with other nouns such as רַחֲמִים "mercy," אֱמֶת "truth," etc.

¹⁰¹ Sakenfeld, "Love," 379.

¹⁰² For example, Exod 20:6; Pss 25:10; 103:17-18; 26:3; 119:159; etc.

¹⁰³ Glueck, *Hesed*, 82-88.

¹⁰⁴ Zobel, "חֶסֶד," 54, 56.

Summing up, the noun **חֶסֶד** is used frequently as the object of the verb **עָשָׂה** “to do” conveyed in various meanings. The noun is used to refer to personal relationships as family, social and political, but never refers to sexual relationships. It is also used to show human loyalty to God and human kindness to a neighbour. However, it is often used as a crucial term to refer to God’s kindness, faithfulness, or steadfast love to Israel, his people, especially to sinners, and is more frequently associated with forgiveness. **חֶסֶד** is used in the Hebrew Bible to show that it is a characteristic of God rather than of human beings and rooted in the divine nature to express who God is,¹⁰⁵ which may be the reason the author of the Song does not want to use **חֶסֶד**. The usage of **אַהֲבָה** is able to convey better meanings of the love relationship between lovers. Perhaps, it is a deliberate avoidance of **חֶסֶד** which shows that the Song does not connote a very broad meaning of love or is not more religiously oriented, but it expresses the sexual love relationship between a man and a woman.

1.1.3 **רָחַם** “love/to have compassion”

The denominative verb **רָחַם** occurs 49 times in the Hebrew Bible, 42 times in the piel as **רָחַם** “to greet someone with love” and four-fifths of all these refer to God as subject; once in qal as **רָחַם** “to love/to have compassion”; and 6 times in pual as **רָחַם** “to find mercy.”¹⁰⁶ The verb means “to love, to have mercy, to have compassion.”¹⁰⁷ It also relates to Akkadian as *rêmu* with both meanings “compassion” and “womb,” hence the verb occurs more than 20 times to mean “born from the same womb” in expressing “brotherly feeling.”¹⁰⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, **רָחַם** is used less often for humans but more frequently for God.

With humans as the subject, there is only one passage referring to human mercy as in Prov 28:13 which implies that the one who confesses and forsakes transgressions will obtain mercy.¹⁰⁹ In other passages, the verb is used in association with God such as **רָחַם** which is used only once in qal as **רָחַם** to show the sense of a relationship affecting the object as in Ps

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *Hesed*, 267.

¹⁰⁶ Simian-Yofre, “**רָחַם** *rḥm*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 13 (2004), 439. *HALOT*, “**רָחַם**,” 1217.

¹⁰⁷ G. A. Turner, “Love” in *ISBE*, vol. 3 (1986), 174.

¹⁰⁸ Simian-Yofre, “**רָחַם**,” 451; *HALOT*, “**רָחַם**,” 1217.

¹⁰⁹ Simian-Yofre, “**רָחַם**,” 451.

18:2 in which the Psalmist declares his love to the Lord (אֶרְחַמְנִי “I love thee”).¹¹⁰ It is used in piel as רָחַם to mention a mother who should have compassion for the son of her womb in Isa 49:15; to describe a father’s compassion for his child in Ps 103:13. Both passages emphasise the duties of parents in providing security and protection for the child and are also understood as metaphors to refer to God’s compassion (as the real subject).¹¹¹ In addition, there are some passages where God asks Israel’s enemies to have mercy (1 Kgs 8:50; Jer 42:12) or when Israel’s enemies are lacking mercy to helpless people (Isa 13:18; Jer 6:23).¹¹²

With God as subject, the piel of רָחַם expresses God as the Lord of birth and of life.¹¹³ He closes and opens the womb as the first point of all human and animal life (Gen 20:18; 29:31); He cares for his people from their mothers’ womb (Isa 46:3; Jer 1:5; 20:17; Ps 22:11).¹¹⁴ Therefore, all peoples have a responsibility to serve and submit to God (Job 31:15; Isa 46:3; Jer 1:5).¹¹⁵ The piel רָחַם describes God’s nature as gracious and merciful to his people (Exod 33:19); his compassion is never changed like that of a father for his children (Ps 103:3), and is even greater than that of a mother for her son (Isa 49:15). The verb is used in parallel to חָסַד in Isa 54:8 and 60:10 to describe God’s wrath for a moment, but his compassion for his people as everlasting.¹¹⁶

It is noticeable that in the Hebrew Bible, the piel of רָחַם is often used to refer to the superior in relation to the inferior.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the people of Israel are understood to be the recipients of the love and mercy of God such as YHWH who had compassion on Jacob (Isa 14:1), Ephraim (Jer 31:20), and the house of Israel (Ezek 39:25). In addition, the piel of רָחַם can express the mitigation of a punishment when the people of Israel repent of their sins and return to the law of the Lord (Deut 13:18; 30:3; Ezek 16:53; 29:14). It also

¹¹⁰ HALOT, “רָחַם,” 1217. TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, רָחַמְנִי (raḥāmānī) compassionate women (Lam 4:10), (2146d).

¹¹¹ H. J. Stoebe, “רָחַם *rḥm* pi. to have mercy,” in *TLOT*, vol. 3 (1997), 1227.

¹¹² Ibid.; TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, “רָחַמְנִי (raḥāmānī) compassionate women (Lam 4:10),” (2146d).

¹¹³ Stoebe, “רָחַם,” 1226.

¹¹⁴ HALOT, “רָחַם,” 1217-1218.

¹¹⁵ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, רָחַמְנִי (raḥāmānī) compassionate women (Lam 4:10), (2146d).

¹¹⁶ Simian-Yofre, רָחַם, 441.

¹¹⁷ Stoebe, “רָחַם,” 1227.

expresses the undeserved revelation of God's compassion (Jer 30:18; Isa 14:1; 49:10-13) and when God refuses to show his mercy (Isa 9:11b, 16b, 20b; 27:7-11).¹¹⁸

The pual רָחַם of רָחַם is used twice to refer to a personal name לֹא רַחֲמָה "Lo-ruhamah" in Hos 1:6, 8 and the same name is also found in Hos 2:3, 25.¹¹⁹ At other times, pual are used to express the meaning "to show mercy" in Hos 14:4 or "to find mercy" in Prov 28:13.

The noun רַחֲמִים of רָחַם means "a feeling of love, loving sensation, mercy"¹²⁰ and is used in parallel with חֶסֶד in various passages, primarily in Psalms and prayers (Isa 63:7; Pss 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; Lam 3:22; Neh 9:19, 27f, 31). The passages remind the reader of God's tender mercy in many situations. There the adjective רַחוּם means "compassionate, merciful" (Pss 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13).¹²¹

To sum up, the verb רָחַם conveys deep love in its various meanings but it is not a synonym of other terms of love in the Hebrew Bible. It is frequently used in association with God and often combines with other verbs to express a basic aspect of YHWH's nature.

1.1.4 דוֹד "beloved, uncle"

The noun דוֹד occurs 56 times in the OT, 13 times in the Pentateuch and historical books, 8 times in the Prophets and Wisdom Literature, and 35 times in the Song.¹²² The etymology of דוֹד is uncertain. However, it is possible דוֹד is derived from the verb root יָדַד "to love."¹²³ In the OT, דוֹד has two different meanings, "father's brother or uncle," and "beloved, lover."¹²⁴

The noun דוֹד is used to refer to "father's brother or uncle" as a "relative." For example, Ner is called as דוֹד שָׂאוּל "Saul's uncle" (1 Sam 14:50) or $\text{עָרַוֹת דָּדוֹ גָּלָה}$ "he has dishonored his uncle" (Lev 20:20).¹²⁵ However, the meaning "uncle" also refers to a spiritual leader of the tribe, or the one who takes place of the deceased, especially when the

¹¹⁸ Simian-Yofre, רָחַם , 442-443.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 445.

¹²⁰ HALOT, " רַחֲמִים ," 1218.

¹²¹ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, " רַחוּם ," (2164c).

¹²² Sanmartin-Ascaso, " דוֹד *dôdh*," in TDOT, vol. 3 (1974), 148.

¹²³ BDB, " יָדַד ," 391.

¹²⁴ HALOT, " דוֹד ," 215; BDB, " דוֹד ," 187.

¹²⁵ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, " דוֹד (dud) pot, jar," (410e).

father dies as in the story of Esther when Mordecai takes her as his own daughter (Esth 2:7, 15); or “uncle” who takes a certain political responsibility (1 Sam 10:13-16).¹²⁶ Other occurrences of **דוד** meaning “uncle” are simple to identify.¹²⁷

However, in the Eastern Semitic languages, the equivalent of **דוד** in Akkadian literature is *dādu(m)* which means “beloved, darling” to refer to an object of love, and in the literary texts from Ugarit, *dd* seems to mean “sexual relationship” as a part of the erotic vocabulary.¹²⁸ Therefore, from the early literature of the ancient Near East, it is probable that **דוד** originally meant a “beloved partner,”¹²⁹ most often referring to the loved one, beloved (lover, betrothed) in the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁰ In the Prophets and Wisdom Literature, the plural **דודים** always means “love” referring to “the physical sexual relationship” as in Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:8; 23:17; and especially in the Song **דוד** has a strong erotic meaning used 27 times with a suffix when addressing the man.¹³¹ There is a passage in the Hebrew Bible in Isa 5:1 where Isaiah refers to the Lord as **דודי** “my beloved” in his song of the Vineyard, but this is an allegory from the mouth of Isaiah.¹³²

Summing up, the noun **דוד** chiefly refers to love between the sexes, based on erotic meaning. The word in this meaning occurs frequently in the Song in celebration of the joys and intimate relationship of the two lovers.¹³³

1.1.5 **רע** “companion”

The noun **רע** is a masculine singular, meaning “friend, companion, fellow, associate.”¹³⁴ It occurs 187 times in the OT. The occurrences include forms such as **רע** (e.g., Job 6:14; 2 Sam 12:11; Prov 14:20); **רעה** “associate with” is used very rarely (Prov 13:20; 28:7; 29:3); **רעה** “friend, confidante” (e.g., 2 Sam 15:37; 1 Kgs 4:5), **מרע** “guest, confidante,

¹²⁶ Samartin-Ascaso, “**דוד**,” 149.

¹²⁷ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, “**דוד** (dud) pot, jar,” (410e).

¹²⁸ Samartin-Ascaso, “**דוד**,” 143-147.

¹²⁹ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 64.

¹³⁰ HALOT, “**דוד**,” 215; BDB, “**דוד**,” 187.

¹³¹ Song 1:13, 14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 4:16; 5:1, 2, 4, 5, 6 (twice), 8, 10, 16; 6:2, 3 (twice); 7:10, 11, 12, 14; 8:14. The erotic meaning will be analysed later in the second part of the chapter.

¹³² Samartin-Ascaso, “**דוד**,” 151, 155.

¹³³ I will analyse in more detail this affirmation in the second part of the chapter.

¹³⁴ BDB, “**רע**,” 945b. HALOT, “**רע**,” vol. 3, 1253b.

best man” (e.g., Judg 14:11, 20; 15:2, 6; 2 Sam 3:8), רֵעָה “friend, companion, fellow” (Judg 11:37; Ps 45:15); רֵעִי “my darling, beloved, lover” (Song 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4); רֵעוּת “neighbour, or another woman” (Exod 11:2; Isa 34:15, 16; Jer 9:19).¹³⁵

The term רֵעַ has a more limited meaning, “friend, fellow or companion,” in a series of passages.¹³⁶ It often refers to a member of the social community and his rights and property which are protected (Exod 22:9-12; Deut 15:2b; 19:14; 27:17). It also refers to a neighbour as in Lev 19:18b.¹³⁷ In Wisdom Literature, רֵעַ is also used in the sense of “friend” (Job 16:20; 19:21; 32:3) and in a general sense it is used to express a proper manner to both “friend” and “neighbour” (Prov 14:20; 27:10; 18:24).¹³⁸ Especially, the noun רֵעַ is used in parallel with אָהֵב “friend or companion” as synonyms as in Pss 38:12; 88:19; Lam 1:2; Prov 14:20.¹³⁹

Even though רֵעַ means generally “friend” in Wisdom Literature, it is used as רֵעִיהָ in the feminine singular meaning “lover, beloved” in the sexual sense, to refer to the woman in the Song.¹⁴⁰ The reason is that רֵעַ is a companion term of דוֹד expressing the same sense as דוֹד and both terms occur only in the Song. But, the occurrences of רֵעַ as רֵעִי in the Song are in the mouth of the man addressing the woman. Especially, the clause in the Song 5:16 זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי means “this is my lover, and this is my friend” spoken by the woman to the man. In this case רֵעִי a masculine singular noun is used to express the meaning of “friendship or companionship.”

The noun רֵעַ expresses friendship in various contexts of the Hebrew Bible. However, in the Song it is parallel with דוֹד to express the sexual meaning including connotations of companionship (5:1; 5:16).

¹³⁵ Kellermann, “רֵעַ,” in *TDOT*, vol. 8 (1974), 525-526.

¹³⁶ J. Kühlewein, “רֵעַ *rēa'* companion,” in *TLOT*, vol. 3 (1997), 1247.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1244.

¹³⁸ Kellermann, “רֵעַ,” 526-528.

¹³⁹ Kühlewein, “רֵעַ *rēa'* companion,” 1244.

¹⁴⁰ Good, “Love,” 165.

1.1.6 יָדִיד “beloved”

The adjective יָדִיד occurs less than 10 times in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁴¹ Sometimes it is used as a noun, derived from the verb root יָדָה “love.”¹⁴² יָדִיד means “beloved, lovely” and its basic meaning is “one greatly loved” by God or by man.¹⁴³ It is used in poetic passages in the Hebrew Bible and is mostly used to describe all or some parts of the nation of Israel (or Judah) and individuals as those who are greatly loved by the Lord. It does not occur at all in the Song. It mainly expresses love by God to bring protection, as Benjamin said יְהוָה יְדִידֵי יְהוָה “the beloved of the Lord” (Deut 33:12), and prosperity upon the beloved people (Ps 127:2).¹⁴⁴ God comes to save his people from military enemies (Deut 33:12) and his love is carried on to demonstrate his faithfulness to the tribe of Benjamin as beloved, even when they were often disobedient and unfaithful to him (Jer 11:15).¹⁴⁵ The people of Israel rely on the love of God and pray to him to hear and deliver them from judgment (Pss 60:7; 108:7) and Isaiah portrays the Lord, the vinedresser of disloyal Israel, as his beloved (Isa 5:1) to show his great love for the Lord.¹⁴⁶

The adjective יָדִיד is used less commonly in the Hebrew Bible and with narrow meaning. It is difficult to give any conclusion, but its usage portrays the people of Israel as the beloved of God.

1.1.7 חָשַׁק “be attached to, love”

The verb חָשַׁק means “be attached to, love.”¹⁴⁷ Its noun חָשֶׁק means inward devotion to or pleasure in a project.¹⁴⁸ The verb occurs clearly 5 times in the Hebrew Bible, but includes three general aspects of love.

In the case of emotions חָשַׁק applies to the love relationship between a man and a woman.¹⁴⁹ For example, Shechem’s strong desire toward Dinah, the beautiful woman he

¹⁴¹ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 375.

¹⁴² *BDB*, “יָדָה,” 391. *HALOT*, “יָדָה,” vol. 2, 389.

¹⁴³ *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, יְדִידוּת (y^edidût) beloved one, (846c).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 375.

¹⁴⁶ *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, יְדִידוּת (y^edidût) beloved one, (846c).

¹⁴⁷ *BDB*, “חָשַׁק,” 365.

¹⁴⁸ Wallis, “חָשַׁק,” in *TDOT*, vol. 5 (1986), 262.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

wants to be his wife (Gen 34:8); and appearance and physical desire are the main aspects of the victorious warriors' selection of the female captives as wives (Deut 21:11).¹⁵⁰

In the relationship between God and his people, God promises that **כִּי בִי חָשַׁק** “Because he loves me,” will be delivered and protected (Ps 91:14). King Solomon feels **חָשַׁק** “pleasure or desire” to build the house of God and his palace, as well as other structures needed for the purpose of the kingdom (1 Kgs 9:1, 19; cf. 2 Chron 8:6). These building projects are not only Solomon's pleasure but also his love to please God.¹⁵¹ **חָשַׁק** is used to describe God's love to his people Israel (Deut 10:15) and his ungrounded love binds them unto him, not because of any qualities and any thing desirable in them (Deut 7:7).¹⁵² **חָשַׁק** and **אַהֲבָה** are synonyms portraying God's love (Deut 7:7; 10:15).¹⁵³ The verb **חָשַׁק** is a rare word and not used in the Song, but it also covers the aspects of love as **אַהֲבָה** and **חֶסֶד**.

1.1.8 Summary

The study of the Hebrew terms about “love” shows that to understand the terms in their original language is not an easy task. Especially in translating the terms from the original language into another often fails to convey its exact meaning.¹⁵⁴

The study of the two important terms **אַהֲבָה** and **חֶסֶד** shows that both express various meanings of love as in human love; human love for God; and divine love in different contexts in the Hebrew Bible. However, the usage of **אַהֲבָה** while it includes “love” is not very close to **חֶסֶד** (e.g., **אַהֲבָה** refers to sexual and emotional love, and **חֶסֶד** refers to acts of love such as mercy, kindness, loyalty). The verb **אַהֲבָה** is used more frequently than its noun, and in the aspect of human love it is also connected to sexual love to express naturally the intimate devotion and loyalty of life together of a man and a woman as seen in the Song (e.g., 2:16; 7:11; 8:6-7). The noun **חֶסֶד** is used frequently and conveys a wider meaning than just love as an emotional attachment. Many languages, including English, cannot

¹⁵⁰ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 375.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 376; *TWOT Hebrew Lexicon*, **חִשְׁשׁוּק** (hishshûq) spoke of a wheel (1 Kgs 7:33), (773d).

¹⁵² *TWOT Hebrew Lexicon*, **חִשְׁשׁוּק** (hishshûq) spoke of a wheel (1 Kgs 7:33), (773d).

¹⁵³ Sakenfeld, “Love,” 375.

¹⁵⁴ As Comfort points out, “All of the translations fail to convey the full original words” (Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* [Wheaton, Illinois: Living Books, 1991], 105). See also in Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Loyalty and Love: The Language of Human interconnects in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Bible and its Traditions*, eds. Michael Patrick O'Connor and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake: University of Michigan: 1983), 190.

convey the meaning of **חָסֵד** adequately. **חָסֵד** is primarily connected with the divine nature and expresses not only an attitude of emotional love, but also stresses acts of loyal goodwill to recipients.

The parallel of the verb **אָהַב** and the noun **חָסֵד** is the denominative verb **רָחַם** which is less common in the Hebrew Bible. Especially, it emphasises God's love to his people as a fundamental and unique attribute of God.

Other parallels are used less frequently in the Hebrew Bible and usually refer to love or affection among people such as the noun **דָּוָד** which expresses mostly a sexual sense; the noun **רֵעַ** is used in its narrow sense to convey the meaning of friendship, but it becomes sexual when its feminine form **רֵעִיָּה** is used with the corresponding term **דָּוָד** in the Song; the adjective **יָדִיד** usually refers to God's love for the beloved Israel; and finally the verb **חָשַׁק** occurs in a few passages but it is close to **אָהַב** in meaning and usage.

Finally, there are only three terms about "love" occur in the Song such as **אָהַב**, **דָּוָד**, and **רֵעַ** in a form of **רֵעִיָּה**, but **רֵעִיָּה** expresses the same sense with **דָּוָד**. The terms are used to refer to sexual love and express physical desire of the man for the woman in different phrase-level semantics of love which will be discovered in the following.

1.2 Phrase-level semantics in relation to particular terms of love in the Song

The Song is speaking about erotic love and sexual desire. Throughout the Song the two lovers express the delights and joys of their love in different ways to tell us the nature and power of love as "love is strong as death" (Song 8:6).

Therefore, to understand how love is described in the Song, it is worthwhile studying the phrase-level semantics of love in the Song in relating to expressions of love, in particular terms **אָהַב**; **דָּוָד**; and **רֵעִיָּה** and its parallels **כָּלָה** and **אָהוּת**.¹⁵⁵ The phrase-level is studied in groups according to various texts in relating to each particular term and drawing out a meaning for each group. Moreover, I will also show how the Hebrew text contains uncertainties and a variety of meanings which cannot be easily conveyed in other languages.

¹⁵⁵ The first three terms for love occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as discussed in points 1.1.1, 1.1.4, and 1.1.5 of this chapter. The last two terms will be discussed in points 1.2.3.2 and 1.2.3.3 of this chapter.

My objective is to portray the significance of studying in the original language in order to bring about a better appreciation of the meaning of love in the Song in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵⁶

Before the phrase-level semantics of love in the Song are treated in detail, it is necessary to have a discussion about the interpretation and structure of the Song.¹⁵⁷ Firstly, the Song is considered as the subject of more controversy about its meaning than other books in the Bible. From the earliest times, Jewish and Christian interpreters employed an allegorical approach of the Song through many centuries.¹⁵⁸ They understood the meaning of love in the Song as the love of God for his people, or the love of Jesus Christ for the church. However, as we have studied in the first part of this chapter, **נָהַג** in Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel is used as a marriage metaphor to refer to Divine love, while the Song is used to refer to sexual relationships between the woman and the man in the Song.¹⁵⁹ There are many modern interpreters who adopt the literal approach rather than the allegorical one.¹⁶⁰ They interpret the meaning of love in the Song in the sexual sense and some refer to multiple meanings by linking both sexual and spiritual meanings.¹⁶¹ However, they agree with the genre of the Song as lyric poetry with different views about the structure of the Song such as an anthology or a poetic unity.¹⁶² In this thesis, I consider to interpret the Song in a literal meaning and its structure as a poetic unity with four parts: The beginning in love (1:2-2:7); Binding in love (2:8-5:1); Difficulties in love (2: 5-6:12); Growing up in love (7:1-8:14).¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ I recognize that studying the translations alone leaves gaps in one's knowledge of the meaning of "love" in the Song.

¹⁵⁷ The study of Chapter Two will be focused more on interpretations of love in the Song, and see also the study of "The poetic unity of the Song" in point 2.3.2 and "The logical progression approach" in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two.

¹⁵⁸ "Traditional interpretations" are studied in point 2.1 of Chapter Two.

¹⁵⁹ See the study "**נָהַג**" in point 1.1.1 of this chapter.

¹⁶⁰ "The literal interpretation of the Song" is studied in point 2.2 of Chapter Two.

¹⁶¹ See point 2.3.1 in Chapter Two.

¹⁶² "The poetic unity of the Song" is discussed in point 2.3.2 and "The logical progression approach" in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two.

¹⁶³ The structure of the Song is listed in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two.

1.2.1 The term אָהַב

The verb root אָהַב occurs quite often in the Song to express a love relationship between the two lovers. The expression of the root in different phrase-level semantics is grouped as intimacy and passion (1:3, [4]; 2:4); insatiable desire (2:5; 5:8); warnings (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15); seeking and not finding (3:1, 4); and the power of love (8:6, 7).

1.2.1.1 Intimacy and passion (1:3; [4]; 2:4)

The expression of intimacy and passion is described in diverse and various images. In the expression, the phrase-level semantics are chosen in verses 1:3; [4]; 2:4 because they contain אָהַב which conveys strongly the expression of the love of the two lovers.

Song 1:2-4 in the first poem¹⁶⁴ describe the woman's desire for union with her lover and presuppose that their conversation and a relationship have already begun.¹⁶⁵ After praising the man as כִּי־טוֹבִים הָרֵיךְ מִיַּיִן “your love is better than wine” (1:2), the woman continues to praise his scent in verse 1:3 that make the maidens love him (אָהַבְוֹךְ “love you”).

לְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן חוֹרֵק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אָהַבְוֹךְ:

*Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfumes poured out;
Therefore do the maidens love you.*

In the context, the woman is aroused by her lover's physical smell that leads to a comment on his reputation signified in the term שְׁמֶךָ “your name.”¹⁶⁶ The term refers not only to an identification of a person, but also to the person's reputation which is compared to שֶׁמֶן which means literally “oil” to refer to fragrant oils and is used as perfumes fragrant oils or perfumes throughout the Song (1:13; 4:1, 14; 5:1; 5, 13).¹⁶⁷ The comparison emphasises the name which is as powerful and attractive to the woman as a special perfume or oil. That

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ The first poem may be from 1:1-4 spoken by the woman and bound by the repetition of the clause כִּי־טוֹבִים הָרֵיךְ מִיַּיִן “your love is better than wine” in 1:2, 4. But it may be from 1:1-6 because עֲלָמוֹת “the maidens” in 1:3 are understood as בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם “Daughters of Jerusalem” in 1:5. However, it is difficult to have very clear divisions in the Song. So, no scholars agree exactly on the divisions because the Song has different speakers addressed to different audiences. See also Marcia Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 107.

¹⁶⁶ Tremper Longman, *The Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 92.

¹⁶⁷ Falk, *Love Lyrics*, 166; and also Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 19.

is why the woman states that the maidens also love him in 1:3. The verb root אָהַב is used the first time as אָהַבוּךָ “love you” to describe the love of the maidens for the man. The usage of אָהַבוּךָ does not refer to sexual love, physical desire, lust or even sensual pleasure, but refers to the emotional feeling of physical attraction to the man.¹⁶⁸ The maidens’ love for the man is based on their emotions of love and intimate friendship, because of his good character and reputation.

As the speaker of the first poem, the woman identifies herself with the maidens and refers to the maidens in 1:3 as “we,” and in 1:4c, d where אָהַבוּךָ is used a second time.¹⁶⁹ It is understandable that the maidens cannot share as deep a love for the man as the woman does, but as an intimate relationship between friends they can enjoy, delight with the woman to praise the man and generally, also love him.

We do not discuss the text of the verse 1:7 because the meaning of the verse is clear that the woman wants to know where her lover is. However, it is noticeable the clause לִי שְׂאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי “you whom my soul loves” is used to express the woman’s desire to see her lover. The usage of אָהַב in the clause belongs to the realm of sexual love and physical desire.

The woman continues to convey more to her personal experience of intimacy and passion by describing that she is “covered” by her lover in Song 2:4.

הָבִיאָנִי אֶל-בַּיִת הַיַּיִן וְדָגְלוֹ עָלַי אֶהָבָה:

He brought me to the wine house and his banner over me was love.

The verse is ambiguous in meaning because the phrase בַּיִת הַיַּיִן appears only once in the Bible and it is a challenge to many interpreters; and the clause עָלַי אֶהָבָה has various interpretations for the noun דָּגְלוֹ usually translated “his banner,” is a crux.¹⁷⁰

According to Fox, בַּיִת הַיַּיִן means “house of wine” simply to refer to any place where wine is drunk; but the meaning of “the banquet house,” referring to a special place for a wedding or celebration, is out of the setting of the Song which is not in a city.¹⁷¹ Snaith

¹⁶⁸ Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 138.

¹⁶⁹ The verse 1:4 is discussed in point 1.2.2.1.

¹⁷⁰ The challenge of the phrase בַּיִת הַיַּיִן is that it is understood differently, as “the banquet room” in most English translations and “the wine house” in the LXX and CGKPV. CGKPV is a Catholic version, published in 1994 in Vietnamese.

¹⁷¹ Michael V. Fox, “Scholia of Canticles” *VT* 33 (1983), 201.

also states that “the banquet room” is a “ornate translation” of **בֵּית הַיַּיִן** which is “a house” or “a place of wine” in general.¹⁷² Furthermore, Longman points out similar phrases to **בֵּית הַיַּיִן** used such as **בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן** “house for the drinking of wine” in Esth 7:8 and **בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה** “drinking house” in Jer 16:8 and Eccl 7:2, and he explains that the house of wine is a place to drink wine and this meaning is appropriate in the context where wine functions as the joy of love (Song 1:2; 4:10; 7: 10).¹⁷³

Murphy agrees that **בֵּית הַיַּיִן** “wine house” associates with wine and love, but where the place is cannot be identified exactly, so it is better to understand the phrase as “the banquet hall.”¹⁷⁴ There is no certain meaning of **בֵּית הַיַּיִן**. Therefore, both meanings of the phrase are possible. However, as the discussion above the argument for the literal meaning “the wine house” of the phrase **בֵּית הַיַּיִן** is strong and the meaning seems to fit well in the context of the previous verses and also the whole Song.

In the clause **וְדָגְלוּ עָלַי אֲהַבָּה**, the problem is the root **דגל** of **דָּגַל** which can be derived from **דגל** “standard, banner” or from Akkadian **דגל** (*dagaâlu*) “look, behold.”¹⁷⁵ Gordis comments that the traditional meaning of the clause **וְדָגְלוּ עָלַי אֲהַבָּה** as “and his banner over me was love” is meaningless and not evident, and he prefers to link the root **דגל** to the Akkadian root as *du-gul-an-ni* “look upon me,” and translates the clause as “and his glance upon me was in love.”¹⁷⁶ Fox also assumes that **דגל** is cognate to Akkadian *diglu*, “glance,” “intent,” “wish.”¹⁷⁷ Meek points out that the clause is translated as “look upon me” in the LXX, Symmachus, Old Latin, Syriac, and Arabic.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Pope argues that *dagaâlu* is also used in the sense of “wish,” “desire,” or “intent” and understands the clause as “His intent toward me is Love.”¹⁷⁹

In contrast to the arguments above, some scholars argue that there is no need to link **דגל** to Akkadian root and the traditional meaning is an exuberant metaphoric expression of

¹⁷² John G. Snaith, *Song of Songs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 30.

¹⁷³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 112.

¹⁷⁴ Roland Murphy, *Songs of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 132.

¹⁷⁵ *BDB*, “דגל,” 186; *DCH*, “דגל,” 414.

¹⁷⁶ Robert Gordis, “The Root **דגל** in the Song of Songs,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 204.

¹⁷⁷ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 108.

¹⁷⁸ Theophile J. Meek, *The Song of Songs, IB*, vol. 5, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abington Press, 1956), 103.

¹⁷⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 364, 376.

the woman's delight in her lover.¹⁸⁰ Longman states that the superior use of דגל in the Bible as “banner” or “emblem” is seen in Numbers¹⁸¹ and suggests that one has no reason to leave the use of the root דגל.¹⁸² Carr lists thirteen references of the use of the root דגל in the Bible which seem to refer to some kind of symbol such as “a flag” or “banner.” He explains that the traditional meaning of the clause is good enough, even though there are disagreements among scholars.¹⁸³ Kellner notes that the traditional meaning refers to a sign of great love between the lovers rather than their physical desires.¹⁸⁴

Both the traditional meaning and the meaning which links דגל to an Akkadian root are possible in the context of verses 2:1-7. However, I prefer the traditional meaning translating דגל as “banner” as an image of both festival and claiming possession.¹⁸⁵ The “banner” describes the climax of triumph of the lovers.

The study of the ambiguous meanings of בֵּית הַיַּיִן and אֶהְבֶּהּ עָלַי וְדָגְלוּ allows us to understand the breadth of meanings of the verse in the context in which the woman states that her lover had taken her to the wine house where she experiences sweet and intoxicating love with her lover. It is probable that the noun אֶהְבֶּהּ used in the verse does not refer to sexual intercourse, but is used to describe the intimacy and passion of lovers.

The exploration of the verses 1:3 and 2:4 show that the meaning of אֶהְבֶּהּ is used in the verses to express intimacy and the passionate love of the lovers. The woman is overwhelmed by feelings of love so she shifts her description of desire to the metaphor which is described vividly through the fragrance of “oil or perfume” and “name” to convey the man's character (1:3). His good character makes her confident of his love which is why she mentions the maidens who also אֶהְבֶּנּוּךָ “love you” (the man). In contrast to the maidens, the woman is intoxicated by his passionate love not only by tasting the sweet kisses from his mouth but also from the fragrance of his reputation.

It is probable that the woman includes the maidens again in 1:4 where they are together with her to enjoy and praise the man for his love which is better than wine (1:4d).

¹⁸⁰ Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 39.

¹⁸¹ Numbers 1:52; 2:2-3, 10, 17, 18, 25, 31, 34; 10:14, 18, 22, 25.

¹⁸² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 114.

¹⁸³ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ Menachem Kellner, *Commentary on Song of Songs: Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 40.

¹⁸⁵ *DBI*, “Banner,” 71.

The woman being jealous or fighting to gain affection from her lover, repeats twice that the maidens also love him in the term אֶהְבֶּנְךָ “love you” (1:4f) in the same sense as in 1:3, to show that the other women share joys and delights with the two lovers and appreciate their love relationship. The woman imagines that her lover takes her into the wine house which is a private place for their tryst and lovemaking (2:4) and the woman is convinced of the man’s passionate love. He wins her heart and covers her with the banner of אֶהְבָּה “love” which is why the woman is faint with אֶהְבָּה “love” (2:5).

1.2.1.2 Insatiable desire (2:5; 5:8)

In the first expression of love, the woman desires for intimate love from her lover. The second expression is bound by the woman being sick with אֶהְבָּה “love” in Song 2:5 and 5:8. After stating that the woman’s lover has brought her into the wine house (2:4), she wants to be sustained and refreshed because the force of love makes her physically sick in verse 2:5.

סִמְכוּנִי בְּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת רַפְדוּנִי בְּתַפּוּחִים כִּי־חֹלֶת אֶהְבָּה אֲנִי:
Sustain me with raisin-cake, refresh me with apples for I am sick with love.

The woman gives a further expression as in אֲנִי כִי־חֹלֶת אֶהְבָּה “for I am sick with love” because of her insatiable desire. But, there are problems in the verse such as to whom the request is addressed, the uncertain meanings of the two imperatives: סִמְכוּנִי and רַפְדוּנִי; and the two nouns: בְּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת and תַּפּוּחִים.

First, it is unclear whether the woman addresses the man or the daughters of Jerusalem. According to Murphy and Exum, the context shows that the imperatives apply directly to the daughters as seen in 2:7 and again when the woman also addresses the daughters to express her lovesickness in 5:8.¹⁸⁶ But what can the daughters do with the woman’s lovesickness? They cannot help to cure her because the only cure for her is her lover. Therefore, it seems more likely that the imperatives are addressed directly to the man who can cure her with his passionate love.

Second, there are problems with the two imperatives: רַפְדוּנִי and סִמְכוּנִי. The first imperative סִמְכוּנִי is derived from the verb root סָמַךְ with two meanings such as “lean, lay, and rest” (Exod 29:10, 29:15; 29:19; Ps 88:8; Ezek 24:2); and “support, uphold and sustain”

¹⁸⁶ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 136; and also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 116.

(Isa 59:16; 63:5; Pss 3:6; 37:17, 24; 54:6; 111:8).¹⁸⁷ Garrett explains that the best meaning of סָמַךְ in 2:5 is “to lean or rest on another” because in English no one uses “I supported him” to mean “I served him with food” and the second imperative רַפְּדוּנִי from the verb רָפַד means “spread me out” or more appropriately “stretch me out” and he translates 2:5a, b as “lay me on a bed of raisins, stretch me out on a couch of apples.”¹⁸⁸ However, the question is how can the woman lie down on a bed which is made with raisins if בְּאֲשִׁשׁוֹת means “with raisin-cakes,” and stretch on a couch of apples?¹⁸⁹ The woman is sick with love not with illness but because of her insatiable desire, so she does not need to lie down on a bed. In the poetical sections the frequent meaning of סָמַךְ is to “support or sustain.”¹⁹⁰ This is natural and it parallels the second verb root רָפַד meaning “support, aid, give;” רָפַד also occurs twice in Job 17:13; 41:30 with the meaning “stretch out or spread.”¹⁹¹ Carr also argues that the meaning used in Job implies any kind of supporting couch or bed as the place of restoration from sickness or fatigue.¹⁹² Even though the two imperatives are uncertain in meaning, it is possible to understand them as “sustain me, or strengthen me” and “refresh me.”

Third, there is a problem with the nouns: בְּאֲשִׁשׁוֹת and תְּפוּחִים. The first noun אֲשִׁשׁוֹת is difficult to understand. It has two meanings: according to the Arabic root it means “the inflorescence of the grapevine”; and “raisin cakes” as in Hos 3:1 is used in a sacrificial feast.¹⁹³ The meaning “the inflorescence of the grapevine” of אֲשִׁשׁוֹת is unlikely in the context of 2:5, but it makes sense with the meaning “raisin cake” which is compressed dried grapes offered to a god.¹⁹⁴ The meaning “raisin cakes” used is also similar to sacrificial cakes that the people made to offer to the “queen of heaven,” e.g., Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess of the fertility cult (Jer 7:18; 44:17-19) focused on extensive sexual ceremonies.¹⁹⁵ The shape of the raisin cakes made is similar to a naked female with

¹⁸⁷ BDB, “סָמַךְ,” 702.

¹⁸⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 141, 150-151. See also in Fox, *Song of Songs*, 108-109; and Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 151.

¹⁸⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 116.

¹⁹⁰ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 92.

¹⁹¹ BDB, “רָפַד,” 951.

¹⁹² Carr, *Song of Songs*, 92.

¹⁹³ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, “אֲשִׁשׁוֹת,” 185a.

¹⁹⁴ ISBE Bible Dictionary, “Raisins,” 7189.

¹⁹⁵ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, “אֲשִׁשׁוֹת,” 185a.

overstated sexual organs or commonly the part representing the female genitalia.¹⁹⁶ The second noun תְּפֹחִים means “apples” which is translated in 2:3 as כְּתֵפֹחַ “as an apple tree” and in 8:5 as הַתֵּפֹחַ “the apple tree.” It is apparent that the apples used in this context are connected with the woman’s lover in 2:3 to carry the imageries as the man’s shade, fruit, and banner in 2:3-4. Therefore, both אֲשִׁישׁוֹת “raisin cakes” and תְּפֹחִים “apples” have an erotic sense and provides the highest level of intimacy,¹⁹⁷ which mean that the woman desires to strengthen herself with more lovemaking from her lover because she is sick with אֶהְבֶּה “love.”

Through the context of the verse, “sick with אֶהְבֶּה” does not mean the woman is sick because of her lover’s absence or that her demands for love are not reciprocated.¹⁹⁸ The sick with אֶהְבֶּה is used to describe the woman’s mental pain caused by overwhelming anxiety and tension. The usage of אֶהְבֶּה “love” reflects the woman’s insatiable desire. Therefore, the woman deeply desires for more lovemaking as seen in the continuing verse 2:6 in which the man’s left hand is under her head and his right hand embraces her which expresses a desire for more lovemaking.

The clause כִּי־חֹלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי “for I am sick with love” in 2:5 is repeated in 5:8 but with different meanings. In the context of 2:5, the woman is sick with love because she longs for sustaining of her lover with food and she has been pleased and delighted with his left hand as he holds her and his right hand as he embraces her (2:6). The context of 5:8 “I adjure you, O Daughters of Jerusalem: If you find my lover (דֹּדִי), what shall you say to him? That I am sick with love (אֶהְבֶּה)!”¹⁹⁹ tells us that the woman has gone through an experience of indifference and her lover’s withdrawal and then she went out to the city to seek her lover in 5:2-7. It is likely that the woman asks the daughters in Jerusalem for help if they find her lover and tell him that she is sick with אֶהְבֶּה “love,” a deeply plaintive cry from her insatiable desire for love. The usage of אֶהְבֶּה parallels with דֹּדִי in 5:8 to describe a strong desire of the woman for union with her lover.

¹⁹⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 92.

¹⁹⁷ Patrick Hunt, *Poetry in the Song of Songs: A Literary Analysis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 121.

¹⁹⁸ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 58-60, 154.

¹⁹⁹ (5:8) הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דֹּדִי מִה־תִּגִּדוּ לוֹ שְׁחֹלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי:

Furthermore, it is noticeable that the verb רָחַם means “to love with compassion.”²⁰⁰ The verb always occurs with a proper name to indicate the love of God to the one who bears the name.²⁰¹ But there is a distinction that the verb רָחַם never parallels with אָהַב while יָדַד always parallels with אָהַב as in the Song (1:4; 5:8) and the distinction seems to show that אָהַב has a special meaning preventing any connection with the divine name.²⁰² Therefore, the meaning of אָהַב here clearly refers to the erotic love of the man and the woman.

In Song 2:5 and 5:8, the meaning of אָהַבָה is used to convey the insatiable desire for love by the lovers. In verse 2:5, the woman is sick with אָהַבָה “love,” not only because her lover is absent but to express that only he is able to cure her sickness and fulfill her insatiable desire. It is probable that the two lovers’ wedding described in 3:6-11 may bring the woman to another step in the love relationship. After her lover left in a night, the woman experiences the real pain that is a result of her unresponsiveness. Therefore, her lovesickness in 5:8 describes a deeper yearning for her lover, both an emotional and sexual relationship. From fearing the loss and at the same time from yearning for a sexual relationship with him she is urged to seek her lover for reunion with him.

1.2.1.3 Warnings (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15)

The woman gives a warning to the daughters of Jerusalem about אָהַבָה “love” in 2:7. The wording of the verse reappears in two other places of the Song (3:5; 8:4). She also gives another warning in 2:15 to her lover about the “little foxes” which ruin their blossoming vineyards.

The first warning is given to the daughters of Jerusalem in 2:7.

הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה
אִם־תִּעְרִי וְאִם־תִּעֹרְרִי אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ:

*I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by gazelles or the hinds of the field.
Do not stir up or awaken love, until it is ready.*

In the phrase אִם־תִּעְרִי and the clause אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ of 2:7c, there are the first two verbs תִּעְרִי and תִּעֹרְרִי which have the same root verb עָוַר. The

²⁰⁰ TWOT Hebrew Lexicon, “רָחַם,” (2146); BDB, “רָחַם,” 933b.

²⁰¹ Wallis, “אָהַב,” 103.

²⁰² Ibid.

repetition of the verb root emphasises the warning to the daughters of Jerusalem. But warning is not clear in meaning and leads to various interpretations.

Falk interprets that the woman adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to disturb their love (the love of the two lovers), until their love is fulfilled.²⁰³ Therefore, אֶהְבָּה “love” is the subject of the verb שְׂתַהַפֵּץ “until it pleases” in third person, feminine, singular. Some interpret that the warning is not to awaken the man’s love, until he pleases.²⁰⁴ But this seems a strange and improbable reading because אֶהְבָּה “love” does not refer to the man in the Song. Others solve the gender problem by suggesting that 2:7b is spoken by the man: do not awake or arouse the woman, until she pleases.²⁰⁵ But this solution is unlikely, since the warning is a continuation spoken by the woman in this verse (2:7; cf. 3:5; 8:4). With different interpretations, it is more natural to interpret the verse as expressing the woman’s warning to the daughters of Jerusalem who know her relationship with the man and desire to have a similar experience.²⁰⁶ The woman warns them not to hurry in אֶהְבָּה “love” but they should wait patiently until אֶהְבָּה blossoms.

The noun אֶהְבָּה occurs with the definite article as הָאֶהְבָּה in 2:7 to describe that אֶהְבָּה has to take place at the proper time, place, with the right person, and in the proper way. The verse 2:7 (cf. 3:5; 8:4) is spoken directly to the daughters of Jerusalem warning them from pursuing אֶהְבָּה “love.” אֶהְבָּה is not an act of lovemaking, but it is holy “Do not stir up or awaken love, until it is ready.” Therefore, אֶהְבָּה used here refers not really to sexual intercourse but it is abstract or an erotic arousal experience.²⁰⁷

Even though the verse 2:15 does not contain the terms of love, it has evidently erotic overtones to express another warning in the love relationship of the lovers.

אֶחְזוּ-לָנוּ שׁוּעָלִים שׁוּעָלִים קְטָנִים מִחֲבָלִים כְּרָמִים וְכִרְמֵינוּ סְמָרִי:
*Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards,
 for our vineyards are in blossom.*

²⁰³ Falk, *Love Lyrics*, 174.

²⁰⁴ Renita J. Weems, *The Song of Songs* (NIB, vol. 5; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 389. See also in translations such as “That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he pleases” (ASV; KJV).

²⁰⁵ “That you will not arouse or awaken my love, until she pleases” (NAS); “Do not wake my beloved before she please” (NJB).

²⁰⁶ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 114.

²⁰⁷ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 133.

The verse is a riddle of the lovers speaking to each other. However, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the warning.²⁰⁸ Murphy explains that the verse is the reply of the woman to her lover's request to hear her voice, and it is "a saucy reply."²⁰⁹ Pope refers to the foxes as young men, and the vineyard as the woman.²¹⁰ Falk thinks the foxes are the city guards as in 3:3.²¹¹ None of these interpretations totally agrees with the others. However, it is easy enough to observe the meaning of the verse on the surface of its context. There is no one else except the two lovers who respond to each other. The woman describes her lover coming in 2:8-10a, her lover responds by inviting her to come in 2:10b-14, and his beloved responds in 2:15-17. Verse 15 is considered as symbolic in which the noun שׁוֹעֲלִים "the foxes" refers to young men,²¹² and the noun כְּרָמַיִם "the vineyards" refers to the love of the woman and her lover. The foxes are often understood as having destructive behavior in the OT and as ravagers of vineyards in world literature.²¹³ It is clear that the woman is threatened by young men.²¹⁴ The threat is emphasised by the repeated parallel of שׁוֹעֲלִים "the foxes." The phrase "catching of the foxes" means the protecting the woman from the threat of the young men. So, the verse is a warning to the woman that the foxes need to be caught to guard their relationship of love. Even though אֶהְבֶּה is not used in the verse 2:15, it is understood as another warning that the bloom of אֶהְבֶּה between two lovers is sexual love which needs to be protected from enemies.

The exploration of Song 2:7 and 2:15 denotes that the meaning of אֶהְבֶּה is expressed through the warnings of love. The woman warns the daughters of Jerusalem from her actual experience that they should not be so stupid as to stir up and awake premature love before אֶהְבֶּה is ready (2:7; 3:5 and 8:4) using imagery of gazelles or the hinds of the field (2:7 and 3:5). The gazelles and a young stag reappear in 2:9, 17 and 8:14 to describe the man as the gazelles and a young stag and in 4:5; 7:3 to describe the woman's breasts as the twins of a gazelle. These animals are used highly poetically showing much appreciation

²⁰⁸ Shalom M. Paul, "The 'Plural of Ecstasy' in Mesopotamian and Biblical Love Poetry" in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, eds. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 596.

²⁰⁹ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 141.

²¹⁰ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 402-405.

²¹¹ Falk, *Love Lyrics*, 178.

²¹² Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 80.

²¹³ Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Word of God, Song of Love: A Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 91.

²¹⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 130.

of their grace and beauty.²¹⁵ There are many sources in the iconography of the Ancient Near East to witness the link between these animals and goddesses of love.²¹⁶ Probably, these animals mentioned in the context of the Song represent such joys of love which are the reason that the woman adjures the daughters to make an oath in the name of gazelles and the hinds.²¹⁷ The core of the texts is the clause **אַם־תְּעִירוּ וְאַם־תְּעוֹרְרוּ** “do not stir up, nor awaken” (2:7) combined with the term with the definite article **הָאַהֲבָה** “the love” to imply erotic arousal.²¹⁸ Therefore the warnings addressed to the daughters remind them not to rush into love with excited action but wait for the right time and the right person.

In the context of the verses 2:14-17 which are full of erotic and sexual symbolism to refer to a sexual explanation,²¹⁹ and the verse 2:15 describes the woman’s increasing desires for union with her lover. For example, the vineyard is understood as the woman’s own sexuality in 2:15 as in 1:6 **כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי** “My own vineyard”; and according to ancient Egyptian the little foxes or young foxes are a metaphor for womanizer.²²⁰ But the verse could be spoken by the woman. Therefore, the little foxes may be understood as men who threaten to spoil the woman’s vineyards from blooming in the spring. The woman warns not only the daughters, but also warns herself and her lover to be careful to protect their love relationship which is blooming in the spring. The little foxes need to be caught to protect the new growths of their love which is very vulnerable to ravishers.

1.2.1.4 Seeking and finding (3:1, 4)

The woman describes an experience in her love relationship in which she is anxious to seek her absent lover (3:1) and then is able to find him (3:4). The chosen verses are 3:1 and 4 for the repetition of the phrase **שְׁאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי** “whom my soul loves.”

Song 3:1 is the opening of an experience of the unsuccessful nighttime search of the woman for her lover described as **שְׁאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי** (whom my soul loves).

עַל־מִשְׁכְּבִי בַלַּיְלֹת בִּקְשָׁתִי אֶת שְׁאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי בִּקְשָׁתִי וְלֹא מָצָאתִיו:
*On my bed at night, I sought him whom my soul loves,
I sought him, but I did not find him.*

²¹⁵ Alfred Ely Day, “Deer,” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 2602.

²¹⁶ Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 91-93.

²¹⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 152.

²¹⁸ Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 152.

²¹⁹ Paul, “The ‘Plural of Ecstasy’,” 596-597.

²²⁰ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 110.

In the verse, the woman is on her bed, yearning desperately for her lover's presence. But the opening term בְּלֵילוֹת is difficult because it can be explained as singular or plural. Snaith argues for a singular meaning and explains that the plural of בְּלֵילוֹת does not mean to continue for nights but it is night in general.²²¹ Pope states that the plural does not indicate many nights.²²² Stadelmann also explains that the term does not refer to “a recurrent dream during several nights.”²²³ However, Fox assumes that the term בְּלֵילוֹת is never “a plural composition meaning one specific night,” because the woman often longs for her love in her bed again and again.²²⁴ Gledhill agrees that the term could mean “all throughout the long hours of the night,” and translates it as “night after night.”²²⁵ Garrett also insists that the term does not mean “all night long” but literally “in the nights” to refer to the woman's yearning for her lover when she is sleeping.²²⁶ Therefore, it seems the meaning “night after night” in plural makes sense in the context. It is not strange for lovers to yearn for each other when they are not side by side. However, it also makes sense that in a specific night, the woman's yearning built up to a special thinking and seeking of her lover.²²⁷ Therefore, בְּלֵילוֹת can mean “at night.”

The clause שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי “the one my soul loves” 3:1 is repeated in 3:2, 3, and 4, and used as idiom to express the woman's desire for her lover wholeheartedly. Therefore, she searches for the one whom her soul loves on her bed at night, to find him, but she could not in 3:1²²⁸ to indicate that the woman longs for her lover not only for his presence as her company but also for sexual fulfillment.²²⁹

Finally, the woman ends the search successfully and she is able to bring her lover to her mother's house in 3:4.

כְּמַעַט שְׁעַבְרְתִּי מֵהֶם עַד שִׁמְצָאתִי אֶת שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי
אֲחֻזְתִּיו וְלֹא אֶרְפְּנוּ עַד-שֶׁהִבִּיאֲתִיו אֶל-בֵּית אָמִי וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הַחוּרָתִי:

Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves.

²²¹ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 46.

²²² Pope, *Song of Songs*, 415.

²²³ Stadelmann, *Love and Politics*, 90.

²²⁴ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 118.

²²⁵ Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (BST; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 144.

²²⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 170.

²²⁷ Stadelmann, *Love and Politics*, 90.

²²⁸ The clause אֲחֻזְתִּיו וְלֹא מְצָאתִיו “but I did not find him” in 3:1 is repeated (the same clause) in 5:6.

²²⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 170.

*I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house,
And into the chamber of her who conceived me.*

The verse describes that a little while after leaving the watchmen (3:3), the woman found her lover as *שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי* “whom my soul loves,” and held him, would not let him go, and brought him to her mother’s house. The end of the verse is the climax of the experience in which the woman yearns for nothing but the lover’s presence.

There is no textual problem in the verse. But it is difficult to understand the meanings of phrases such as *אֶל-בַּיִת אִמִּי* and *וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הוֹרְתִי*. The first phrase *אֶל-בַּיִת אִמִּי* means “my mother’s house” which is the place where matters relating to the lovers’ marriage may be discussed.²³⁰ The place also refers to intimacies in which the woman’s intention is to make love. It is similar to the situation in 8:2 in which the woman fantasizes about her lover as a brother and wishes to bring him to her mother’s house where a comfortable place for her and her lover can be found.²³¹ It is also understood as a place to protect the lovers from the outside world.²³² The second phrase *וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הוֹרְתִי* means “and into the chamber of her who conceived me.” The meaning refers to the mother who conceived the woman. It is understood as “the womb” which is the first home of the woman.²³³ It parallels the phrase *אֶל-בַּיִת אִמִּי* “to my mother’s house” to convey the innermost sanctum of intimacy into which the woman yearns to bring her lover.²³⁴

The two phrases express the woman’s sexual fantasies, but she is not satisfied unless her lover is present. That is why *אֵהְבָה* is used in the context of seeking and finding to describe the absent lover which causes the woman to fear loss and insecurity, but she enjoys love when the desire for the presence of her lover is fulfilled.

Studying the verses 3:1 and 4 in their context and in the original language gives an understanding of the longing of the woman for the one whom her soul loves (*שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי*). She is seeking for her lover upon her bed at night, but she cannot find him (3:1). Then, she is seeking him again in the streets and in the squares (3:2), and when she finds him, she brings him into her mother’s house (3:4). *אֵהְבָה* “love” is more joyful when the lovers are

²³⁰ Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 159.

²³¹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 130-131.

²³² Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron* (JSOTSup 203; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 71.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Gledhill, *Message of the Song*, 145.

together, but it becomes sorrowful when they are separated. The experience of seeking and finding the absent lover is the pattern repeated in 5:2-8 with fullest expression. The experience describes the moment of crisis when woman becomes aware of vulnerabilities in her love relationship.²³⁵ Therefore, she tries to deal with the vulnerability by seeking her lover, and when she finds the lover, she brings him to a safe place, that is, her mother's house where her desire can be fulfilled by intimacy and experience of union with her lover.

1.2.1.5 Power of love (8:6, 7)

Verses 8:6 and 7 are the most powerful of the love verses and the climax of the Song, and tied by אֶהְבֶּה "love."²³⁶ First, the woman claims to be inseparably united with her lover, and then she requires him to declare his ownership of her in 8:6a. Second, she talks about the celebrating of the power of אֶהְבֶּה "love" with the profound and convincing metaphors of 8:6b-7a. Finally, she ends with the value of love which is more than anything else in 8:7.

(8:6) שִׁימוּנֵי כַחוֹתֶם עַל-לִבֶּךָ כַחוֹתֶם עַל-זְרוּעֶךָ כִּי-עֵזָה כַמוֹת
 אֶהְבֶּה קָשָׁה כַשְּׂאוּל קִנְאָה רִשְׁפִּיהָ רִשְׁפִּי אִשׁ שְׁלֵהֲבַתְיָה:
 (8:7) מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת-הָאֶהְבֶּה וְנְהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ
 אִם-יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת-כָּל-הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֶהְבֶּה בּוֹז יְבוֹזוּ לוֹ:

8:6 *Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.*

For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as relentless as Sheol.

Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame.

8:7 *Many waters are not able to extinguish love,*

And rivers cannot sweep it away;

Should a man offer all his wealth for love,

He would be utterly scorned.

Verse 8:6 uses a comparison of a seal to point out the inseparable love of the two lovers (8:6a) and אֶהְבֶּה is extended with the power of love which is compared to Death, Sheol, and flames (8:6b) and many waters and rivers (8:7). But there are different interpretations for the last half of the verse 8:6 and the meaning of the first bicolon of verse 8:7.

²³⁵ Kathryn Harding, "‘I sought Him but I did not find Him:’ The Elusive Lover in the Song of Songs," *BI* 16 (2008): 49.

²³⁶ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 226.

First, the fourth colon **קָשָׁה כְּשֵׂאוֹל קִנְיָהּ** in 8:6 can be interpreted variously.²³⁷ The adjective **קָשָׁה** means “hard, difficult” or “severe, fierce, intense, vehement.”²³⁸ The meanings convey both a positive and negative sense. According to Snaith, the adjective is used without any emotional connotation and probably describes the conviction of love which pushes people to an unrelenting way of death or the grave.²³⁹ However, it is not exactly clear which sense is referred to the text. Therefore, both negative and positive are possible meanings in the context. I prefer the meaning “relentless” as Sheol, in a positive sense, which parallels the third colon “strong as Death.”²⁴⁰ The noun **קִנְיָהּ** means “ardor, zeal, jealousy” (from the colour produced in the face of deep emotion).²⁴¹ It is translated as “jealousy” and supported in the LXX, Vulgate and Syriac.²⁴² Meek suggests that the noun is better translated as “zealous love” or “passion” that keeps the parallel to the third colon “for love is as strong as death.”²⁴³ Pope assumes that the meaning of **קִנְיָהּ** is used to refer to emotions rather than “jealousy” in a love triangle.²⁴⁴ Murphy thinks that the meaning of the noun is better rendered in its broad meaning as “ardor” rather than “passion” which may refer only to the sexual in character.²⁴⁵ The different interpretations show that the unclear meaning of **קִנְיָהּ** is seen in a variety of strong emotions. However, the meaning “jealousy” seems to be preferred to describe a desire for no rivalry in the lovers’ relationship although the meaning often occurs in the Bible to link with anger as Deut 29:19; Ezek 5:13; 35:11; Num 5:14-30.²⁴⁶

Second, the last bicolon **רִשְׁפִּיהָ רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵהֶבֶתָּהּ** in 8:6 describes the power and energy of **אֵהָבָה**. However, the use of imagery in the last colon is difficult and leads to

²³⁷ As “jealousy is as cruel (or fierce) as the Sheol (or the grave)” (RSV, ASV, ESV, NIB, NIV); “passion as relentless as Sheol” (NJB) or “passion fierce as the grave” (NRSV); “relentless as the netherworld is devotion” (NAB).

²³⁸ *BDB*, “קָשָׁה,” 904.

²³⁹ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 121.

²⁴⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 251.

²⁴¹ *BDB*, “קִנְיָהּ,” 888.

²⁴² Fox, *Song of Songs*, 169.

²⁴³ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 143.

²⁴⁴ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 668.

²⁴⁵ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 191.

²⁴⁶ Basing on Prov 14:30, Reuter argues that it is better to translate “קִנְיָהּ” as “passion” because both Prov 14:30 and Song 8:6 do not mention “the triangle constituted by the jealous individual, his rival, and his partner.” Offered by Reuter, “קִנְיָהּ” in *TDOT*, vol. 13 (2004), 50.

different meanings.²⁴⁷ The noun רֶשֶׁפִּיָּהּ is from the noun רֶשֶׁף meaning “flame, fire-bolt, lightning-flame.”²⁴⁸ It is translated “its flashes” in most English translations and “mũi tên” (an arrow) in NVNB,²⁴⁹ but the exact meaning of רֶשֶׁפִּיָּהּ is uncertain. Some scholars assume that in Job 5:7, רֶשֶׁף refers to sparks rising from a fire that is a metaphor for love which is so powerful that even its tiny sparks burn like great fires, and understand the clause as “even its sparks are a raging fire.”²⁵⁰ Fox argues that the phrase רֶשֶׁפִּי־קִשְׁת׃ in Ps 76:4 shows that רֶשֶׁף refers to a kind of arrow, probably a flaming arrow and he understands the clause רֶשֶׁפִּיָּהּ רֶשֶׁפִּי אֵשׁ as “its darts are darts of fire!”²⁵¹ Keel argues that these arrows are considered as YHWH-flames in 8:6 and he renders this as “Its arrows are flaming arrows.”²⁵² However, Tromp comments that רֶשֶׁף does not mean “arrow.”²⁵³ Snaith explains that the meaning “flashes” of רֶשֶׁף is related to the Canaanite god Resheph who is depicted in iconography as holding arms.²⁵⁴ In BDB, רֶשֶׁף is often used to refer to “flash” which is adopted in most English translations.²⁵⁵ The ambiguity of רֶשֶׁף gives more than a possible meaning. Therefore, “arrow” is an acceptable meaning in the context of Song 8:6. However, the meaning of the clause רֶשֶׁפִּיָּהּ רֶשֶׁפִּי אֵשׁ could be “its flames are flames of fire” which are so hot denoting the strongest of all.

Finally, the noun שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ is of uncertain meaning²⁵⁶ and has two ways of being interpreted. First, שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ is read in one word as an idiom for the superlative and thus the noun means “like a mighty flame.”²⁵⁷ Second, שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ is traditionally read as two words to refer to God’s personal name in which יָהּ could be the short form of the divine name

²⁴⁷ Such as “the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of Jehovah” (ASV); “Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord” (NAS, ESV); “It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (NIV); “Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame” (NRSV).

²⁴⁸ BDB, “רֶשֶׁף,” 958.

²⁴⁹ NVNB is the New Vietnamese Bible translation in the Protestant version, published in 2002. See in Trần Đào, “Kinh Thánh Bản Dịch Mới (New Vietnamese Bible),” *Article 20* (2003): 1-10.

²⁵⁰ Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 111, 213.

²⁵¹ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 170.

²⁵² Keel, *Song of Songs*, 275.

²⁵³ Nicolas J. Tromp, “Wisdom and the Canticle,” in *La Sagesse de l’Ancient Testament*, ed. Maurice Gilbert (Leuven: University Press, 1990), 90.

²⁵⁴ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 121.

²⁵⁵ BDB, “רֶשֶׁף,” 958.

²⁵⁶ HALOT, “שְׁלֵה־בְתִיָּהּ,” 1504.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

YHWH and יה is suffixed to שְׁלֵהֶבֶתָּהּ “flame,”²⁵⁸ hence the noun שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ means “flame of YHWH.” According to Fox, the noun שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ read as one word is supported by the LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac as “its flame.” The same problem appears as מֵאֵפְלֵיָּהּ in Jer 2:31, but the suffix יה is not of particular theological significance. He advises that it is not right to try to hang too much theological weight on an uncertain reference to God.²⁵⁹ Carr also argues that it is more likely the use of the noun שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ is a standard idiom for the superlative as “a most vehement flame.”²⁶⁰ Stadelmann mentions that the יה is not a short form of a divine name but it is an intensifying participle.²⁶¹ Pope also states that it is better to ignore the יה of the noun שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ, and explains that if we depend on the יה as the sole reference to God it is not sufficient support, so he translates the noun as “its flames . . .”²⁶² I prefer the meaning of שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ as “a most vehement flame” because it is likely read as a standard idiom for the superlative. Most scholars also argue strongly for reading שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ as one word rather than two words as above. The traditional translation referring to the divine name seems to be a weak meaning of שְׁלֵהֶבֶתֶיָּהּ.

In short, the meaning of אֶהְבֶּהּ in the verse 8:6 describes the strength and enduring nature of true love in which the woman desires her lover to bind her to him permanently and tightly as a seal, even surpassing the power of the grave. The comparison of אֶהְבֶּהּ and מוֹת “death” expresses its power, both universal and unavoidable as death. The meaning of אֶהְבֶּהּ here is nothing more than the power of erotic and sexual love as expressed throughout the Song that is a force to overcome all the difficulties and trials threatening the very existence of humankind.²⁶³

Third, the woman carries on her statement of the power of אֶהְבֶּהּ “love” in the first bicolon of 8:7, but she associates אֶהְבֶּהּ with מַיִם רַבִּים “many waters” and נְהַרֹּת “rivers.” The phrase מַיִם רַבִּים means “many waters”²⁶⁴ which is parallel to נְהַרֹּת “rivers”

²⁵⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 255. Examples are “a very flame of Jehovah” (ASV); “the very flame of the Lord” (ESV, NVNB); “a flame of Yahweh himself” (NJB).

²⁵⁹ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 171.

²⁶⁰ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 170-171.

²⁶¹ Stadelmann, *Love and Politics*, 210.

²⁶² Pope, *Song of Songs*, 670.

²⁶³ Tromp, “Wisdom and the Canticle,” 94.

²⁶⁴ BDB, “מַיִם,” and “רַב,” 565, 912.

in the second colon. Both “many waters” and “rivers” cannot quench the flame of love. Bergant explains that there is the Ugaritic myth in which “many waters” and “rivers” are connected to Yamm, the Ugaritic god of chaotic cosmic waters, but the god of chaos was subdued and completed by the creator god as the protector who brought the creation into order before the earth took place.²⁶⁵ Moreover, the phrase מַיִם רַבִּים appears many times in the OT, especially in Pss 24:2; 29:3; 32:6; 77:19; 93:4 and Isa 17:13; 51:10 in which “the waters” usually imply the sea and the waters of chaos.²⁶⁶ The connections of the Ugaritic myth and the usages of מַיִם רַבִּים “many waters” in the OT may show that the woman could have the myth in mind to claim that even the superhuman mythological power chaos is unable to dampen the flames of love. However, I agree with Garrett’s explanation that it is not necessary to look at the Ugaritic myth to explain the meaning of the verses because the text of 8:6 and 7 obviously portrays the contrast between fire and water in which the flame of אֶהְבֶּה “love” is so great that the waters cannot quench it.²⁶⁷ The power of אֶהְבֶּה is stronger than other forces such as waters, rivers and even money which will bring many things but not true love. The verse 8:7 is used to express a powerful imagery of the indestructibility of אֶהְבֶּה. Therefore, the woman requires her lover’s faithfulness to her in all circumstances which is the nature of אֶהְבֶּה.

The meaning of אֶהְבֶּה in 8:6 and 7 expresses the power of love which is a warning against betrayal of love.²⁶⁸ In verse 8:6, the woman does not hesitate to show her intense desire for union and possessing the man wisely even though she has to pass the power of death. First, she asks the man to mark her as the seal in his heart and his hands. Second, she gives three comparisons: אֶהְבֶּה “love” is as strong as death, jealous and relentless as Sheol with its flames which are flames of fire. There is nothing to prevent death which is powerful and unavoidable and similarly, אֶהְבֶּה is never shaken and irresistible, as strong as death and as relentless as Sheol. Death and Sheol are often used as a pair in Ps 89:48; Isa 28:15, 18; Prov 5:5; 7:27; Hab 2:5; they convey the idea of being very hard to resist.²⁶⁹ The woman gives a further description of the power of אֶהְבֶּה in the image of flames of fire to denote her

²⁶⁵ Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 99.

²⁶⁶ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 276; also in Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 192.

²⁶⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 255-256.

²⁶⁸ Hunt, *Song of Songs*, 240.

²⁶⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 252.

intense passion. The three comparisons say that there is nothing that can compare with the awesome power of אֶהְבֶּהָ. The woman continues to say that many waters or floods cannot quench the flames of אֶהְבֶּהָ and all rivers cannot sweep אֶהְבֶּהָ away (8:7). It is persistent to pursue, willing to overcome obstacles and afflictions in life until satisfied in its desire.

However, since the Song is poetry with many uncertain meanings and play-words, the meaning of אֶהְבֶּהָ in verses 8:6 and 7 can be explored in different ways and interpreted with multiple meanings.²⁷⁰

1.2.2 The term דֹּדִי

In the Song, דֹּדִי is used to express all aspects of sexual love,²⁷¹ and occurs 27 times with a suffix to address to man.²⁷² דֹּדִי “my lover/beloved” is in the mouth of the woman to address to the man, and another five times as דְּדִי “your love” (5:9 [twice]; 6:1[twice]) and דֹּדָה “her lover” (8:5) is in the mouth of the daughter of Jerusalem. In addition, there are five times as דְּדִי or דְּדִי “your love” (1:2, 4; 4:10); דֹּדִים “lovers” (5:1),²⁷³ and דֹּדִי “my beloved” (7:10). The phrase-level semantics in this part are grouped such as kisses (1:2, 4; 7:10) and mutual belonging (2:16, 17).

1.2.2.1 Kisses (1:2, 4; 7:10)

In Song 1:2 and 4, the woman expresses her desire for kisses from her lover and in 7:10 the man also expresses his desire for kisses from his beloved. The kisses are signs of love in which both the two lovers share their deep love.

(1:2) יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי-טוֹבִים דְּדִיךָ מִיַּיִן:
 (1:4) מִשְׁכְּנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נְרוּצָה הֵבִיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמָחָה
 כִּךָ נִזְכִּירָה דְּדִיךָ מִיַּיִן מִיִּשְׁרִים אֶהְבוּךָ:

*1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.
 1:4 Draw me after you! Let us make haste! The king has brought me into his
 chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you;
 (Friends:) We will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you.*

²⁷⁰ Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Love and Death once more (Song of Songs VIII 6),” *VT* XLVII, 3 (1997): 386.

²⁷¹ Ogden and Zogho, *Song of Songs*, 19.

²⁷² Song 1:13, 14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 4:16; 5:1, 2, 4, 5, 6 (twice), 8, 10, 16; 6:2, 3 (twice); 7:10, 11, 12, 14; 8:14.

²⁷³ See the discussion of verse 5:1 on the aspect of erotic and sensuous feeling in point 1.2.3.3.

The verses are bound together by the clause הַדֶּבֶר מִיַּיִן “your love more than wine” in 1:2b and 4d. In these verses, the woman addresses her lover by shifting the third person of יִשָּׁקֵנִי “Let him kiss me” to the second person of הַדֶּבֶר “your love” in 1:2 and then from the second person of $\text{מִשְׁכַּנִּי אַחֲרָיִךְ}$ “draw me after you” to the third person of הֵבִיאָנִי “he has brought me” in 1:4a, b.

However, the shift of subject pronouns in 1:2 and 4 seems to have a confusing grammatical structure. According to the context, the woman’s lover is actually present in 1:2b, where she proudly announces her lover as the king who has brought her into his chambers in 1:4. So, the third person and the second person are the same character, not two different characters.²⁷⁴ The shifts are a common style in poetry of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 32:15; Jer 22:24; Mic 7:19; Pss 23:1-3, 4-5).²⁷⁵ So, as there is no need to amend the text, we can assume more than two characters.²⁷⁶ Another argument is that shifts are always used in the love songs of the Egyptians.²⁷⁷ Therefore, the Hebrew text is probably correct and makes appropriate sense in the context.²⁷⁸ The study of Song 1:2 and 4 gives clear pictures of the woman’s longing to be kissed to express the love of her lover which is better than wine. However, in the LXX, the term נִשְׁקָ “kiss” in 1:2 and 8:1 is translated with the term φιλέω which means “to love” to show that the woman desires to have a deep feeling of love. It is noticeable that the LXX translation of “kisses” by

²⁷⁴ Translators of RSV think that the shift of person from the third to the second is difficult. Therefore, to make the translation consistent in English usage, they change the third person to the second person and translate 1:2 as “O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth.” However, these translations have “amended” the Hebrew text.

²⁷⁵ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 14.

²⁷⁶ Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs: A study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1954), 78.

²⁷⁷ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 41, 44. E.g., a cited song:

“He does not know my lust to embrace him, or that he could write my mother.

Lover, I am given over to you by the Golden Goddess of womankind.”

²⁷⁸ The Old Vietnamese Bible translation (OVNB) is a Protestant version, published in 1926. See also in Phước Nguyễn, “Quá Trình Phiên Dịch Kinh Thánh Sang Tiếng Việt (Bible translation process to Vietnamese),” *Linh Lược* (1/1996): 1-8. In OVB, the usage “Vua” (the King) and “phòng Ngài” (His room) refers to God. But the poem in 1:2-4 is language of love, without specific emphasis about God or Christ. So, the fact that the woman refers to her lover as a king means that he represents the best one in her life.

φιλημάτων is odd, given that φιλέω represents a platonic, non-sexual form of love. The LXX may be trying to remove sexual connotations from the verses.

In the context of Song 1:2, the woman desires deep kisses of her lover and compares her lover's love (דוֹרִי "your love") to imply lovemaking with the sweetness of wine. But lovemaking is the better and more desirable intoxicant.²⁷⁹ The woman repeats the comparison again and involves the maidens in 1:4c who also love the man (אָהֲבוּךָ "they love you"). The comparison shows "wine" used as figurative for 'love.'²⁸⁰ Therefore, both דוֹרִי and אָהֲב are used in the verses with different meanings as דוֹרִי "your love" occurs in 1:2 and 4 to refer specifically to sexual love and the joys of the lovers' tender intimacy; and אָהֲב refers to love in general.

The kisses are also described in Song 7:10 in which both lovers share the sweetness of their kisses:

וַחֲכַךְ כְּיַיִן הַטּוֹב הוֹלֵךְ לְדוֹרִי לְמִישְׁרִים הוֹבֵב שִׁפְתַי יִשְׁנִים:
*And your mouth is like the best wine,
 goes down to the beloved smoothly gliding over my lips and teeth.*

The verse 7:10 is the request of a deep kiss where the man compares his beloved's mouth to the best wine and the woman's response. However, it is very difficult to make certainty of meaning and especially in the last half of the verse.

The phrase הוֹלֵךְ לְדוֹרִי in the second colon is of uncertain meaning. The noun לְדוֹרִי is masculine, singular, suffixed first person meaning "for my lover," and the phrase הוֹלֵךְ לְדוֹרִי could mean "goes down for my lover." However, Longman argues that לְדוֹרִי "for my lover" does not fit the context which is spoken by the man, and the meaning seems odd for the man (the lover) in asking for the wine to go straight to "my lover." So, he emends לְדוֹרִי to לִי meaning "to me."²⁸¹ RSV and NRSV delete the word לְדוֹרִי and conclude that the verse is spoken by the lover to his beloved.²⁸² Murphy prefers two speakers in the verse, the man expresses his desire to this point "your mouth like the best

²⁷⁹ Hunt, *Song of Songs*, 22.

²⁸⁰ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 269.

²⁸¹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 190.

²⁸² "That goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth." (RSV, NRSV)

wine” in the first half of the verse, and then there is a transition where the woman continues to speak the last part of the verse, so he translates the word לְרוּרִי as “my lover” and the last half as “flowing smoothly for my lover.”²⁸³ However, it is not necessary to emend the word לְרוּרִי because the same word is used elsewhere as in Song 5:6 (twice); 6:3; 7:11, to refer to the man as “my lover/my beloved.” The explanation seems to make sense and is preferable in the context.

The clause דוֹבֵב שְׁפִתַי יְשָׁנִים in the last colon of the verse is problematic because the verb דוֹבֵב has uncertain meaning and the phrase שְׁפִתַי יְשָׁנִים in the Hebrew text does not make sense in the context. The verb דוֹבֵב means “move gently, glide, glide over” from the root דבב.²⁸⁴ However, Murphy explains that the verb דוֹבֵב means “spreading,” probably derived from דוב meaning “flow” rather than from דבב meaning “murmur,” and the verb is not transitive, so he thinks that the final letter ב of the verb דוֹבֵב is attached to the next word as a preposition meaning “over.”²⁸⁵ Pope translates the verb דוֹבֵב as “stirring” and explains that it is construed as “causing to speak”; as “gliding”; “spreading”; or “flowing.” He also mentions that the choice of these meanings depends on the meaning of the last word יְשָׁנִים, the Hebrew text “sleepers” or the LXX and Vulgate “teeth.”²⁸⁶ The uncertain meaning is always given more than one possible meaning. So, I prefer the meaning of דוֹבֵב as “flowing” which picks up the general nuance of the sensuousness.

The phrase שְׁפִתַי יְשָׁנִים of the last colon means literally “the lips of sleepers.”²⁸⁷ But the question of who the sleepers are provides a difficulty. While the poem in 6:13-7:10 is describing the man’s intimate desire towards his lover, verse 7:10 mentions the two lovers who share each other in deep intimate kisses.²⁸⁸ There are two interpretations of the phrase. The ancient versions read שְׁפִתַי יְשָׁנִים differently. The LXX renders the phrase as χείλεσί μου καὶ ὀδοῦσιν “my lips and my teeth” which is also found in Aquila, Syriac, and

²⁸³ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 183.

²⁸⁴ *BDB*, “דוֹבֵב,” 179.

²⁸⁵ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 184.

²⁸⁶ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 640.

²⁸⁷ “BELOVED: Flowing down the throat of my love, as it runs on the lips of those who sleep” (NJB); “Let it flow to my beloved as new wine gliding over the lips of sleepers” (TNK).

²⁸⁸ Gledhill, *Message of the Song*, 210.

in the Vulgate as “his lips and teeth.”²⁸⁹ The translations in the ancient versions seem to provide a better meaning than the Hebrew text.²⁹⁰ Therefore, Murphy suggests emending שְׁפָתַי וְשִׁנַּי in the Hebrew text to שְׁפָתַי וְשִׁנַּי “my lips and my teeth,” and the emendation only changes the first letter י of שְׁפָתַי to ו which is thought to be easily confused, and the last consonant ם of שִׁנַּי regarded as enclitic.²⁹¹ The meaning “my lips and teeth” makes good sense in the context and is adopted by many interpreters and modern translations.²⁹² Stadelmann prefers to preserve the Hebrew text by arguing that the emendation makes a good parallel between “my lips” and “my teeth,” but the parallelism serves as an image of the consumption of the drink, and the text emphasises the specific quality of the wine. So, he explains that “the sleepers” refers to the two lovers who are affected by the high degree of the superior quality wine.²⁹³ Both interpretations are possible and make sense in the context, either שְׁפָתַי וְשִׁנַּי “the lips of sleepers” in the Hebrew text or emendation as שְׁפָתַי וְשִׁנַּי “my lips and my teeth.” However, I prefer the meaning “my lips and my teeth” which seems more suited to the context which the two lovers share their love to each other. Verse 7:10 describes the man’s desire and the woman’s response to her lover (לְדוֹדִי “my lover”), and is used to express a strong desire through the deep kisses of the lovers.

The study of Song 1:2, 4 and 7:10 shows that the meaning of דוֹדִי is used to express a strong desire for physical union of lovers through kisses. The imagery used to describe the woman’s desire is vibrantly sensual with the imperatives מְשַׁבְּבֵנִי “draw me” and נְרוֹצָה “let us make haste” in 1:4a. She wants her lover to take her away to his chambers where the woman is free from all controls on her to explore her love relationship with the man.²⁹⁴ The man takes his beloved into the chambers to express the same desire as her and both share intimacy and passion.²⁹⁵ The Song opens with the woman’s voice in longing for her lover’s kisses (1:2a). The kisses are a sign of intense love and an essential act of intimacy and passion.²⁹⁶ They bring the lovers close together, not only by their presence but also tasting the sweet kiss of each other. Such desire for the kisses from the man’s mouth shows that the

²⁸⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 640.

²⁹⁰ White, *Language of Love*, 47.

²⁹¹ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 184.

²⁹² Such as ESV, NRS, RSV, NIB, NIV.

²⁹³ Stadelmann, *Love and Politics*, 186.

²⁹⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 130.

²⁹⁵ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 12.

²⁹⁶ DBI, “Kiss,” 482.

language of the Song is full of the sexual tone of the two lovers and now their love seems to go to a new stage. The stronger attraction for the woman is that “הַדִּיךְ (your love) is better than wine” and repeated in 1:4. In 1:2 the woman longs for kisses from the lover, in 7:10 the man desires the kisses from the mouth of his beloved which is the best wine gliding gently through his lips. Similar comparisons between love and wine are found in the Song at 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:10; 8:1, 2. The wine makes the drinker feel warm, excited and produces euphoria, but the man’s love is better which is why the woman desires only הַדִּיךְ (the man’s love); she wants to drink the special wine from his mouth through sweet kisses (1:2b). The man desires kisses from his beloved’s mouth as the best wine (7:10). Therefore, הַדִּיךְ is used to provide more than the normal sense of love. It refers to the physical sexual relationship in which the man’s embraces or caresses make her more excited and intoxicated (1:4). In 7:10, the two lovers enjoy their intoxication and share their blissful rest in love. Kisses are the simple act to describe an affection of the lovers that involves all the senses.

1.2.2.2 Mutual belonging (2:16)

Song 2:16 (6:3; 7:11) expresses the mutual belonging in love of the lovers and their desire to keep themselves only for one another as:²⁹⁷

הַדִּיךְ לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ הִרְעָה בְּשׂוֹשַׁנִּים:

My lover is mine and I am his; he grazes among lotuses.

The clause הַדִּיךְ לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ in the verse spoken by the woman is repeated in 6:3 and partially in 7:11. It expresses the mutual belonging and exclusiveness of the lovers for one another.²⁹⁸ There is no textual problem in the verse, except the unclear meaning of the clause הִרְעָה בְּשׂוֹשַׁנִּים in the last colon.

The participle הִרְעָה in the clause means “he pastures (his flock)” derived from the verb root רָעָה “to pasture, tend, graze.”²⁹⁹ The verb occurs quite frequently in the Hebrew Bible and always goes with an object as the flock, to refer to feeding domestic animals as the function of a shepherd.³⁰⁰ But, the clause הִרְעָה בְּשׂוֹשַׁנִּים seems unclear because of the reference to the man pasturing his flock among the lotuses, and sheep or goats do not eat

²⁹⁷ M. Timothea Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 38.

²⁹⁸ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1974), 172.

²⁹⁹ *BDB*, “רָעָה,” 945.

³⁰⁰ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 102.

lotuses. However, the woman describes herself as a lotus of the valley (2:1),³⁰¹ her lover's lips as lotuses which drip with liquid myrrh (5:13) and her lover who plucks lotus (6:2). The man also describes his beloved as a lotus among the thorns (2:2), her breasts as two fawns or twins of gazelle grazing among the lotus (4:5), and her belly as a heap of wheat bordered with lotuses (7:3). Even though we should not overstate the meaning of the clause, it is probable the lotuses are used as a metaphor to refer to the woman in expressing hints of intimacy of the lovers.³⁰²

The study of Song 2:16 shows the clause לֹא יִנְיִן לִי דְוִדִּי is used to affirm the togetherness of the lovers and to convey the mutual ownership that is the covenant in a healthy love relationship.³⁰³ The woman portrays her great confidence in her lover (דְוִדִּי “my love”). The meaning of דְוִדִּי is used in the context of a sexual relationship of the lovers to describe their mutual belonging in love. The woman celebrates the presence of her lover (דְוִדִּי) as “a bag of myrrh that lies between her breasts” (1:13); she longs for him in erotic and sensuous language “How beautiful you are, דְוִדִּי “my beloved” (1:16); and she expresses her desire to the man as לֹא יִנְיִן לִי דְוִדִּי “my lover is mine and I am his” (2:16 cf. 6:3 and 7:11). The verse gives a rule of mutual possession of the two lovers that is called the mutual belonging in love as an affirmation of togetherness. It describes the two lovers completely united in one and their love is only for themselves, not for others.³⁰⁴

After the fall the woman is told, “Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). In the context of Genesis, the woman longs for her husband, not the man longing for his beloved as in 7:11 “his desire is for me,” and “she is controlled by him” to mean that she wants to dominate him but he opposes her by trying to control her.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ What kind of flower does שׁוֹשַׁנָּה in 2:1 refer to? “A lily”; “the lily”; or “a lotus”? The noun שׁוֹשַׁנָּה translated as “the lily” to refer a specific lily as in KJV, NAS, NKJ, OVB. Perhaps the translators of the version argue that Israel had no water-lily (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 27). But while the lily does not grow freely in Israel, one can find there the water-lily (Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 27). Murphy explains שׁוֹשַׁנָּה is derived from an Egyptian word to refer to the lotus or water-lily (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 132). Pope also argues that there is no reason to dismiss the established meaning “lotus” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 238). Therefore, there are two possible translations of שׁוֹשַׁנָּה as “a lily” in general, and “a lotus.”

³⁰² Exum, *Song of Songs*, 130.

³⁰³ Ogden and Zogho, *Song of Songs*, 82.

³⁰⁴ Tremper Longman, “Song of Solomon, Theology of,” in *EDBT* (1996), 742; William. C. Williams, “Sexuality, Human,” in *EDBT* (1996), 728.

³⁰⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 94. See also D. E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 59.

This is the description of the power struggles, rather than love and cherishing, and is the result of human sin and not the intention of God.³⁰⁶ In contrast, the love relationship of the two lovers in the Song is in the intention of God, not an unequal relationship, for they mutually possess each other.³⁰⁷ The mutual belonging in love in Song 2:16; 6:3 and 7:11 presents the ideal of love and marriage in which love, sexuality, and pleasures of the lovers are healthy and robust.³⁰⁸ The mutual belonging in love of the Song is similar to the covenant in love between God and his people “I shall be your God and you will be my people” (Jer 7:23; 11:4; Ezek 34:30-31; Hos 2:23).³⁰⁹ Even the love relationship in marriage is used as a metaphor to describe the love of God,³¹⁰ the mutual belonging in 2:16 does not refer to the religious covenant formula³¹¹ and the primary meaning of love in the Song is a sexual relationship between the man and the woman.

1.2.3 The terms רַעִיָּה; כַּלָּה; אָחֹתִי

In the same erotic and sensuous sense of הַיָּרִי, the man addresses the woman in various terms of love as רַעִיָּה “my love/my darling”; כַּלָּה “bride” and אָחֹתִי “my sister.”

The term רַעִיָּה is most common, used nine times in the Song (1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4)³¹² and its parallels such as כַּלָּה “bride or my bride” is used six times (4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1) and אָחֹתִי “my sister” is used four times (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1) in the Song. The term כַּלָּה refers to a wife just before marriage and also after marriage as in Hos. 4:13; 4:14.³¹³ In the context of the Song, כַּלָּה “bride” could refer to the woman after her marriage, especially the endearment, if one takes the passage 3:6-11 as the description of the lovers’ wedding. The term אָחֹתִי “my sister” does not mean that the man refers to his beloved as his sibling. It is used as a parallel to כַּלָּה “bride” in the Song also to express the closeness and permanence in their desire for union.³¹⁴ The phrase-level semantics grouped in

³⁰⁶ Waltke, *Genesis*, 94; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 65; and see also Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 90.

³⁰⁷ The intention of a love relationship is found in Matt 20:25-28; Gal 3:28; and Eph 5:21-33; see Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 90; and also Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 246.

³⁰⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 246.

³⁰⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 125.

³¹⁰ As we have discussed in point 1.1.1.3 of this chapter.

³¹¹ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 42.

³¹² The term was discussed in point 1.1.5 of this chapter.

³¹³ BDB, “כַּלָּה” 483.

³¹⁴ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 121.

this section are attraction of beauty (1:9, 15; 6:4); marriage (4:8, 9); and erotic and sensuous sensuality (5:1).

1.2.3.1 Attraction of beauty (1:9, 15; 6:4)

The attraction of beauty is mentioned throughout the Song in which the two lovers show their love by praising the beauty of each other. The woman's beauty is described as lively and powerful as the man's beauty. The attraction of beauty is not just the external appearance but also the internal that portrays the power of love to bind the lovers in oneness. In this expression, the chosen verses are Song 1:9, 15; 6:4 because they convey the term רַעֲיָתִי.

In admiration of the woman's physical beauty (1:9-11), the man begins with a statement of encouragement by comparing her beauty to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots in 1:9 in which for the first time, the man refers to the woman as רַעֲיָתִי which is derived from רַעַי "darling, favourite, lover."³¹⁵ I understand רַעֲיָתִי as "darling" because it is used to express an intimate relationship as well as a general sense of friendship.

לְסִסְתִּי בְרֻכְבֵּי פָרְעָה דְּמִיִּחַדְךָ רַעֲיָתִי:

I compare you, my darling, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots.

In the verse, the man compares his darling (רַעֲיָתִי "my darling") to "a mare in Pharaoh's chariot" (לְסִסְתִּי בְרֻכְבֵּי פָרְעָה), but in ancient Egypt Pharaoh's chariots were drawn by stallions, not by mares.³¹⁶ According to Murphy, the term סִסְתִּי with the possessive suffix in the first person singular יְ, "my" which is supported by many ancient versions such as the LXX and Syriac, but the possessive suffix יְ is the survival of the old genitive ending.³¹⁷ Therefore, many commentators recognize that this is nothing to do with the possessive.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ HALOT, "רַעַי," 1253.

³¹⁶ Falk, *Love Lyrics*, 171. Cf. רֻכְבַּי "chariots" or "chariotry" which is used as a collective plural.

³¹⁷ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 131.

³¹⁸ Pope explains that there is a story about the Egyptian soldier named Amenemheb who relates how a swift mare is sent forth by the Prince of Qadesh to enter into the midst of the Egyptian army to confuse the stallions pulling the chariots of the army (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 138). Snaith confirms that this story is real which happened at the battle of Kadesh, in the time of Pharaoh Thutmose III (Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 21). Bloch and Chana Bloch note that the comparison of a beautiful woman to a horse is well known in Greek poetry (Bloch and Chana Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 145).

The term רַעֲיָתִי used in 1:9 portrays the man's endearment in an intimate relationship through the image of a mare in Pharaoh's chariots. The image of a mare is a temptation and allurements that sends all men into a state of confusion.³¹⁹ Today, nobody compares the beauty of a woman to "a mare," but it was common in ancient culture.³²⁰

The man also refers to his beloved as רַעֲיָתִי "my darling" to admire her beauty as "Oh! you are beautiful" in verse 1:15.

הַנֶּזֶד יָפָה רַעֲיָתִי הַנֶּזֶד יָפָה עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים:

Oh, you are beautiful, my darling; Oh, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves.

In the verse, the man pays special attention to her eyes as עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים "your eyes are doves." However, the intended meaning of the clause עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים is unclear: whether it refers to dove's eyes or other parts of the dove such as its softness, beauty of feathers, affections for and faithfulness to its mate.³²¹ Pope insists that the LXX, Targum, Rashi and modern scholars are right to interpret literally the clause עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים as "your eyes are doves."³²² Garrett also states that the text simply shows the woman's eyes are doves to express an attraction and affection.³²³ No one is able to tell what exactly the ancient understanding about the dove was, but the term יוֹנִים "doves" occurs as a term of endearment a few times in the Song (2:14; 4:1; 5:2; 6:9) in the mouth of the man.³²⁴ He portrays his love to his beloved (רַעֲיָתִי) in 1:15 by focusing on her beautiful eyes as doves which are a simple expression of sexuality in the Ancient Near East,³²⁵ and also described as messengers of love.³²⁶ The man continues to refer to the woman as רַעֲיָתִי to show her physical beauty in 6:4.³²⁷

³¹⁹ Weems, *Song of Songs*, 387.

³²⁰ James M. Reese, *The Book of Wisdom: Song of Songs* (Wilmington, Delaware: Glazier, 1983), 219.

³²¹ DBI, "Dove," 217. However, Keel explains that the comparison of the woman's eyes to dove's eyes is unacceptable because other animal comparisons in the Song always refer to the whole animal as in 4:1, 2, 5; 7:3, 4 (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 69). Therefore, the meaning "dove's eyes" of the clause is unlikely in the context.

³²² Pope, *Song of Songs*, 356.

³²³ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 147-148.

³²⁴ Reese, *The Book of Wisdom*, 221.

³²⁵ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 70-73.

³²⁶ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 22.

³²⁷ The description of physical beauty is one of the characteristics of Arabic love-poetry called *wasf* (Gledhill, *Message of the Song*, 153). According to Soulen, there are four *wasfs* in the Song: the first in 4:1-7; the three others in 5:10-16; 6:4-6; and 7:2-8 (7:1-7[E]) (Richard N. Soulen, "The *wasfs* of the Song of Songs and Hermeneutic," *JBL* 86 [1967], 183). Among the *wasfs*, 5:10-16 is the only one refer to the man's beauty. The

יָפָה אֶת רַעֲיָתִי כְּתִרְצָה נְאוּהָ כִּירוּשָׁלַם כְּנִדְגָלוֹת:

*You are beautiful, O my darling, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem.
Awe-inspiring as an army with banners.*

The noun תִּרְצָה means “pleasure, beauty” or the name of a city.³²⁸ But, the ancient versions do not recognize the proper name תִּרְצָה; the LXX translates it as εὐδοκία “pleasure”; Syriac “as a thing of delight”; Vulgate “pleasant, agreeable” which are all from the root רצה meaning “pleasing.”³²⁹ Therefore, Pope explains that Tirzah is mistaken as the name of the city from כְּתִרְצָה and Jerusalem is added to make a balance. He also argues that in Ugaritic, the particle כִּ is used to refer to beauty, תִּרְצָה is read as תִּרְצֶה “thou art pleasing” as in the LXX. Therefore, he translates the first colon as “fair you are, my darling, verily pleasing.”³³⁰ According to Carr, the likely explanation is that even if the site of תִּרְצָה is not identified certainly, it is likely to refer to Tell el-Fa‘rah near the north east of Shechem, and a site which is one of great natural beauty with gardens and groves.³³¹ A play on words is likely.

The noun יְרוּשָׁלַם means “foundation of shalem,” and shalem also means “complete, prosperous, peaceful.”³³² It is a holy city, the city of YHWH (Isa 45:13; 48:2; 52:1; 60:14; Pss 46:5; 48:2, 9; 101:8) and described as one of the most beautiful cities and “the joy of the whole earth” (Pss 48:3; 50:2; Lam 2:15), and lovely city (Jer 6:2).³³³ Therefore, it is reasonable to keep the parallel between תִּרְצָה “Tirzah” and יְרוּשָׁלַם “Jerusalem” which is a

verses 6:4-6 are the third *wasf* of the man describing the beauty of his beloved (רַעֲיָתִי). The *wasf* starts with a simile in 6:4 which is a general affirmation of the woman’s beauty and is compared to תִּרְצָה “Tirzah” and יְרוּשָׁלַם “Jerusalem”; and כְּנִדְגָלוֹת אֵימָה “awe-inspiring as an army with banners.”

³²⁸ *BDB*, “תִּרְצָה,” 935. Tirzah is mentioned as a Canaanite city (Josh 12:24) and later it is the name of the capital on the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the times of Jeroboam, and remains so until Omri (920-880 B.C.) built Samaria as the new capital (1 Kgs 14:17; 16:17-18, 23) (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 213). But if Tirzah is the capital, then the first colon must date back to the time of Jeroboam and Omri (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 175). However, this is hard to accept, and a Solomonic date of this verse is more likely.

³²⁹ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 88.

³³⁰ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 551, 559.

³³¹ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 146.

³³² *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, “יְרוּשָׁלַם,” (912).

³³³ Tsevat, “יְרוּשָׁלַם,” in *TDOT*, vol. 6 (1990), 352.

capital.³³⁴ The parallelism in this verse does not show the woman as cities, but her proud beauty equals the cities,³³⁵ because both תְּרִצָּה and יְרוּשָׁלַם refer to beauty.³³⁶

In the last colon of Song 6:4, the man describes his beloved's (רַעֲיָתִי) beauty in the phrase אֵימָה כַּנְּדָגְלוֹת "awe-inspiring as an army with banners."³³⁷ According to Pope, אֵימָה is used in Hab 1:7 where it applies to the terrible Neo-Babylonians, and throughout the Hebrew Bible it is associated with war to designate something terrifying, horrifying or awe-inspiring, theophany, divine or royal majesty, etc. Therefore, he understands the meaning of אֵימָה as "awesome."³³⁸ Murphy explains that אֵימָה means "awe-inspiring" based on the usage of אֵימָה in Hab 1:7 with the sense of "fearsome," in Deut 32:25 with war, and in Gen 15:12 with theophany which clearly describes a bold woman, with a view of tenderness.³³⁹ Even, the adjective אֵימָה implies the awesome terror inspired by a mighty army and it is used metaphorically in the Song 6:4, 10 to convey the woman's beauty.³⁴⁰ More recently, Long makes clear that the beauty and loveliness of the woman are highlighted in the first bicolon of 6:4 leading אֵימָה to mean "awe-inspiring" in a non-terror sense, and in the context of 6:5 which tells how the woman's eyes may excite the man, suggesting that אֵימָה may mean "fear," but it is more likely to focus on beauty within the immediate context of 6:4.³⁴¹

The participle נִדְגְלוֹת has a very uncertain meaning and it is often understood as "lift banners, in victory, or give battle" from the root דגל (I) or "to look, wait upon" from דגל (II).³⁴² The ancient versions have a military sense to נִדְגְלוֹת as τεταγμέναι "drawn up"

³³⁴ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 147.

³³⁵ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 151.

³³⁶ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 175.

³³⁷ The meaning of the phrase is crucial yet uncertain. The adjective אֵימָה literally means "terrible," "frightening" as seen in *BDB*, "אֵיִם," 33. But the adjective is embarrassing to explain with the combination of beauty and terror. אֵימָה is translated as "terrible" (ASV, KJV, NRSV, RSV), "awesome" (CGKPV, ESV, NKJ, NAS, NVNB, OVB), "awe-inspiring" (NAB), "formidable" (NJB) and "majestic" (NIB, NIV).

³³⁸ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 560.

³³⁹ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 174.

³⁴⁰ *TWOT* Hebrew Lexicon, "אֵימָה," (80b)

³⁴¹ Gary A. Long, "A Lover, Cities, and Heavenly Bodies: Co-Text and the Translation of Two Similes in Canticles (6:4c; 6:10d)," *JBL* 115 (1996):706.

³⁴² See the discussion of the root דגל of verse 2:4 in point 1.2.1.1 of this chapter.

in the LXX and “camps in battle array” in the Vulgate.³⁴³ There are two main interpretations of the participle. First, according to the meaning of “banner” which is used as the camps of Israel prepare for their wilderness journey, and תִּרְצָה “Tirzah” and יְרוּשָׁלַם “Jerusalem” in the first bicolon of the verse, the participle נִדְגָלוֹת is translated as “an army with banners,” “troops with banners,” or “bannered hosts.”³⁴⁴ Second, Gordis argues that the meaning of the phrase כְּנִדְגָלוֹת אֵימָה as “an army with banners” is unlikely and refers כְּנִדְגָלוֹת to the heavenly bodies from the Akkadian *dagaâlu* “things seen,” “looked upon.” Therefore, he understands the phrase as “awe-inspiring like cynosures, great sights.”³⁴⁵ Goitein also notes that כְּנִדְגָלוֹת parallels with “dawn, moon, sun” in 6:10, so he understands the phrase in 6:4 as “brilliant stars.”³⁴⁶

However, Fox assumes that in the context, נִדְגָל with the article could be understood as a superlative and the phrase is translated (כְּנִדְגָלוֹת) as “the most eminent.”³⁴⁷ There is no “best meaning” of the phrase כְּנִדְגָלוֹת אֵימָה known. All the translations render כְּנִדְגָלוֹת either from the root דָּגַל “banner” or from the Akkadian *dagaâlu* “look, see” which either links to Song 6:10, or is explained as a superlative. Therefore, I prefer the root דָּגַל “banner” and the meaning of the phrase as “an army with banners,” because the Akkadian *dagaâlu* “look, or see” seems to fit well in the context of 6:10, but not in 6:4. Even so, it is difficult to explain as the Hebrew text does not contain the word “army.” In the OT, נִדְגָלוֹת as often associated with military is well attested.³⁴⁸ Therefore, it is preferable to include those words. The term רַעֲיָתִי is used the last time in 6:4 to express the man’s love to his beloved by adoration of her beauty and characteristics compared as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and awe-inspiring as an army with banners.

The study of Song 1:9, 15 and 6:4 implies that רַעֲיָתִי is used to express a sexual meaning by the man. A comparison of the woman’s beauty to the tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon highlights her natural beauty that is exotic and enhanced by gold and silver (1:10-11). Hence, the man calls her רַעֲיָתִי “my beloved” or “my darling” to expresses

³⁴³ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 175.

³⁴⁴ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 147.

³⁴⁵ Gordis, “The Root דָּגַל in the Song of Songs,” 203.

³⁴⁶ S. D. Goitein, “*Ayumma Kannidgalot* (Song of Songs VI. 10),” *JSS* 10 (1965): 220-221.

³⁴⁷ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 152.

³⁴⁸ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 39.

an endearment to his beloved, and also praises her beauty as a mare which is so attractive that confuses Pharaoh's chariots (1:9). He continues to call her רַעֲיָתִי and expresses an intimacy in praising her beautiful eyes as doves (1:15). Perhaps, the eyes have good shape, gentle motion, and joy that convey a message of love. The man expresses his love by alternately calling her his beloved רַעֲיָתִי and praising her beauty (2:10, 13). In 4:1-7, the man focuses on the woman's physical beauty by a series of comparisons and a conclusion "you are wholly beautiful, my darling (רַעֲיָתִי), you are flawless" (4:1, 2, 3, 4, 7). In 6:4-6, the man praises his beloved's eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, cheeks, neck, and breasts (6:4-7). The comparison of the woman with the beauty of the two cities (6:4) shows that she is "perfect in beauty, the joy of the whole earth" as is Jerusalem. The attractive beauty of the woman is the power of eroticism which is stronger than the power of armies.³⁴⁹ The man is distinguished among ten thousand (5:10), but the woman is as awe-inspiring as an army with banners to express both joys and fears. Praising the beauty of each other, the lovers express their attraction for each other all the time, their desire for each other being even stronger with the power of love from which nothing can separate them (8:6, 7).

1.2.3.2 Marriage (4:8, 9)

If the poem in Song 3:6-11 is the description of the wedding of the two lovers, the following poems from 4:1-5:1 fit well in the context of marriage.³⁵⁰ From this phrase-level discussion, the chosen verses are 4:8, 9 studied in relating to terms as אַחֲתִי and כַּלָּה.

The man shows his strong desire for his beloved who is called as כַּלָּה in 4:8.

אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן כַּלָּה אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן תְּבוֹאִי תְּשׁוּרִי מִרֹאשׁ אֲמָנָה
מִרֹאשׁ שֵׁנִיר וְחֶרְמוֹן מִמְּעַנּוֹת אֲרִיּוֹת מִהַרְרֵי נְמִרִים:

*With me from Lebanon, O bride! With me from Lebanon, come!
Depart from the peak of Amanah, from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions, the mountains of leopards.*

³⁴⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 165.

³⁵⁰ We do not know clearly whether the poem in 3:6-11 refers to Solomon's wedding or not, even though his name is mentioned three times in 3:7, 9, and 11. But, it seems more likely that the poem describes the lovers' wedding with imagination of their wedding as Solomon's wedding associated with his mighty men, litter, and all luxuries of his time, and the man in the Song is identified with Solomon. If the poem in 3:6-11 is the description of the wedding of the two lovers, the following poems from 4:1-5:1 fit well in the context of marriage. The Song is the love songs which give a model for a human love relationship in which the lovers do not only express their passionate love but also their union in love through their marriage.

In the verse, the man calls the woman the first time כְּלָה “O bride!” and invites her to come to him from Lebanon, the place of wild animals. However, the geography of 4:8 is understood metaphorically because of the distance from Lebanon range to Senir and Hermon, the woman’s presence is hardly on these mountains, and the man is unable to call to her there.³⁵¹

The Hebrew text has אִתִּי “with me” in the first colon and the second colon. The repetition of אִתִּי is a style which makes good sense in the context with the first normal verb תָּבוֹאִי “come” in the end of the second colon serving both the first and the second colon.³⁵² The meaning “come with me from Lebanon” is used twice to emphasise the man’s request to his כְּלָה “bride.” The second verb תִּשׁוּרִי in the third colon³⁵³ means “depart.”³⁵⁴ The two verbs as תָּבוֹאִי and תִּשׁוּרִי suggest that the man invites his כְּלָה “bride” to come to him and depart from the places where she is. The term כְּלָה in the verse is used to depict the man’s strong desire for oneness in his love relationship with the woman. Furthermore, the term used refers to the married bride in the normal meaning which is supported by many scholars as Carr, Gledhill, Longman, Goulder, Garrett.³⁵⁵

The man continues to express his desire by calling his beloved not only as כְּלָה but also אָחֹתִי in Song 4:9 as:

לִבִּבְתִּנִּי אָחֹתִי כְּלָה לִבִּבְתִּינִי (בְּאֶחָד) [בְּאֶחָד] מֵעֵינַיִךְ בְּאֶחָד עֵנֶק מִצְוּרֵינֶיךָ
*You have stolen my heart my sister, my bride,
 You have stolen my heart with one of your eyes,
 With one jewel of your necklace.*

The verse 4:9 expresses the strong desire of the man for his כְּלָה “bride” and for the first time the woman is addressed as the man’s sister (אָחֹתִי “my sister”) which is always

³⁵¹ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 160.

³⁵² Carr, *Song of Songs*, 119.

³⁵³ The verb תִּשׁוּרִי derives from the root שׁוּר to mean (1) “look, look down,” (2) “travel, journey, descend, climb down.” *HALOT*, “שׁוּר,” vol. 4, 1449.

³⁵⁴ According to Murphy, the verb תִּשׁוּרִי is used in the context to mean “travel” which makes a good parallel to תָּבוֹאִי “come,” so he translates it as “come down” (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 154, 156). Furthermore, Fox explains that the meaning “look” of תִּשׁוּרִי does not fit the context, but the meaning “travel” or “journey” as שׁוּר fits well to the context because the man invites his beloved to come, not only to look (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 134).

³⁵⁵ Some scholars such as Fox, Snaith, and Exum, prefer כְּלָה as the term used to express the endearment of the man to his beloved and do not imply the wedding has take place.

used for the beloved in Egyptian love poetry to express endearment of the lovers.³⁵⁶

In the first two cola of the verse, the woman is called both **כָּלָה** and **אֶחָתִי**, as subjects of the verb **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** occur twice and only here in the Bible. The verb seems to derive from the root **לִבֵּב** meaning “inner man,” “mind,” or “heart.”³⁵⁷ Waldman thinks that **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** is not derived from the root **לֵב** or **לִבֵּב** “heart,” but **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** is identical with the Akkadian verb **לִבְבוּ** from the Late Hebrew **לִבֵּב** which is used in the sense of “arouse, incite.”³⁵⁸ Keel assumes that **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** can be understood as a privative piel as in Gordis’ translation “thou hast stolen my heart away,” or intensifying as in “you make my heart beat faster” or “you excited my heart.” He also explains that because the woman affects the man’s heart which is no longer beating normally, so he translates the first colon as “you drive me crazy” which conveys both meanings of **לִבְבֹתֵינִי**.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, Longman argues that the root **לִבֵּב** meaning “heart” is preferable, but in the context which focuses on the emotions rather than action and **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** refers to the man’s excitement when he thinks about his beloved, so he prefers Keel’s explanation.³⁶⁰ Therefore, the verb **לִבְבֹתֵינִי** may mean “you have stolen my heart” to portray a strong emotion of the man to his beloved as **כָּלָה** and **אֶחָתִי**.

The phrase **בְּאַחַד מֵעֵינַיִךְ** in the second colon of the verse³⁶¹ may mean “one of your eyes.”³⁶² The meaning makes good sense in the context because the beautiful eyes as doves have already been mentioned in 1:15 and 4:1. The literal translation is also preferable; “by

³⁵⁶ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 160.

³⁵⁷ *BDB*, “לִבֵּב” 524-525. The verb is one of the causative uses of the piel, but it is ambiguous because it could be understood as two opposite directions “to take heart” or “to lose heart,” (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 120). The ancient versions do not help, having different meanings such as: *ἐκαρδίσωσας* “ravished” in LXX; “pierced” in Vulgate; “encouragement” in Symmachus; and “strengthened” in Syriac, (Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 65).

³⁵⁸ Nahum M. Waldman, “A Note on Canticles 4:9,” *JBL* 89 (1970), 215.

³⁵⁹ Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 85; Keel, *Song of Songs*, 162.

³⁶⁰ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 149-151.

³⁶¹ This phrase is difficult in the Hebrew because the noun **מֵעֵינַיִךְ** means “eyes” in feminine, but **בְּאַחַד** means “one of” in the masculine (Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 66). Gordis holds that **בְּאַחַד** in masculine is a scribal error of **בְּאַחַת** in feminine and the error also crept into the following phrase **עִנְךָ** (Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 85). However, it is unnecessary to emend **בְּאַחַד** to **בְּאַחַת** because as Pope renders sometimes parts of body are employed occasionally as masculine as seen in Job 21:20 and Zech 4:10, and the phrase is translated literally “with one of your eyes” which reflects “the goddess of multiple eyes” as seen in ancient world (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 481).

³⁶² Seen in translations such as OVB, CGKPV, NVNB, ESV, NAS, NIV, and TNK.

the power of eyes” is the motif used frequently in love poetry.³⁶³ In this context, the man describes that just one look or a glance of the woman’s eyes is enough to steal his heart. The phrase *מַצְיֹרְנִיךְ עֵנֶק* in the third colon³⁶⁴ may mean “one jewel of your necklace” because the parallel in the verse suggests that the meaning of the third colon must fit into the second colon. Therefore, both terms *כְּלָה* and *אָחֹתִי* in 4:9 are parallel expressing the strong emotion of the man to his beloved who captures his heart with one of the woman’s eyes and one jewel of her necklace.

In the context of Song 4:8 and 9, the term *כְּלָה* is used not only to express endearment and intimacy, but also to express its normal meaning “bride” because they are just married (3:6-11).³⁶⁵ The images in 4:8 are used as metaphors for obstacles which prevent the man accessing her as seen in 2:14, even when she is with him. The man’s invitation is to urge that the woman recognizes her new role in the nature of their relationship. In verse 4:9, the man calls the woman *כְּלָה* and *אָחֹתִי* “my sister” to show his affection.³⁶⁶ The term *אָחֹתִי* is not used in its literal meaning as his biological sister. The man portrays his love to the woman in sexual union and his offer of protection to bring the woman to the safe place. The verse shows the man’s feeling about his beloved’s beauty and the power of her looks. Therefore, he is as a captive before her. Indeed, the power of love is an attraction to draw both the man and the woman to become one (Gen 2:23).³⁶⁷

1.2.3.3 Erotic and sensuous feeling (5:1)

The lovers encourage each other into their mutual intoxication and satiation. In this expression, the chosen verse is 5:1 studied in relation to the terms as *כְּלָה*, *אָחֹתִי*, *רַעִים*, and *הַדּוֹרִים*.

³⁶³ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 156.

³⁶⁴ The phrase is of uncertain meaning. It seems to be connected either with “neck” or “necklace” (Meek, *Song of Songs*, 124). Gordis suggests that the noun *עֵנֶק* has two meanings “neck” and “jewel,” but the latter is preferable in the context, as seen in Prov 1:9 which designates the objects hung around the necks of women, and the noun *צִוְרָן* is derived from *צִוָּאר* “neck,” but means “ornament for neck, necklace,” not “neck” (Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 86). Exum explains that *עֵנֶק* is a unit of *מַצְיֹרְנִיךְ* “your necklace” which is probably either a strand of a necklace or some sort of ornament on it such as a gem or a bead (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 154).

³⁶⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 192.

³⁶⁶ Ogden and Zogho, *Song of Songs*, 124.

³⁶⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 194.

בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֶחְתִּי כִלְהָ אָרִיתִי מוֹרֵי עִם־בְּשָׂמִי
 אֶכְלֹתִי יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבַשִּׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִנִי עִם־חֶלְבִי
 אֶכְלוּ רְעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ הַדּוֹרִים:

*I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride! I have gathered my myrrh with spice,
 I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.
 (The daughters of Jerusalem:) Eat, friends, drink! Be intoxicated, lovers.*

The climax of the poem in Song 4:8-5:1 is verse 5:1 in which the man describes how he possesses his beloved called כִלְהָ and אֶחְתִּי who has invited him to enter her erotic garden. Many delights of the preceding verses reappear in the verse such as: גַּל “garden” in 4:12, 15, 16; אֶחְתִּי כִלְהָ “my sister, my bride” in 4:9, 10; מוֹר “myrrh” and בְּשָׂמִים “spices” in 4:14; חֶלְבִי “milk” and דְּבַשִּׁי “honey” in 4:11. The verse is the man’s response to his beloved’s invitation in 4:16 to come to his garden and now he fulfills his desire joyfully, and possesses her in the garden.

The four verbs in the verse are בָּאתִי “I have come”; אָרִיתִי “I have gathered”; אֶכְלֹתִי “I have eaten”; and שְׁתִּיתִי “I have drunk” used in the perfect tense.³⁶⁸ The perfect tense in Hebrew syntax can be translated in past, present, present perfect tenses and even in the future.³⁶⁹ Pope assumes that the past tense in the verse are so-called *perfect confidentiae*, to show actions which are completed in the future.³⁷⁰ Therefore, the present perfect tense of the four verbs seems preferable in the context in which the man answers to his beloved’s invitation in 4:16.

The verbs in the last colon can be understood in the present tense as indicated by the imperatives אֶכְלוּ “eat,” שְׁתוּ “drink,” which show that the man has not yet taken of the food and drink. It seems preferable to assume the speakers in the last colon are the daughters of Jerusalem, who are mentioned in 1:4; 2:7; and 3:5.³⁷¹ The daughters urge רְעִים “friends” as הַדּוֹרִים “the lovers” in their union and command them to eat and drink so that they are

³⁶⁸ But the three imperatives of the last colon of the verse such as אֶכְלוּ רְעִים “eat, O friends”; שְׁתוּ “drink”; וְשָׁכְרוּ “drink deeply” which seem not to make sense because the four verbs used in the perfect that suppose that דְּבַשִּׁי “my honey” and חֶלְבִי “my milk” have already been finished.

³⁶⁹ Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 85-86.

³⁷⁰ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 504.

³⁷¹ The translators of NVNB signify the speaker of the last colon as the friends and guests who are invited to the celebration of the lovers’ union. In contrast, the translators of NKJV indicate the speaker as the Shulamite who addresses the man’s friends. Others state that the speaker is the man who turns to his friends and invites them to eat and drink (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 184).

drunk³⁷² and enjoy fully their love.³⁷³ Some interpret רעים “friends” as parallel to דוֹרִים “lovers” as in the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate.³⁷⁴ This interpretation indicates the last colon to be addressed to the lovers. Another interpretation is that דוֹרִים in the plural always means “love” elsewhere in the Bible and is understood as an “adverbial accusative” in the Song and רעים is understood as the lovers.³⁷⁵ Both interpretations above make sense in the context; either דוֹרִים is interpreted as “love,” “signs of affection” or “lovers.” But it seems preferable to maintain the parallelism as the style in the Hebrew in the last colon and translate it as “Eat, friends, drink! Be intoxicated, lovers.” The parallelisms also occur in 5:16 as יְזֶה רֹדְדִי וְזֶה רְעִי “this is my lover and this is my friend,” in 1:15 spoken by the man as הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רְעִיתִי “Behold you are beautiful my love,” and in 1:16 spoken by woman as הִנֵּךְ יָפָה רֹדְדִי “Behold you are beautiful my love.”³⁷⁶

In the verse 5:1, the man calls his beloved כַּלָּה and אָחֹתִי to tell her that he has possessed her completely and has entered his garden to enjoy all of its delights. רעים “friends” and דוֹרִים “the lovers” are also used to express an erotic and sexual sense. The study of the verse shows that the woman invites her lover to come to his garden and taste the erotic sweet fruits offered to him (4:16). The man responds and comes to his garden (5:1) which refers to his beloved whom the man calls אָחֹתִי “my sister” and כַּלָּה “my bride” with the same erotic and sexual sense in 4:12 and 4:15.³⁷⁷ He has come to gather myrrh with her spice, eat her honey, and drink her wine with milk in the garden. The metaphors are used to depict the sexual union with which the man is intoxicated and satisfied in his beloved’s garden as in his own garden. In the last of verse 5:1, רעים “friends” address the two as דוֹרִים “lovers” to celebrate the lovers’ union. The daughters of Jerusalem encourage דוֹרִים “lovers” to continue to enjoy and delight in their love. Therefore, דוֹרִים used in 5:1 refers to physical sexual relationship as seen throughout the Song. In the Wisdom Literature,

³⁷² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 159.

³⁷³ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 139.

³⁷⁴ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 157.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Francis Landy, “Beauty and the Enigma: An Inquiry in to Some Interrelated Episodes of the Song of Songs” in *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 91.

³⁷⁷ Fiona C. Black, “What is my Beloved? On Erotic Reading and the Song of Songs” in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Fiona C. Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 41.

the physical sexual relationship is a powerful force to bind a man and a woman in their oneness.

1.2.4 Summary

I have tried to show the phrase-level semantics of love through various texts in relating particular terms such as אָהַב; דּוֹרֵי; רַעֲיָתִי and other two terms כָּלָה and אָחֹתִי.

The two lovers express their love through kisses which are associated with wine to bring the lovers more pleasure, excited and intoxicated in love as the woman describes the man's love (דּוֹרֵי “your love”) as better than wine (1:2, 4; 7:10). Their desire for each other is in acts of intimacy and passionate love (אָהַבָה) (1:3; [4]; 2:4). The acts depict the desire for union of the lovers, joys, and sensual feelings. The woman experiences lovesickness (כִּי-חֹלֶת אָהַבָה) when her desire to be united with her lover is insatiable and her lovesickness can be healed only by the presence of her lover (2:5; 5:8). That is why the woman claims the mutual belonging to her lover (דּוֹרֵי) as a formula of mutual possession of the lovers (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). For the mutual belonging, the woman seeks her lover whom her soul loves (שָׂאֲהַבָה נַפְשִׁי) until she can find him and they satisfy their loves (3:1, 4). However, she gives warnings that the joys and delights of love (אָהַבָה) can be achieved only at the right time and in the right place, and it needs to be protected carefully from threats of ruin (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15). The lovers continue to express the power of love (אָהַבָה) throughout the Song, especially in 8:6 and 7 where the power is compared to death, or flames of fire which many waters cannot quench and even rivers cannot sweep away. However, the lovers' relationship must be marked by the wedding day that is a joyful day for the lovers and the people around. On this day, the lovers are officially united both in their physical sexual and emotional relationship, and enjoy their love, and in the context of marriage the man refers to the woman as כָּלָה “my bride” and אָחֹתִי “my sister” (4:8, 9). The man is invited by his beloved (אָחֹתִי, כָּלָה) to taste the erotic sweet fruits and both דּוֹרֵי “lovers” as רַעִים “friends” are drunk with love (5:1). Their love relationship is carried on not only by keeping the mutual possession and permanent commitment in marriage but also by praising each other's beauty, both external appearance and internal personality, especially the praise spoken by the man to address the woman (רַעֲיָתִי “O my darling” in 1: 9, 15; 6:4).

1.3 Conclusion

I have studied the terms of love in the Hebrew Bible as אָהַב; הִסֵּד; רָחַם; דָּוָד; רַע; יָרִיד; and חָשַׁק. The terms express various meanings of love that are not simply an emotional feeling but the entire nature of a relationship. The study also shows that the terms as אָהַב; הִסֵּד; and חָשַׁק are used to refer to three general aspects of love, human love, love for God, and divine love. However, all the terms of love studied are not entirely the same meaning and each of them has specific meaning not found in the other terms.

The term אָהַב is common for love with a broad meaning such as sexual desire or romantic attraction of a man and a woman; general feelings of love of persons in families, friends, or neighbours, and even enemies; and desire, affection, or love used both for human and divine-human relations. The term הִסֵּד is used more frequently to refer to acts or aspects of love such as loyal love, steadfast love, kindness, or loving kindness in personal relationship, human to God and neighbour, and God to Israel. However, the term is not used to refer to sexual desire or emotional love as in אָהַב and does not occur in the Song. The term רָחַם means “to love, to have mercy, to have compassion” and it is used more frequently for God to express his nature. The term דָּוָד is used to refer to the meanings such as “uncle or beloved or lover,” but mainly to denote erotic meaning in the Song. The term רַע means “friend or companion” and it becomes “lover or beloved” in sexual sense in the Song. The term יָרִיד means “lover or beloved” and usually refers to God’s love to Israel as his beloved. Finally, the term חָשַׁק is used infrequently, but it covers the three general aspects of love with a meaning of a desire to be attached to the other.

Among the terms of love in the Hebrew Bible, there are only three terms occurring in the Song: אָהַב; דָּוָד; and רַע in the form as רַעֲיָה. The study shows that the three terms are used to express the erotic love and sexual desire of the two lovers. Besides the three terms, there are other two terms such as כָּלָה and אֶחָדִי which occur in the Song, and are also studied because they are used as parallels and denote the same sense with the terms רַעֲיָה and דָּוָד.

To explore the meaning of love in the Song, I have selected various texts in relating to the particular terms of love throughout the eight chapters of the Song. The study shows that the texts contain a variety of meanings and readings of the Hebrew words and the

uncertainties involved in the texts. However, the emotional expressions, imagery and idiomatic usages in the Hebrew love poetry express powerfully the meaning of love in the Song.

The term **אַהֲבָה** is used to depict the wonders of sexual love such as intimacy and passion (1:3 [4]; 2:4); insatiable desire (2:5; 5:8); warnings (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15); seeking and finding (3:1, 4); and the power of love (8:6, 7). As other passages in the Hebrew Bible and in the aspect of human love, **אַהֲבָה** is also used to express the passionate and sexual love between a man and a woman and in the context of marital relationships (Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24:67); Samson and Delilah (Judg 16:4, 15); Michal and David (1 Sam 18:20)). The study of the term **אַהֲבָה** in the Song indicates that the meaning used refers to the joyful experience of sexual love relationship as the power of love in mutual devotion of the two lovers.

The term **דִּוָּר** has a strong erotic meaning used for the man loved by the woman to express kisses (1:2, 4; 7:10) and mutual belonging (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). The meaning is also found in the Prophets and Wisdom Literature in which **דִּוָּר** refers to the intimate physical sexual relationship (e.g., Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:8; 23:17; cf. Hos 8:9; Prov 5:19). Indeed, **דִּוָּר** is used in the Song to denote the delight of the lovers' affectionate and intimate relationship, and the denotation is a personal, physical and sexual love relationship.

The terms **רַעֲיָתִי** and its parallels as **כַּלָּה** and **אָהוּתִי** are used for the woman by the man. The terms occur only in the Song to portray the attraction of beauty (1:9, 15; 6:4); marriage (4:8, 9); and the erotic and sensuous feelings (5:1). The terms also convey a strong erotic sense and an intimate relationship as **דִּוָּר**.

The exploration of the terms of love such as **אַהֲבָה**; **דִּוָּר**; **רַעֲיָתִי** and the other two terms **כַּלָּה** and **אָהוּתִי** through the phrase-level semantics of love in the Song demonstrates that the meaning of love in the Song is the celebration of joys of physical intimacy of the lovers before and after marriage. Indeed, the Song invites readers to discover diverse expressions of the passionate love relationship of the lovers. The study insists that the primary meaning of love in the Song is human love relationship in which the lovers enjoy the physical pleasure of their love. However, traditional allegorical interpretations, which the Vietnamese Protestant Evangelical Church imbedded, understand the meaning of love in the Song as the love relationship between God and Israel, or the love between Christ and his

church or Christ and the individual believer, dominated for many centuries and even today. Therefore, it is necessary to study the historical survey of the Song in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETATIONS OF LOVE IN THE SONG:

A HISTORICAL SURVEY

The opening words of the Song introduce love in sexual and romantic language “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine” (1:2). The words tell us of the powerful images of the passionate longing of the lovers and physical expression in marriage. But such a subject seems odd in the Bible. Moreover, the Song is the most enigmatic book without referring to God,¹ religion, or spiritual things, and it is like locks to which the keys are missing.² Such matters were obviously complicated through the centuries for many interpreters who have attempted to explain the meaning of love by determining the literary category of the Song and what basic approach needs to be taken in interpreting the meaning. Therefore, interpretations of the Song proposed are whether the Song focuses on sexuality, or spirituality, or both. The surveys of the history of interpretations of the Song are available in the commentaries of Pope (1977); Murphy (1977); Longman (2001); Garrett (2004); and Exum (2005).³ Most church leaders of the Vietnamese Protestant Evangelical Church have imbedded the allegorical interpretation of the Song and based their understanding on Burrowes’ commentary rather than a literal interpretation.⁴

The purpose in this chapter is to examine the interpretative context in which the Vietnamese readings of the Song have become imbedded; then attempting to open up these

¹ See the study of verse 8:6 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One.

² Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; New York: Doubleday, 1977), 89.

³ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 89-229; Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 11-41; Tremper Longman, *The Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-47; Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 59-91; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2005), 73-86.

⁴ See the Introduction of the Thesis and note 2 of Chapter One.

interpretations to provide a new context (the ‘literal’ readings) for the Vietnamese readings. Therefore, in this chapter I will draw out what has been discovered about love in Chapter One and compare it with the history of interpretations of the Song. The study will not attempt to survey all of the history of interpretations of the Song, but rather select prominent interpreters in Jewish and Christian allegorical or traditional interpretations (see below), precursors of the literal interpretation and contemporary interpreters which are deserving of comparison. The interpreters are selected because they represent the different schools of interpretation of the meaning of love in the Song.

I will show that allegorists understand the love in the Song differently from what the text supposes it to be. I will also demonstrate that the literal meaning is the meaning of words in their primary or nonfigurative sense which are derivable from the ordinary rules of grammar, the structures and rhetorical strategies of the text, or from the authorial intention.⁵ There are ambiguities in the text that cause so many various theories that it is difficult to recognize how love should be exactly interpreted. Finally, there are principles suggested to discover the meaning of love in the Song focusing on a literal interpretation as the best way to present the Song into the Vietnamese society and church context.

2.1 Traditional interpretations

The traditional interpretations understand the love spiritually as the love of God for his people Israel or of Jesus Christ for his church or the individual believer. The term used in traditional interpretations is ἀλληγορέω (I allegorize) which is a combination of the two Greek words: ἄλλος (other) and ἀγορεύω (I speak or proclaim).⁶ These words can convey the idea “to say something different from what the words themselves imply, and can etymologically be applied to any figurative form of expression or thought.”⁷ A key point of this definition is the use of figurative language and metaphors to express spiritual meanings hidden behind the literal meaning of the words.⁸

⁵ W. Randolph Tale, “Literal meaning,” in *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 10-11. See also Frances Young, “Literal Meaning,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM, 1990), 401-402.

⁶ Liddell-Scott Lexicon, “ἀλληγορέω,” 1826.

⁷ G. H. Schodde, “Allegory,” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 395.

⁸ Andrew Louth, “Allegorical Interpretation,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM, 1990), 12-14. See also William R. Goodman, “Allegory,” in *EDB* (2000), 43-44.

The allegorical interpretations of the Song have influenced the Vietnamese Church and have prevailed throughout Jewish and Christian circles for many centuries.⁹ The logic behind allegorical interpretations is that the Bible is the Word of God, and the Song is a book in the Bible. Therefore, it is a book about God.

2.1.1 Jewish Allegorical Interpretation

The earliest stage of the history of interpretation of the Song is uncertain.¹⁰ In common assumption, Jewish tradition begins with allegorical or spiritualizing exposition in which the basis of the interpretation is understood as the man or the bridegroom representing God, the woman or the bride representing Israel.¹¹ Therefore, the love in the Song is actually the love of God given to Israel, not about the sensual love between a man and a woman.¹² There are prominent Jewish allegorical interpretation of the Song considered such as Aqiba, the Targum on the Song, and Midrash Rabbah.

2.1.1.1 Aqiba on the Song (100 A.D.)

An early voice for the allegorical interpretation is Aqiba with the isolated statements.

Aqiba states that “He who trills his voice in the chanting of the Song of Songs and treats it as a secular song, has no share in the world to come!”¹³ and, “Heaven forbid . . . for all ages do not have the same value as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, because all of the Writings are Holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.”¹⁴ Aqiba held an allegorical interpretation of the Song rather than a literal one and explains that to sing the Song in an unacceptable way and unsuitable place is a serious transgression.¹⁵ Surviving examples of exegesis by named Tannaitic figures mention Aqiba’s reading of the Song as a dialogue between God the lover and Israel people the beloved.¹⁶

⁹ Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *Song of Songs* (New York: United Bible Societies: 1998), 3-4.

¹⁰ Roland Murphy, *Songs of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 24.

¹³ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 1051.

¹⁴ Samson Dunsky, ed., *Song of Songs Rabbah* (Devir: Tel Aviv, 1980), 11.

¹⁵ Michael E. Stone, “The Interpretation of Song of Songs in *4 Ezra*,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 226.

¹⁶ Raphael Loewe, “Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs” in *Biblical Motifs*, edited by A. Altmann [Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1966], 161. A few extracts of Aqiba are cited as: “I will speak

2.1.1.2 Targum on the Song (between 700-800 A.D.)

The Targum is the prime source for Jewish allegorical interpretation written between the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁷ It introduces the idea that the Song is Solomon's story from the exodus to the future rebuilding of the third temple to express the deep love between Israel¹⁸ and God and it includes the ten songs given to this world as a redemptive history of God's chosen people, Israel.¹⁹

According to Alexander, the Targum of the Song may be set out into five parts: the first part is the title which introduces the Midrash of the Ten Songs with an opening benediction in 1:1-2; the second part is from the Exile of Egypt to the construction of the tabernacle and Israel's triumphal entry into Canaan preaching the climax with the glories of the Solomonic age in 1:3-5:1; the third part is the account of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Israel in exile in Babylon, ingathering of the exiles from Babylon, and the restoration of the ideal polity and the glories of the Hasmonean age in 5:2-7:11;²⁰ the fourth part is the exile of Edom, the picture reverting to the Messianic age, and the restoration of the Solomonic polity under the King Messiah in 7:12-8:12; and the fifth part is Solomon's prophetic plea to Israel at the end of days and the concluding prayer in 8:13-14.²¹

There are four features in the Targum of the Song: the symbol of God's love for Israel; the emphasis on Israel's sin; the building of the tabernacle and also the atoning value

of the beauty and praise of God before all the nations. They ask Israel and say, "What is your beloved more than any other beloved that thou dost so charge us" (Cant. v. 5), that you die for Him, and that you are slain for Him"; "My beloved is mine and I am his" (Cant. ii. 16). Israel says: He is my God, and I am His people; he is my father, and I am His son; He is my shepherd, and I am his flock; He is my Guardian, and I am His vineyard"; "Many waters cannot quench love" (Cant. viii. 7). If the idolatrous nations of the world were to unite to destroy the love between God and Israel, they would be unable to do so." The above extracts are cited from Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, (Macmillan, 1938), where other extracts of the Song can be found. See also Murphy, "Note 55," in *Song of Songs*, 13; and also Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Song of Songs* [London: Elek Books Limited, 1959], 18-19.

¹⁷ Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles: Translated with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Aramaic Bible 17A; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 55.

¹⁸ Larry L. Lyke, *I Will Espouse You Forever: The Song of Songs and the Theology of Love in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Loewe, "Apologetic Motifs in the Targum on the Song of Songs," 169; Alexander, *Targum*, 75; see also Pope, *Song of Songs*, 296. Pope provides a translation and commentary of each verse in the Targum at the end of each verse in his notes and commentary of the Song.

²⁰ Hasmoneans in classic Rabbinic sources may contain an indication of the Targumist's date (Alexander, *Targum*, 17).

²¹ Alexander, *Targum*, 14-18.

of the temple cultus; and the very restricted role accorded to the King Messiah.²² The Targum allegorizes the four features in the Song as the story of God's love for Israel. These features are explained as "anti-Christian apologetic" and "polemic against Jewish esotericism."²³

There are several examples explained verse by verse in the Targum such as the text "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine" in Song 1:2²⁴ which is read by the Targum as:²⁵

Said Solomon, the prophet: Blessed be the name of YHWH who gave us the Law at the hands of Moses, the Scribe, a Law inscribed on two tablets of stone, and the six Orders of the Mishnah and the Talmud by oral tradition, and spoke to us face to face as a man kisses his companion, from the abundance of the love with which He loved us, more than seventy nations.

The text "Your oils have a pleasing fragrance; your name is poured out as oil; Therefore do the maidens love you" in 1:3 is read in the Targum as:²⁶

At the sound of your wonders and great works that you did for your people, the house of Israel, all the people shook; especially those who heard the report of your greatness and your good signs. Your holy name was heard in all the world as more choice than the abundant anointing that was placed upon the heads of kings and priests. As a result, the righteous desired to follow after your good ways in order to gain this world and the world to come.

In the first three poems of the Song in 1:2-4, 1:5-8, and in 1:7-8,²⁷ the Targum interprets the poems that the woman is the people of Israel who ask for the kisses from the man who is God and desire to have a relationship with him "face-to-face" (1:2); they hear the divine name which is better than anointing oil (1:3); and then the people seek to be in God's presence and as God grants them so serve him and follow his commandments (1:4),²⁸ but in the wilderness, the people sin against God by worshiping the calf (1:5), after that they confess their sin (1:6).²⁹ The Targum describes 1:7-8 as Moses' anxiety about Israel's fidelity in the future to God and his rebukes to the people.³⁰

²² Loewe, "The Targum to the Song of Songs," 173.

²³ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 96. See also in Loewe "The Targums to the Song of Songs," 173.

²⁴ See the study of verse 1:2 in point 1.2.2.1 of Chapter One.

²⁵ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 299.

²⁶ Lyke, *I will Espouse You Forever*, 74.

²⁷ See the division of the Song in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two.

²⁸ Lyke, *I will Espouse You Forever*, 72, 74, 77.

²⁹ Alexander, *Targum*, 78-85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

In the examples above, the Targum interprets the Song in so much detail and is complicated in paraphrasing the text. As we have discovered, the meanings of Song 1:2-4 is spoken by the woman to depict a woman desiring for her lover's kisses that are an indication of passionate love and a vital act of intimacy and passion (1:2); she is overwhelmed by the feelings of love from the fragrance of the man's reputation (1:3); the woman and the maidens praise and enjoy the man for his love which is better than wine (1:4).³¹ The poem in 1:5-6 is self-description, an apology relating to the woman's appearance in which the woman insists on her beauty, even though her skin became dark for working under that sun.³² But Targum connects this to the worship of the golden calf. And the poem in 1:7-8 describes the woman who wants to know where her lover is, in order to come to him.

2.1.1.3 Midrash Rabbah (eighth century A.D.)

Midrash Rabbah is dated approximately the same time as the Targum, possibly later.³³ The Midrash Rabbah is offered by Jewish writers who follow the same allegorical approach as the Targum describing the meaning of love in the Song as the mutual love of God and Israel in which God gives the law and the redemption of his people from Egypt, and Israel the acceptance of the law and willingness to suffer for the sake of God.³⁴ But in contrast to the Targum, the Midrash interprets the Song word by word, phrase by phrase, and verse by verse. There are many verses subdivided for the purpose of exegesis, without taking into account the context.³⁵

There are examples of the Song taken in the Midrash Rabbah such as Song 1:2 "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine," which is divided into two clauses. The first clause of the verse "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"

³¹ See the study of 1:2 in point 1.2.2.1 and 1:3-4 in point 1.2.1.1 of Chapter One.

³² The conjunction וְ of the clause וְנִאֲמָה אֲנִי שְׁחֹרָה in the first colon of 1:5, could mean "and" or "but." Even though the meaning of וְ as "and" is supported by scholars such as, Pope (*Song of Songs*, 308); Falk (*Song of Songs*, 168); Murphy (*Song of Songs*, 126), I prefer the meaning "but," because of the evidence in the context, which explains why the woman's complexion has changed under the sun. She defends herself that even if she is dark complexion. She is beautiful before the daughters of Jerusalem who, because are living in the big city, do not have to labor under the sun like her. She carefully explains how her skin became dark because her brothers forced her to work in the vineyards (1:6). This is nothing to do with race, but rather depends on the prevailing standard of beauty of the culture at that time.

³³ Lyke, *I will Espouse You Forever*, 81.

³⁴ Midrash Rabbah, *Song of Songs*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1961), vii.

³⁵ Ibid.

is subdivided into five parts, and the second clause of the verse “For your love is better than wine” is subdivided into three parts.³⁶ In the first clause, there are many comments, especially the comment attributed to Johanan as follows.

An angel carried the utterances [at Mount Sinai] from before the Holy One, blessed be He, each one in turn, and brought it to each of the Israelites and said to him, ‘Do you take upon yourself this commandment? ...’ The Israelites would answer him, ‘Yes.’ Hence he then said, ‘Do you accept the divinity of the Holy One, blessed be He?’ and he answered, ‘Yes, yes.’ There-upon he kissed him on the mouth; hence it says, *Unto thee it was shown that thou mightest know* (Deut. 4:35), namely, by an [angelic] messenger.³⁷

In the second clause, there are many comments contributing to the clause, especially the comment attributed to Johanan that the commands of the Scribes are more beloved than those of the Torah, as it says, “For thy love is better than wine.”³⁸

Another verse is 1:5 “I am black, but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the tent of curtains of Solomon” is divided into three clauses. The first clause “I am black but beautiful” is subdivided into two parts; the second is “O daughters of Jerusalem”; and the third is “the tents of Kedar.”³⁹

One of the interpretations of the first clause in Song 1:5 is “I am black in my own sight, but comely before my Creator” as it is written in Amos 9:7 which describes Israel not as the children of Ethiopians, but in the Lord’s own eyes as the children of Israel whom the Lord has brought out from the land of Egypt.⁴⁰ In the second clause, Johanan says Jerusalem will one day turn out to be the capital of all countries, and draw people to her to give her respect.⁴¹ The third clause is interpreted as even though from outside the tents of Kedar look ugly, black, and ragged, the inside contains precious stones and pearls. Therefore, the followers of the wise are the same, even though they look frightful and swarthy in this world, they have knowledge of the Pentateuch, the Scriptures, the Mishnas, the Midrash, Halachoth, and Talmud.⁴²

³⁶ Ibid., 20-36.

³⁷ Ibid., 21- 22.

³⁸ Ibid., 32.

³⁹ Ibid., 51-55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 53.

⁴² Ibid., 54-55.

Both Targum and Midrash take an historical allegorical interpretation to connect the Song with episodes from Israelite history such as the giving of the Torah,⁴³ and both identify the woman as Israel and the man as God. Their historical allegory is the dominant early Jewish allegorical interpretation of the Song.⁴⁴ However, both interpret the Song for their purpose rather than what the context of the Song says.

The survey of the ancient Jewish interpretation of the Song shows that there are various themes of love represented. But none considers the meaning of love in the literal or natural interpretation of the Song nor supports a sexual and erotic meaning as we found in the Song.

2.1.2 Christian Allegorical Interpretation

The early Christian interpretation follows Jewish interpretation very closely. The interpretation identifies the love in the Song as the love of Jesus Christ and the church and/or the individual Christian.⁴⁵ There are a few prominent allegorists of Christian exegesis of the Song such as Hippolytus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, and Thomas Brightman.

2.1.2.1 Hippolytus of Rome on the Song (170-235 A.D)

Hippolytus is the first Christian to write a purely spiritual interpretation to the Song⁴⁶ which is about the marriage of the church to the Incarnate Word, but unfortunately his work remains only as fragments in Greek.⁴⁷ He does not understand love as the relationship between God and the individual soul, but his approach is widely salvation-historical in which the Song is read as “Solomonic prophecy” of the old and new covenants, and Israel is understood as the church, the subject of God’s love.⁴⁸

⁴³ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 61.

⁴⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 74.

⁴⁵ The Christian interpretation is following Jewish allegorical interpretation but doing so christologically.

⁴⁶ Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes (Great Britain: T&T Clark LTD, 1994), 44.

⁴⁷ James M. Reese, *The Book of Wisdom, Song of Songs* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 211.

⁴⁸ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 15.

Hippolytus understands “the king has brought me into his chambers” in Song 1:4 as those whom Christ had wedded and brought into his church.⁴⁹ Here he identifies the man as Christ and the woman as a member of the church. In the verse 4:5, Hippolytus interprets “the two breasts” of the woman as the old and the new covenants.⁵⁰ He understands the basic unity and profound significance of the two parts of the Bible. Chappuzeau describes Hippolytus’ approach as very succinct hermeneutics: looking at the earthly, one has to understand the heavenly through the symbolic views the spiritual, and through the temporal one has a hope for the everlasting.⁵¹ Therefore, this approach is the task of those who want to understand the Scripture, the figures of the Bible are symbols of truth, and the symbols of the truth in the Song are declared by Solomon and fulfilled in Christ by the grace of God.⁵²

Almost one hundred years before Hippolytus, the Jewish interpreters understood the Song to be about God’s love for Israel.⁵³ This understanding affects Hippolytus’ interpretation so that he uses the same method as the Targum in the interpretation of the Song. But the difference is that he just transforms the symbols from God and Israel to Jesus and the Church.

2.1.2.2 Origen (184-253 A.D.)

Origen is the great Christian allegorical interpreter along with Hippolytus.⁵⁴ He is considered largely to be a mystic, spiritualist, Platonist, and “true Gnostic” by the early twentieth century scholars such as Bigg (1913), Daniélou (1948), Koch (1932), and Völker (1931).⁵⁵

Origen wrote ten full volumes on the Song during 240-245 A.D., but only two homilies of his work on Song 1:1-2:14 survive in a Latin translation made by St. Jerome.⁵⁶ Origen understands the Song as not meaning a physical relationship, but it is the spiritual

⁴⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 114.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 15.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 28.

⁵⁴ Reese, *Book of Wisdom*, 211.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth A. Clark, “Origen, the Jew, and the Song of Songs: Allegory and Polemic in Christian Antiquity,” in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (New York: Walter de Gruyter: 2005), 275.

⁵⁶ Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies: Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. xxvi, trans. R. P. Lawson (London: The Newman Press, 1957), 16-17.

nature in which the love of the bridegroom would be identified as the love of God and the bride is identified either as the Christian soul or the church; the Song is truly the same with the perfect marriage-hymn that belongs to the bridegroom alone.⁵⁷ Origen introduces his commentary as:

This little book is an epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the Bride, about to wed and burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God. And deeply indeed did she love Him, whether we take her as the soul made in His image, or as the Church.⁵⁸

In the introduction, Origen names the Song as a wedding song and understands the literal meaning of the Song as a superficial babble, unworthy of God, but he defends a typological meaning of the Song, that it actually has a higher meaning than what was described as a profane wedding song.⁵⁹

In Origen's two homilies, he understands in verse 1:2 that the woman identified as the church longs for the kisses of her lover, Christ; the kisses are the Word of God given to his Church as the perfected soul; and now she is satisfied by the kisses of his mouth-meaning she is able to enter into direct communication with him.⁶⁰ Origen interprets the third colon of 1:4 according to the spiritual meaning as when Christ leads a soul to understand his mind that means the soul to be brought into the King's chambers which are the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge.⁶¹ Thus, Origen refers the meaning in the third colon to Paul's reference to Christ and he also distinguishes two opposition types as earthly and physical which differ from the heavenly and spiritual, as his comment in 1:4 that a love of the flesh comes from Satan, but there is another love which belongs to the Spirit and its origin is in God.⁶² Furthermore, Origen interprets the verses 2:12-13 as the flowers which have grown on the earth, and the trees which have sprouted are the season of spring time which is now

⁵⁷ J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15, 26. Cf. Robert, Raymond and Tournay also explains that the poem in Song 3:6-11 may be read as parallels to the Israelites' journey through the wilderness because the detailed description of the poem is similar to the descriptions of the wilderness tabernacle and the temple (André Robert, Raymond Tournay, and André Feuillet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: traduction et commentaire* [Paris: Gabalda, 1963], 140-144, 155-158); Exod 25-31, 35-40; 1 Kgs 6-7.

⁵⁸ Origen, *Song of Songs*, 21.

⁵⁹ Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 8.

⁶⁰ Origen, *Song of Songs*, 58-61.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 84-85. See Loewe, "Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs," 179. See also 1 Cor 2:16, 9, 12; and Col 2:3.

⁶² Pope, *Song of Songs*, 115.

with us, and Christ, who has doubtless sat indoors all winter, calls upon the his bride to come forth in the proper time.⁶³ Then, he adds a formidable qualification that to him earthly things seem to be of no profit to the reader as far as the story of the Song goes and nor do they preserve any continuous narrative such as we find in other stories of the Scripture, but it is necessary to give them all a spiritual meaning.⁶⁴

In the interpretations above, we can see that Origen keeps much closer to details of the biblical text and presents both ecclesiastical and psychological interpretations of “the bride.” He also characterizes the biblical work as a marriage-song which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama.⁶⁵ He links the Song to other parts of the Bible and understands its purpose as fulfilling the spiritual needs of the reader. Therefore, his concern for the Song is for theological relevance.⁶⁶ Origen also links the Platonic and Gnostic attitudes toward sexuality to denature the Song and transform it into a spiritual meaning free from all eroticism that leads the reader toward the divine senses of the inner man rather than reference to bodily functions.⁶⁷ Furthermore, to him, the body and the soul are separated, but the body is secondary and to promote the soul, the body needs to be subjugated and eliminated in death.⁶⁸ Therefore, all bodily things must be despised to gain spiritual love.⁶⁹

In short, Origen treats the Song as something other than the text itself and the sexual dimensions of the Song which demand a “resaying.”⁷⁰ It is not surprising that Origen quickly changes the literal meaning of love in the Song to the spiritual meaning as in the examples above. In other words, his “bodiless” reading of the Song totally avoids the real meaning of the text which is plain, superficial babble and unworthy of God.⁷¹ The reason is that he cannot reconcile the sensual meaning of the text with the spiritual meaning that it must be understood also to impart. The strong reason for Origen’s view is that he feels the natural and literal meaning can only be read by those who are deaf to the enticements of physical

⁶³ Origen, *Song of Songs*, 247.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 18-19.

⁶⁵ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁷ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 115.

⁶⁸ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 30.

⁶⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 115.

⁷⁰ Clarl, “Origen,” 276.

⁷¹ R. Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957), 268-270.

love, and only mature people (over age 30) should be allowed to read the Song.⁷² Origen's interpretation may satisfy Christian monks and nuns to seek the love of God in Origen's time and also shows that the early Christian biblical interpretation is different from the modern biblical interpretation in our time.⁷³ However, such an allegorical interpretation is a means of erasing the actual meaning of the text, while the text of the Song is clearly about the pleasure of the body described in erotic language.⁷⁴

2.1.2.3 Gregory of Nyssa (late in the fourth century)

Gregory was a rhetorician and theologian, inheriting the mysticism of Origen. Gregory mentions that if Origen concerned himself with the Song, he too has to be diligent in his writing.⁷⁵ So, his homilies of the Song are heavily indebted to Origen and could be called a revision of Origen's work.⁷⁶ Gregory wrote a commentary on the Song which contains fifteen homilies and carried an exposition up to 6:9 of the Song.⁷⁷ In his commentary, he understood the bride as the soul of man and paid not much attention to the identification with the Church; the man enters into spiritual union with God as the perfect and blessed way to salvation.⁷⁸

The title of the Song in 1:1, Gregory understands as the Holy of Holiest that teaches us a superabundance and exaggeration of holiness and also reminds us that the soul needs to get to the divine nature's invisible beauty.⁷⁹ To him, the soul must change passion into the passionless state so that when every physical affection has been reduced, our mind may burn up with passion for spirit alone and be warmed by the fire of the Lord who came to cast it upon the earth, and Gregory links Song 1:1 with Luke 12:49 "I have come to set fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled."⁸⁰ He assumes "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" in 1:2 is a great desire to be united with God, but the more the soul enjoys in the Lord, the more its desire increases. The soul desires to draw near to the

⁷² Keel, *Song of Songs*, 8.

⁷³ Carl, "Origen," 290.

⁷⁴ King, *Origen*, 78.

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Casimir McCambley OCSO (Brookline, Massachusetts: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 6-7.

⁷⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 66.

⁷⁷ Gregory, *Song of Songs*, 30.

⁷⁸ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 118.

⁷⁹ Gregory, *Song of Songs*, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

fountain of spiritual life, and the fountain is the bridegroom's mouth in which the words of eternal life come forth. It is necessary for the person to draw near to the fountain as in John 7:37 "If any one is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."⁸¹

For Gregory, the soul is worthy to speak to God freely and the spiritual meaning found in each verse of the Song is confirmed by other verses in the Bible.⁸² Like Origen, Gregory criticizes those who hold closely to the literal meaning, but his interpretation is quite different from what is contained in the text such as the title in 1:1 which does not tell much about the content of the Song, but tells that the Song is the greatest song of all songs, and is traditionally attributed to Solomon as are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.⁸³

2.1.2.4 Bernard of Clairvaux (twelfth century)

Bernard as a late medieval interpreter (1090-1153)⁸⁴ continues the allegorical approach, and shares the same passionate concern for the union of the soul with God as in Origen's interpretation.⁸⁵ He was the abbot of the Cistercian monastery at Clairvaux and a key leader in promoting the contemplative ideal among Christians of his time. He had spoken the Song until the end of his life.⁸⁶

Bernard wrote eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters of the Song that were dominated by spiritual understanding and have been studied very carefully by twentieth-

⁸¹ Ibid., 51.

⁸² Pope, *Song of Songs*, 118.

⁸³ Ibid., 295-296. The phrase **שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים** in the Song 1:1 is singular with a plural form in the construction of the same noun **שִׁיר**! "song." This grammatical structure is often used in the Hebrew Bible to denote the superlative. For example, **אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנָיִם** "the God of gods and the Lord of lords" in Deut 10:17; **הַבָּל הַבָּלִים** "vanity of vanities" (KJV and NAB) in Eccl 1:2; **קֹדֶשׁ קִדְשִׁים** "holy of holies" in Exod 29:37; or **מֶלֶךְ מְלָכִים** "the king of kings" in Ezra 7:12 and Dan 2:37. Audet argues that the title "Song of Songs" is not really an appropriate title for the work which suggests great esteem (Jean-Paul Audet, "Love and Marriage in the Old Testament," *Scripture* 10 [1958], 81). However, Keel insists that the Song is understood as an incomparable and most beautiful song (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 38). Indeed, the Song of Songs is called the greatest by such scholars as Marvin H. Pope, Roland E. Murphy, Michael V. Fox, Tremper Longman, Diana Bergant (*The Song of Songs* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001]), Duane Garrett, etc. The great song must come from a wise person. The Bible states that Solomon's wisdom was "greater than the wisdom of all men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kgs 4:30).

⁸⁴ Norris, *Song of Songs*, 299.

⁸⁵ E. Ann. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1990), 28-39, 123.

⁸⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Song of Songs*, ed. Halcyon Backhouse (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 24.

century scholars.⁸⁷ His sermons were intended for the devotional life of the Cistercian movement as lessons of biblical teaching provided to build up one's mystical union with God.⁸⁸ Bernard's view of the Song is that the woman or the bride is the church or an individual soul who desires the love of God and God is the man or the bridegroom.⁸⁹ He introduces the text of the Song as a wealth of imagery which conveys his teaching about the relationship of the soul to God, in which the object of the soul's longing is the spiritual union with the Word, spoken in terms of the interaction of earthly lovers.⁹⁰ On the first sermon, Bernard interprets the superlative character of "the Song of Songs," in verse 1:1, by a question that draws his readers into the expository effort as:⁹¹

And you, my brethren, if you look back upon your own experience, have not you also sung a new canticle to the Lord, 'because He worked wonders,' in the victory where with your faith 'hath vanquished the world,' . . . And when your penitence obtained from Him not only the pardon of your sins but even the promise of reward-did you not with still greater fervor, rejoice in the Lord, because great is the glory of the Lord?

In the first sermon, Bernard shifts his commentary of the Song to a totally monastic reading to bring out his purpose that is a guide to the ultimate goal of Cistercian spiritual discipline - union with God.⁹² Bernard gives eight sermons in 1:2 "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" as on the mystical kiss of the Lord's feet, hand, and mouth.⁹³ The three stages of mystical ascent are: the first kiss on the feet is the beginning stage of penitential devotion when we fall under the feet of the Lord and cry for our sins; the second kiss is moving up to another step, that is the kiss of the hand as God's helping hand to lift us up to stand upright; and the third then is the "kiss of the mouth" which is a holy kiss and great blessing.⁹⁴ In the obscure meaning of Pharaoh's chariots "I compare you, my darling, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots" in 1:9,⁹⁵ Bernard gives the verse in sermon 39 with the title "The Devil and his Army" and says that it is a comparison between the person who is holy

⁸⁷ Matter, *Voice of my Beloved*, 39, 123; Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 299.

⁸⁸ Karlfried. Froehlich, "Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament in the High Middle Ages," in *HBOT*, vol. 1 (2000), 499-500; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 32.

⁸⁹ Froehlich, "Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament," 499-500; Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 69.

⁹⁰ Michael Casey, *Athirst for God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 181.

⁹¹ Bernard's Sermons, *Canticle of Canticles*, vol. 1, trans. from the Original Latin by a Priest of Mount Melleray (London: Waterfordiae, 1920), 6-7.

⁹² Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 125.

⁹³ Bernard's Sermons, *Canticle*, vol. 1, 10-78.

⁹⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I*, 38; and also Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 126.

⁹⁵ See the discussion of the verse 1:9 in point 1.2.3.1 of Chapter One.

and spiritual and the horse of the Lord with Pharaoh and the devil and both their armies. Pharaoh and the devil persecute God's people, but God's people triumph over them by the wonderful miracle of divine power.⁹⁶ To enforce his interpretation, he assumes without doubt that some understand what he is saying from their own experience, which enables them to look forward to his words.⁹⁷ For Bernard, the meaning of the Song is the declarations of the inner-most emotions and desires for God's love of the human soul, so that he claims the Song to be the book of experience.⁹⁸

Murphy states that Bernard is a mystic, and his sermons are directed to those who seek both the knowledge of the divine mysteries and the spiritual union with God, and he considers the Bible as a source which supplies vocabulary and specific texts for his thoughts, but Bernard always pulls out of the discussion of an exegetical point with an appeal to the experience of his readers.⁹⁹ To him, the literal meaning is the "outer husk of the 'dead letter' of the writing."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the love in Bernard is not about the love of God or Christ nor his people or the church, but it is the Christian soul or the church as the bride who desires union spiritually with God as the bridegroom.¹⁰¹ The first and foremost of Bernard's sermons on the Song are about the spiritual dimensions of human experience, rather than focusing on the meaning of the particular text of the Song or exegetical techniques.¹⁰²

2.1.2.5 Martin Luther

Luther interpreted the Song in a series of lectures at Wittenberg during 1530 and 1531.¹⁰³ He is the only outstanding person in the early Protestant movement to develop another allegorical interpretation that is a political allegory on the Song.¹⁰⁴

Luther rejects Origen's interpretation, holding that the Song is not about God and the church or the individual soul. To him, the relationship of the man and the woman in the Song

⁹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Wash (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 192-198.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁸ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 32.

¹⁰¹ Froehlich, "Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament," 499-500.

¹⁰² Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 27.

¹⁰³ Luther's Works, vol. 15, Notes on Ecclesiastes, *Lectures on the Song of Solomon, Treatise on the Last Words of David*, ed. H. C. Oswald (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), x.

¹⁰⁴ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 33.

is talking about the intimate relationship of God and Solomon who rules over God's people through poetic images.¹⁰⁵ Thus, he pays attention to the literal development and mood of the text, but his interpretation is allegorical.¹⁰⁶ For him, the esoteric speculations are a distortion of the Song, but the fundamental purpose of the Song as with the rest of the Bible must be an instruction with doctrine useful for life and consolation.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, he rejects the views such as understanding the language of love in the Song as an erotic love of the daughter of Pharaoh married by Solomon or the union of God and his people by Jewish interpreters, or the identity of the bride as the faithful human soul seeking to unite with God as interpreted by the "tropologist."¹⁰⁸

Luther understands the love in another dimension when he takes the historical context into account to develop his allegorical interpretation. To support his own interpretation, Luther makes a link between the three books attributed to Solomon. The first book is Proverbs which conveys a general instruction to the Israelites to keep their propriety and manner in domestic affairs; the second book is Ecclesiastes which is a political book; and the third book is the Song which rightly belongs with Ecclesiastes and is a poetic encomium on the political order, in which Solomon celebrates his own government as responsive to the love that God has given it.¹⁰⁹ To Luther, Solomon gives thanks to God for that external peace and highest blessing, and also sets an example for others who may learn to give thanks to God in the same way, to acknowledge his highest benefit, and to pray for corrections.¹¹⁰

Luther understands "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" in Song 1:2 to mean God kisses Solomon to show his favor to Solomon's government. God honors the government with all manner of blessing and love. To him, "the kisses of his mouth!" means God honors this people with his Word.¹¹¹ Instead of the church asking God for his kiss as in Origen, Luther understands verse 1:2 differently; that is, God's kisses are for his people

¹⁰⁵ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 33; cf. S. Raeder, "The Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work of Martin Luther," in *HBOT*, vol. 2 (2000), 388.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 34; Raeder, "The Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work," 388.

¹⁰⁷ Luther's Works, vol. 15, 194.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

because He loves to bless them. Luther explains “you are beautiful, O my darling, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, Awe-inspiring as an army with banners” in 6:4¹¹² as follows.

. . . this is great comfort for our conscience, because it establishes with certainty that patience pleases God and that He takes delight in the sacrifice of a contrite, but not of a despairing heart, so that even though the flesh takes offense and murmurs somewhat, yet the spirit cries out to God and would rather remain in perpetual trial and even perish than withdraw from God into ungodliness.¹¹³

Luther also explains “As Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem” by arguing Tirzah is the seat of the kings of Israel and God says to his bride that she is as beautiful as Tirzah, a well-fortified city and she is shaped and created as Jerusalem with its excellent laws.¹¹⁴

Here we see that Luther is contradictory in his interpretation. To defend his approach, he gives a link between the three books of Solomon and refers to “the Solomonic kingdom” as above, which means that he understands the Song is of Solomon. Thus, to him the Song may be dated in Solomon’s time. But then in 6:4, he refers to Tirzah as the name of the capital of the kings of Israel which means the Song must be dated later, in the time of Jeroboam until the time of Omri (920-880), not in the time of Solomon.¹¹⁵ As discussed in the study in chapter one, both Tirzah and Jerusalem in 6:4 refer to the woman’s beauty and Tirzah is understood as a northern “garden city.”

2.1.2.6 Thomas Brightman (seventeenth century)

In the seventeenth-century, the allegorical interpretation were favored by Protestant commentators. Brightman divided the Song into two parts: 1-4:6 which describes the God’s people from the time of king David to the death of Christ, and 4:7-8:14 which describes the state of the early Church from 34 A.D. to the second coming of Christ.¹¹⁶

Here Brightman brings us to another view, not about the love of God and his people or of the two lovers, but the Song refers to the historical church from the time of David to the time of Christ’s coming as the following Brightman’s summary:¹¹⁷

¹¹² See the discussion of the verse 6:4 in point 1.2.3.1 of Chapter One.

¹¹³ Luther’s Works, vol. 15, 242.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 243-244.

¹¹⁵ This is discussed in point 1.2.3.1 of Chapter One.

¹¹⁶ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 128.

¹¹⁷ Philip S. Alexander, “The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory: Notes on the Development of an Exegetical Tradition” In *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara*, ed. K. J. Cathcart and M. Maher (Sheffield: Sheffield, Academic Press, 1996), 16.

The authority of this Song is declared in the Inscription. Then he [Solomon] prosecuteth his purpose in verse, which is wholly employed in describing the condition of the Church, as well as it was Legal, from the time of David to the death of Christ, in the first 3 chapters and to the 6th verse of the 4th chapter. As also, as it was Evangelical unto the Second Coming of Christ to the end of the book.

Thus, Brightman argues that the Song is a prophetic history under both old and new dispensations through Christ up to the second coming.¹¹⁸ However, it is hard to see that the Song is about a prophetic history of the church from David to Christ, and to the second coming because the text of the Song does not mention any such relationship to the death of Christ or the second coming. Therefore, we can conclude that Brightman is free to imagine the meaning of love in the Song rather than depend on what the actual text means.

The kinds of political interpretation as in Luther's, and historical interpretation as in Brightman's, are out of fashion after the seventeenth century, except for a general allegorical approach which suggests that the love between the man and the woman in the Song represents God and his people, adopted both in and out of Reformed theological circles.¹¹⁹

2.1.3 Assessment of the allegorical interpretations

I do not deny that the love in the allegorical interpretations encourages the Vietnamese church to continue to follow Jesus and trust in God through difficult times. However, my argument is based on the study of Chapter One which shows that the Song is the passionate love relationship of the man and the woman. Hence, we can recognize that all the allegorical interpretations in Jewish and Christian allegories mentioned above are problematic. These allegorists consider how to convey the love as deeper spiritual truth and in different ways, but the grammatical and historical meanings of the text are ignored, and such allegorical interpretations became the common custom of the early Christian church.¹²⁰ However, Simonetti explains that the interpretation of the lovers in the Song as God and Israel was considered a secondary type and it was only minimally developed in the early church.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Alexander "The Song of Songs," 16.

¹¹⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 34.

¹²⁰ G. H. Schodde, "Allegory," *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 395.

¹²¹ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 3.

A serious difficulty with interpreting the Song as allegory is that its interpreters suppose a narrative structure, some plot developments and give fixed characters in the Song. For example, Aqiba insists that the Song is a dialogue between God and Israel; in Targum the Song is understood as Israel's deliverance from the exile of Egypt to the re-establishment of the Solomonic polity under the King Messiah; in Midrash Rabbah the Song is the Law given and the redemption of Israel from Egypt; in Luther the Song is the celebration of Solomon's own government; or in Brightman the Song refers to the chronological church from David's time to Christ and the second coming.

Therefore, most of the problems in the allegorical interpretations of the Song are many interpreters unwilling to recognize the relationship of the Song to the Ancient Near East poetic forms. Especially love poetry in which genre, theme, motifs, language, and poetic techniques parallel to the Song.¹²² The interpretations are also influenced by the early Christian thought such as "flesh" which is evil and "spirit" which is good and Platonic philosophy such as reading the Bible with spiritual meaning which opposes the physical meaning.¹²³

The imagery in the Song is too often understood as allegory in the negative sense, and characters and images refer to persons or qualities which are not implied in the text. So, the literal meaning is turned to real people and real events, as happens in the various dramatic interpretations of the Song, but it is never allegory.¹²⁴ Most scholars consider the Song as pure human love.¹²⁵ Gordis mentions that the Song describes love's repining, or its

¹²² Watson surveys the various literature which comes from Egypt such as Mesopotamian, Northwest Semitic, early Arabic, and Indian literature and shows the connections of this literature to the Song through various areas: point of view, literary form, poetic techniques, descriptions of lovers, themes and motifs, and overt or covert eroticism (Wilfred G. E. Watson, "Some Ancient Near Eastern Parallels to the Song of Song," in *Words, Remembered, Texts Renewed*, ed. J. Davies et al. [Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995], 253-271; and also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 47-70).

¹²³ Ricoeur mentions, "We must not underestimate that the initial gap, which we have situated at the origin of the assimilation of two kinds of love, is not stated in terms of a Platonic dualism of the sensible and the intelligible, but rather than in terms of the duality of Pauline typology. This later, . . . places into relation two historical economies, not two ontological levels" (André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 283); cf. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 36; and Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 74-75.

¹²⁴ The study of the particular terms of love in the Song in point 1.2 of Chapter One insists the primary meaning of love in the Song is human love in which the lovers express their passionate love relationship to each other.

¹²⁵ Such as G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 31; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 67; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 36; Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 90; etc.

fulfillment of lovers' flirtation, disappointment, and union.¹²⁶ Paridon assumes that "the language of the Song is voluptuous and reticent."¹²⁷ As the study in Chapter One, the Song does not present a real story or any plot, as the allegorists mention in their interpretations, but rather presents the love relationship of the man and the woman, in the monologues and dialogue expressed through various aspects of love.¹²⁸

The allegorical interpretations produce fixed characters. Origen, Gregory, and Bernard interpret references in the Song with the bridegroom as God and the bride as the Christian soul and the church. However, the characters are not identified easily in the text. For example, verses 1:2-4 are spoken by the woman,¹²⁹ but they may be spoken by the woman in 1:2-4a and friends in 1:4b.¹³⁰ It is difficult to indicate the speaker in the last colon of verse 5:1, it may be spoken by the friends and guests to the lovers or the Shulamite to the man's friends or the man to his friends; and it is not clear who is the speaker of verse 6:12. Furthermore, the equality of the lovers is hard to reconcile with the unequal relationship between God and Israel, or Christ and the church or individual believer.¹³¹

When allegory does appear as a genre in the texts of the Hebrew Bible (Hos 2:4-17; Jer 2:1-3:13; Ezek 16, 23; cf. Isa 5:4-8; 62:4-5), they will give the key for their interpretation, but this is not the case in the Song because there is no indication in the Song of a mysterious interpretation.¹³² As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is clear that the text of the Song shows no clear signs about God's relationship with his people.¹³³

¹²⁶ Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1954), 8.

¹²⁷ Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs: A Philological Analysis of the Hebrew Book (Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Supplement 17; Paris: Peeters, 2005)*, 9.

¹²⁸ The aspects of love studied are intimacy and passion; insatiable desire; warnings; seeking and finding; power of love; kisses; mutual belonging; attraction and beauty; marriage; and erotic and sensuous feeling discussed in point 1.2 of Chapter One. See also M. T. Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 6.

¹²⁹ See the discussion of verses 1:2-4 in point 1.2.2.1 of Chapter One.

¹³⁰ It is quite interesting to observe NKJV which divides very clearly the speakers in 1:4 "Draw me away! THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM We will run after you. THE SHULAMITE The king has brought me into his chambers. THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. THE SHULAMITE Rightly do they love you."

¹³¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 76-77.

¹³² Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 6-7.

¹³³ As we have discussed in the aspect of power of love in Chapter One, the noun שְׁלֵהַבְּתִיָּה in 8:6 traditionally refers to God's name in which הָיָה could be the short form of the divine name Yahweh. However, it is an uncertain reference to God and the noun can read as one word to mean "a most vehement flame."

Furthermore, the Song is not close to texts in Hosea, Ezekiel or Jeremiah¹³⁴ which clearly depict the divine-human relationship as that between a husband and a wife.

Allegorical interpretations are compelled to avoid the literal meaning of the Song by imagination in interpreting the text but imagination is unrelated to the Song. For example, Hippolytus explains the two breasts of the woman in 4:5 as the Old and the New Covenants or two parts of the Bible. According to the poem in Song 4:1-7, we understand that the poem is the description in which the man describes his beloved's physical beauty.¹³⁵ The man continues to describe the beauty of his beloved by focusing on her "breasts" in 4:5 that are objects of the man's erotic interest and also indicate the intimate relationship of the two lovers. Therefore, it is hard to refer the "breasts" to the two parts of the Bible as Hippolytus' interpretation. Bernard understands the kisses in 1:2 as the mystical kiss of the Lord's feet, hand, and mouth and in 1:9 as the horse of the Lord with Pharaoh and the devil. However, the Song is explicitly erotic with romantic language that is a major embarrassment to early Christian sensitivities because their views originated in a neoplatonic worldview, holding that the body and its needs are unspiritual and evil, so the love in Song cannot be about sexual love,¹³⁶ and this leads to the allegorical interpretations as in Pope's long statement:¹³⁷

Thus from the early days of the Church, Solomon's salacious Song, which at first blush tended to appeal to the pernicious pruriency of men, women, and children, had to be interpreted in a way that would eliminate the evil impulse and transform and spiritualize carnal desire into praise of virginity and celibacy and sexless passion of the human soul and/or the Church for God, and of God's response in kind. This was accomplished by means of allegorical interpretation in much the same way that the Greek philosophers had managed to change the lusty gods of Homer and Hesiod into spiritual ideals. Celibate Christian theologians were thus able by allegory to unsex the Sublime Song and make it a hymn of spiritual and mystical love without carnal taint. *Canticum Canticorum* thus became the favorite book of ascetics and monastics who found in it and in expansive sermons and commentaries on it, the means to rise above earthly and fleshly desire to the pure platonic love of the virgin soul for God.

It is very interesting to study the language of love in the Song through its historical interpretations. There are no other books in the Bible that witness the shift in identification of the various interpretations of love as the Song does. However, we must set aside the allegorical interpretations for there is no internal or external evidence for these. After the

¹³⁴ For example, Hos 2:4-17; Jer 2:1-3:13; Ezek 16, 23; cf. Isa 54:4-8; 62:4-5.

¹³⁵ The description of physical beauty in 4:1-7 is the first *wash* in the Song.

¹³⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 75.

¹³⁷ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 114.

nineteenth century, it is hard to find any scholars to support the allegorical interpretations and a new shift has taken place among Catholics, Jewish scholars, and Protestants, both liberal and evangelical.¹³⁸ Longman gives reasons for the shift such as a cultural revolution of Western culture which moves from a pre-modern to a modern worldview; if the Bible is read as a purpose of spiritual meaning against the physical, it is the result of the power of Platonic philosophy; and the Song explicitly denotes a sexual meaning.¹³⁹

It is not that the understanding of the language of love in the Song is based on the traditional allegorical interpretations are wrong or that the Song may not contain any illustration of the relationship between Christ and the individual. However, such understanding of the meaning dismisses the surface meaning of the Song which is the celebration of the human love relationship and sexuality. Furthermore, the dangers of such meanings (the allegorical interpretations) are that the church leaders may be led into an erotic thinking of an individual as the bride relationship with Christ who is the Bridegroom.¹⁴⁰ Their understanding of the text depends on their diverse imagery rather than the actual meaning of the text itself.

2.1.4 Summary

It is difficult for the Vietnamese Protestant Evangelical Church to understand the language of love in the Song and know how to explain it in the way it should. Perhaps the missionaries have come in at a time when the allegorical interpretations were still popular and later introduced Burrowes' commentary which is the only commentary on the Song translated in Vietnamese.¹⁴¹ Therefore, an understanding of the historical survey of Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations of love in the Song is necessary for the church. It provides a great

¹³⁸ Stephen D. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," *Church History* 69:2 (June 2000): 347. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 35. Cf. allegorical interpreters are isolated voices in the twentieth century, they have included Joüon who suggests that the Song was composed to encourage Jews to return to their homeland (Paul Joüon, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Commentaire philologique et exégétique* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1909]; Robert, Tournay, and Feuillet refer the Song to Israel's history, land and religion (Robert, Tournay, and Feuillet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*); and for Stadelmann's view see note 200 below about (Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* [New York: Paulish Press, 1990]).

¹³⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Gledhill, *Message of the Songs*, 33.

¹⁴¹ Missionaries as R. A. Jaffay, Paul M. Hosler, and G. Lloyd Huglers came to Vietnam in 1911 when there was still a strong sense of dualism on the church such as the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. See in Lê Văn Thái, *Bốn Mươi Sáu Năm Chức Vụ* (Forty six years of ministry) (Sài Gòn: NXB Tin Lành, 1970), 84; and see also in the Introduction of the Thesis.

pool of knowledge of interpretations of how the language of love is interpreted through the centuries and also identifies problems in allegorical interpretations.

The study of the meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and in the Song in Chapter One confirms that the Song depicts the delights of intimate love between lovers and their yearning and pleasure in each other. It is used to compare the history of interpretation of love in the Song to show that the allegorical interpretation understands the meaning of love spiritually. That knowledge helps the church to be able to answer questions about different explanations of love in the Song and to choose a better interpretation of the Song which is more suited in Vietnamese society and church context. It also allows the church to situate its own interpretations historically, and to see where those interpretations have been flawed by lack of knowledge (e.g., of the Ancient Near East literature), and how this knowledge has been improved and extended in the scholarly community as in the following section.

2.2 The literal interpretation

The language of love in the literal or natural interpretation is the opposite to that of the allegorical interpretations and resists any meaning understood differently from the text referring.¹⁴² Therefore, the Song is not a code and it does not need a special key to unlock it.¹⁴³

Many modern interpreters adopt the literal interpretation. This interpretation understands the love in the Song as it appears in the text naturally, in which the poems in the Song express clearly and explicitly the feeling, longing, desire, concern, joy, satisfaction, hope, and fear in emotional language of the two lovers. Therefore, the Song is interpreted and applied according to the same principle as other books in the Bible which means the natural reading of the Song retains all the ambiguity and mystery inherent in love poetry.¹⁴⁴ It is important to review the love in the precursors of the literal interpretation of the Song and dramatic theory as a ground for interpretation before we study the contemporary literal reading of the Song.

¹⁴² Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 3.

¹⁴³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

2.2.1 *The precursors of the literal interpretation*

The precursors may be seen in Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibn Ezra, John Calvin and Sebastian Castellio, and J. G. von Herder.

2.2.1.1 Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 A.D.)

Theodore was bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia, one of the most famous figure-heads of the so-called Antiochian School.¹⁴⁵ Theodore alone among early interpreters resists the allegorical interpretations.¹⁴⁶ He writes a commentary on the Song and boldly explains the Song as a secular love song in its literal and plain meaning that made him reject the full canonicity of the Song.¹⁴⁷ But unfortunately, Theodore's commentary was preserved as part of the evidence which was used against him when he was condemned for his views on the Song by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D.¹⁴⁸

Theodore explains the Song simply as a secular love song which describes the love of Solomon and the dark-skinned daughter of Pharaoh whom Solomon married, but he thinks that the secular song is unworthy of the canon.¹⁴⁹ Keel mentions that Theodore's point was true in practice because the Song was never read aloud in synagogues or churches until the eighth century A.D., but it was read at Passover - often regarded as an ancient practice.¹⁵⁰ In ninth century A.D., the Syrian Isho' dad of Hedatta (died 872 A.D.) supported Theodore and stated that it was correct for Theodore and those who pursue his footsteps to link the Song to the daughter of Pharaoh.¹⁵¹

2.2.1.2 Ibn Ezra (twelfth century)

In the twelfth century, there was a rabbi known as Ibn Ezra in northern France who interpreted the Song literally as a song of praise written by Solomon about his favorite wife.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 119; and Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Moore, "The Song of Songs," 346.

¹⁴⁹ Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 9.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Ibn Ezra presents three different glosses as he exposes every hidden word in the Song; he states its explicit meaning according to its plainness; and the Song will be explained along the lines of the Midrash.¹⁵³ In the comment of Graetz (1871) cited by H. J. Matthews about Ibn Ezra on the Song, he was fully aware that the Song had a simple literal meaning which contains a love story, but he had not enough confidence to expand this understanding.¹⁵⁴

Through this comment, we understand that Ibn Ezra interpreted the meaning of love in the Song in its natural meaning, even though he also offered a secondary typological meaning to defend attacks by the orthodox leaders.¹⁵⁵

2.2.1.3 John Calvin and Sebastian Castellio (sixteenth century)

During the Reformation, Calvin and Sebastian Castellio disagreed concerning the nature and value of the Song.¹⁵⁶ According to Phipps, Calvin thought that the meaning of love in the Song is about physical love, but that it should be in the canon.¹⁵⁷ Sebastian saw the Song as an erotic song as Theodore of Mopsuestia did and concluded that the Song did not belong in the canon and because of his view Calvin forced him to leave Geneva in 1545.¹⁵⁸ Calvin also stated that Sebastian saw the Song as a lascivious and obscene poem, in which Solomon portrays his shameless love relationship.¹⁵⁹

2.2.1.4 J. G. Von Herder (Late eighteenth century)

The allegorical interpretations had no place in the eighteenth century. There is J. G. Von Herder who is a poet and critic who understands the Hebrew poetry deeply, and gives new insights for lovers of literal beauty.¹⁶⁰

Herder paid attention to the Song between 1765 and 1778, regarding it as beautiful poetry and a paean of pure, virtuous love and sensuality rather than supernatural or

¹⁵³ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 103.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ William E. Phipps, "The Plight of the Song of Songs," *JAAR* 42 (1974): 91.

¹⁵⁸ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 131.

theological allegory.¹⁶¹ Even though there was a long tradition of Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations, Herder stated that if he were to turn away from the literal meaning of the Song, he would be “just like an uncouth” person and rejected any historical, mystical, metaphysical or political interpretations, and laughed at those who held the allegorical approach.¹⁶² Herder understood the Song as a collection of individual, unrelated songs. He did not interpret the meaning of love in the Song to ordinary love, but understood it as the original pattern of all love poetry by arguing that the Bible contains God’s ideal for the human race, so the meaning of love in the Song is understood as the first love of Adam and Eve.¹⁶³

Herder interprets the Song by six scenes. For example, in the first section of Song 1-2:7, Herder understands that in 1:1-3, the kiss is the first sign of longing and pure love without knowledge of envy; the verses in 1:4-7 show the woman more certain of her lover’s feeling and her poverty is contrasted with the man’s wealth. She seeks comfort and solace, as the initial signs of envy appear. The first germ of love almost dies, but it emerges all the stronger for the trials to which it has been subjected. The verses in 1:8-13 demonstrate love through tokens, symbols and gifts. The verses in 1:14-2:7 introduce us to the Bed and Nature, the Banner of Love and the image of the apple tree. The woman swoons and falls asleep. A lullaby closes the first scene.¹⁶⁴

Herder was upset by the allegorical interpretations and thus had no time for those who allegorized the Song.¹⁶⁵ He contributed a clear translation, his aim being to maintain the character of the original and deeply literal criticism, which provided new categories in the interpretation of the Song.¹⁶⁶ His analysis of the Song brought a light to the nineteenth century and was adopted widely among contemporary critics.¹⁶⁷

In sum, it is clear that the allegorical interpretations of love in the Song were being replaced gradually by the literal or natural interpretation which is considered as the standard way of understanding the meaning of the Song, as we have discussed through the precursors

¹⁶¹ John D. Baildam, *Paradisal Love: Johan Gottfried Herder and the Song of Songs* (JSOTSup 298; England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 39-42. I follow Baildam closely for this discussion.

¹⁶² Baildam, *Paradisal Love*, 151.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶⁷ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 38-39.

of the literal approach above. However, among those who hold the Song as relating the meaning to human love, there is disagreement about precisely what type of love is represented in the Song.¹⁶⁸

2.2.2 *Dramatic theory*

When the meaning of love in the allegorical interpretations of the Song shifted to another way of interpretation, there was a theory which found most favor in the nineteenth century - the dramatic theory.

This theory is found early in Origen's interpretation in which he declares that the Song is "a marriage-song which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama."¹⁶⁹ But Origen's idea was largely forgotten until the nineteenth century and since that time a number of interpreters have proposed this idea as the key to understanding the Song, like Grotius and Bossuet who assumed that the Song was composed to celebrate the marriage of Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh.¹⁷⁰ According to Bossuet (in the end of seventeenth century),¹⁷¹ the meaning of love in the Song has a literal meaning on the basis of a Solomonic nuptial liturgy, and is divided into seven scenes, sung on seven days of the wedding feast observed by Hebrews and represented on the typological or parabolic level of meaning in spiritual marriage with its divine sovereign.¹⁷² This theory is developed by Renan (1860) and Delitzsch (1875).¹⁷³ Those who interpret the Song as a drama argue against the allegory and base their theory on some manuscript tradition of the LXX from the fourth and fifth centuries, identifying verses of the Song with specific speakers,¹⁷⁴ but the dramatic form is divided by two or three characters, with male and female choruses.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 39.

¹⁶⁹ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957), 21.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Song of Songs* (London: Elek Books Limited, 1959), 23.

¹⁷¹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 129.

¹⁷² Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 37-38.

¹⁷³ Athalya Brenner, *The Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 70.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 40.

2.2.2.1 Two-character theory (seventeenth century)

Those who believe that the Song has the two-character approach, explain that the main players are the man identified as king Solomon, and the woman identified as a rural shepherdess, a girl from Shunem, or a foreign princess.

Delitzsch's commentary of the Song concerns two main characters. Delitzsch is the most representative of those who see the Song as a simple dramatic theory. He describes the whole of the Song divided into six parts, and each part has two scenes as follows.

1. The mutual affection of the lovers (1:2-2:7) with the conclusion "I adjure you, ye daughters of Jerusalem."
2. The mutual seeking and finding of the lovers (2:8-3:5) with the conclusion "I adjure you, ye daughters of Jerusalem."
3. The fetching of the bride and the marriage (3:6-5:1) beginning with "Who is This . . . ?" and ending with "Drink and be drunken, beloved."
4. Love scorned but won again (5:2-6:9) with the Shulammitte.
5. The attractively fair but humble princess (6:10-8:4) beginning with "Who is This . . . ?" and ending with "I adjure you, ye daughters of Jerusalem."
6. The ratification of the covenant of love in the Shulammitte's home (8:5-8:14) beginning with "Who is this . . . ?"

Delitzsch believes that the Shulammitte is a country maiden of humble class who by her beauty and the purity of her soul filled Solomon with love and drew him away from the immorality of polygamy. He also realizes that he cannot understand the Song without thinking that the Shulammitte has not only external attractions, but also the virtues which make her a perfect woman. Her character and attitudes give the impression of her beautiful soul. The humble woman draws the king to her level, and he willingly leaves his status in the bustle and the splendor of court life for rural simplicity, running over mountain and meadow with her. The six parts describe the joys of conjugal love and show Solomon as a type of hero. Delitzsch rejects an allegorical approach, but he accepts the typological by understanding Solomon as Christ, and shows the typological meaning of love in the Song as a consequence.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 3-10.

The two characters are famous at the beginning of the dramatic theory, but it does not seem satisfactory, in the light of the development of a three-character theory. The obvious problems are that the theory added to the Song with more information and there is no sign that the dramatic theory existed as an art style in Israel.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the two-character theory fixes the two characters of the Song as the king Solomon and a girl from Shunem, or a foreign princess. However, such characters are uncertain. Solomon is traditionally understood to be the author of the Song, but many modern scholars believe that Solomon is not the composer of the Song and not the speaker in the Song, except in the description of his elaborate procession in 3:6-11.¹⁷⁸ But, no one knows clearly whether the verses 3:6-11 refer to Solomon's procession or not, even though his name is mentioned three times in 3:7, 9, and 11. Therefore, it seems more likely that the verses describe the lovers' wedding with imagination of their wedding as Solomon's wedding and the man in the Song being identified with Solomon.¹⁷⁹ If the woman the first time called Shulammitte in 7:1 is identified with a girl from Shunem that means she is Abishag passed over into Solomon's harem (1 Kgs 2:17ff).¹⁸⁰ But this identification is not satisfactory and does not win general consensus, because the site is not recognized with certainty in the literature.¹⁸¹ It is likely that Shulammitte refers to the woman as the one who brings peace to her lover (8:4).¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 80-81.

¹⁷⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 90.

¹⁷⁹ See also the discussion of the aspect of love through marriage in point 1.2.3.3 of Chapter One. Cf. Robert, Tournay, and Feuillet mention that a reason urge one more prompting for allegorizing is because "we cannot find in texts that a King has ever been crowned by his mother on his wedding day" (Tournay, Tournay, and Feuillet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, 155).

¹⁸⁰ Michael D. Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs* (JSOTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 55.

¹⁸¹ The likely place of Shunem is near "mount Tabor in Galilee's Esdraclon Valley about nine miles west of Megiddo" (Josh 19:18; Isa 28:4; 2 Kgs 4:8) where Abishag, David's last nurse came from, and in the NT the place seems to be called Shulem (see Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 154). Fox also adds that Shunem is not Shulem in the Bible, the identification of Shunem with the place Shulem is a guess, and the woman in the Song lives in Jerusalem, not in Shunem: she lives in a walled city (5:7); her friends are called the daughters of Jerusalem (Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985], 157). Therefore, the view of "Shulammitte" as a girl of Shunem is unlikely.

¹⁸² Meek mentions that the best explanation of הַשׁוּלַמִּית is the feminine of Solomon (Theophile J. Meek, *The Song of Songs, IB*, vol. 5, ed. by G. A. Buttrick [New York: Abington Press, 1956], 134); Longman prefers the third view that הַשׁוּלַמִּית "the Shulammitte" is a feminine form of Solomon's name, mentioned in 3:6-11; 8:11-12; and 1:1, and שְׁלוֹמִית may be derived from the noun שְׁלוֹמִי meaning "peace," "wholeness," or "well being," to refer to the woman (Longman, *Song of Songs*, 192).

2.2.2.2 Three-character theory (twelfth century)

Another school of thought of dramatic theory believes that there are not two characters, but three characters in the story of the Song. The first interpreters concerning the story with three characters are Ibn Ezra (twelfth century), and I. Provan.¹⁸³

According to Ibn Ezra's interpretation, the lovers in the Song are a shepherd and a shepherdess, and the king who is a separate and dissimilar person from the beloved shepherd.¹⁸⁴ For example, Ezra identifies the lover as a shepherd, not Solomon, in the beginning of Song 1:2; he explains that when the shepherdess is outside the city in the vineyards seeing the shepherd pass by, she falls in love with him, and longs for kisses from his mouth.¹⁸⁵ To Ibn Ezra, Solomon mentioned several times in 1:5, 3:7, 6:8, 8:11, and in 3:7, implies that Solomon is not the (shepherd) lover, he is an outsider.¹⁸⁶

The "three characters theory" introduces the third character who is the shepherd, and thus the story becomes more interesting with a love triangle. The plot of the story surrounds a country girl who is caught by the eye of the lustful king Solomon, who is pictured as one who buys and sells love (8:11-12), and who wants to bring her to his harem, but the girl falls in love with the shepherd, and she does what she can to repel the lascivious king, and remain faithful to her lover, the shepherd.¹⁸⁷

In a recent commentary, the three characters in the dramatic theory is Provan's. He thinks that the woman has married king Solomon, but she is not satisfied under his harem as described below.

The woman, already a member of the king's harem, expresses her continuing love for her lover (and, implicitly, her disdain for the king) and he reciprocates (chapters 1-2). The contrast between king and lovers is forcibly underlined in chapter 3, where both the woman's determination to overcome threats to her relationship with the man and her negative view of the royal bed and its owner are clear. Both the threats to and depths of the relationship are in evidence in chapters 4-5, where the language and imagery speak of a committed, marital-like relationship between the man and the woman; and chapters 6-7 portray for us in yet further graphic detail the nature of his relationship. Chapter 8 provides us with a strong closing statement of the woman's passion for the man and her resistance to those other males who claim possession of her, whether her brothers or the king. It is a stirring tale of fidelity to first love in the face of power, coercion and all the temptations of the royal court.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 41.

¹⁸⁴ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 104.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ Iain W. Provan, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*. (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 120.

Thus, Provan has twisted the story in order to see love as in a triangle but the superiority of true love over legal love.¹⁸⁹ According to Garrett, Provan's theory is not practical because it changes the meaning of the text to gain a socially subversive meaning, and thus it misreads all the basics of the language of love in the Song.¹⁹⁰

The three-character dramatic theory puts Solomon in an unfavorable light and casts him in the role of villain, but if this were so, the Song would never have been accepted into the canon by rabbis.¹⁹¹ There is no unity in the three-character theory, no agreement in the actions and the words spoken by the various speakers, and also too much difference in where the various poems begin and end in the drama.¹⁹² Furthermore, there are no examples found in literature in the Ancient Near East of any kind of love triangle;¹⁹³ it is much more natural to refer to the two lovers who are praising each other as shown in the study of chapter one.¹⁹⁴

To sum up, those who think that the text of the Song is a dramatic script need certain amounts of reconstruction and supplied stage instructions to reproduce a drama, but the actual text of the Song is not written as a dramatic script.¹⁹⁵ The dramatic theories cannot be ignored because various plots are suggested in the text which could make that text into dramatic scenes, but these are not convincing because most of the stage directions in the drama supplied are imaginary.¹⁹⁶ The question is that was drama practiced by the Hebrews in the OT before it was well accepted in the Hellenistic period? An affirmative answer is impossible because the dramatic performances were considered as horror, heathen, irreligious, and opposite to Israel's tradition until the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Song is forced to tell a story, but it does not progress towards a climax in the narrative sense, and the dramatic theory is impossible without straining the sense of the

¹⁸⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 42.

¹⁹⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 79.

¹⁹¹ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 93.

¹⁹² Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 33.

¹⁹³ Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (BST; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 26.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 71.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Greshon Shaked, "Drama, Hebrew," in *EJ*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem, 1971), 193-207; Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 2.

language, which indeed has to some extent been responsible both for faulty translation and exegesis.¹⁹⁸

The evidence is heavily weighted against the dramatic theory because so much has to be supplied to the text from the imagination of the dramatic interpreters. This applies even to the meaning of love understood in the literal sense. The dramatic theory has many similarities to allegorical readings in needing to distort the plain meaning of the text in order to find its purpose. As we have discussed in chapter one, terms, clauses, phrases, and metaphors in every verse of the eight chapters convey the meaning of the Song which contains powerful, emotions of love and sexual desire. Therefore, we continue to study the contemporary literal interpretations of the Song in the next section.

2.2.3 Contemporary literal interpretations of the Song

We appreciate the diverse interpretations of the language of love in the Song in the history of interpretation because of the uncertainties, ambiguities often found in each poem and even sometimes apparent disconnection between poems. The love in the Song interpreted as the love of God to his people in the allegorical interpretations is not a suitable approach. It is replaced by the literal interpretation which expresses the meaning of human love between the woman and man because the Song clearly expresses erotic love and sexual meaning.¹⁹⁹ In the literal interpretation, the dramatic theory is unlikely; these are love poems. However, this is not the final word of the history of interpretation of the Song. We need to observe a few theories in contemporary literal interpretations of the Song such as wedding theory, cultic theory, funeral theory, and love poetry.²⁰⁰ These theories all have the advantage of reading the Song in its Ancient Near East context, in comparison with other literature of the

¹⁹⁸ Schonfield, *Song of Songs*, 27-28.

¹⁹⁹ Carey Ellen Walsh, "A Startling Voice: Woman's Desire in the Song of Songs," in *BTB* 28 (1998): 131.

²⁰⁰ There is "Feminist criticism" of the Song held by Athalya Brenner, S. D. Goitein, and others with certain tendencies in feminist examinations such as a female composition, the sexual equality between male and female, etc. Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 87-97; S. D. Goitein, "The Song of Songs: A Female Composition," in *Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* [Great Britain: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 58-66). In addition, "Psychological interpretation" of Landy who believes that the Song is best considered as love lyrics and argues for his psychological readings of the characters and metaphors of the Song (Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* [Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983], 36). Finally, "Political interpretation" of Stadelmann who thinks that the Song is a political one and its message is the restoration of the Davidic monarchy in Judah after the exile, and the love of the woman and Solomon is a political covenant between king and people (Stadelmann, *Love and Politics*, 1-2). These interpretations would bring a fresh outlook to the Song, but my concern in this thesis is to find the literal meaning of love in the Song.

area.²⁰¹ They are also discussed in the literal meaning regarding whether the Song is understood as an anthology or unity of poems.

2.2.3.1 Wedding theory

At the end of the nineteenth century, Wetzstein published a study of contemporary marriage customs in Syria which described the seven-day wedding festivities in contemporary Syria in which the bridegroom and the bride are treated as the king and the queen, and poems called *wasfs* describing their physical beauty are recited in their honor and when the bride performs a sword dance.²⁰² The *wasfs* in Syrian custom are similar to the *wasfs* poems (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-6; and 7:1-8 in the Song.²⁰³ In 1888, Wetzstein's contributions were considered a good way to understand the Song.²⁰⁴ Two decades later, Budde suggested that the Song is a collection of Judean wedding songs sung during the wedding festivity like those in Syria and the collection is called "textbook of a Palestinian-Israelite wedding," in which the Bridegroom and the bride take the roles of king and queen.²⁰⁵ Both Wetzstein and Budde's interpretations throw light on the village wedding song in interpretation of the Song, accepted widely as solving the puzzle of the Song, and dominated the interpretation of the Song in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰⁶

However, according to Pope, Cannon comments that there is an enormous assumption that these wedding ceremonies shown by Wetzstein as taking place in Syrian villages near Damascus in 1861 were essentially the same as weddings in Judea more than 2000 years earlier.²⁰⁷ Meek critiques that it is impossible to have any Jewish wedding customs survive in Syria, and there is no trace of similar customs in Palestine.²⁰⁸ In addition, the woman is never named as queen in the Song, and the man named as King Solomon is doubtful and not a satisfactory explanation.²⁰⁹ To Murphy, there are many interpreters who assume that the Song is used in ancient Israelite wedding festivities, but there is no solid

²⁰¹ John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 22-25.

²⁰² Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 74.

²⁰³ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 93.

²⁰⁴ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 143.

²⁰⁵ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 59.

²⁰⁶ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 94.

²⁰⁷ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 144.

²⁰⁸ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 94.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

basis for identifying marriage rites found as the primary setting of the whole Song, except 3:11.²¹⁰ Finally, Brenner also argues that there is no evidence for usage of the Song as a wedding text which can be drawn from the sources of Syrian customs.²¹¹

It is true that the Song mentions a wedding day in 3:11 and the man calls the woman “sister” and “bride” in 4:9-12.²¹² However, the wedding theory is weak because it is not sufficient to establish a marriage setting throughout the Song as in the wedding interpretation.²¹³

2.2.3.2 Cultic theory

In the nineteenth century there was a discovery of documents of religious literature of the great civilizations and of the Ancient Near East.²¹⁴ The documents connect with a sacred marriage rite and its oldest known form involves the combination of Dumuz and Inanna, two Sumerian deities, in order to make sure of fertility for the coming year.²¹⁵ Thus, cultic theory assumes that the Song derives from myths and rites of sacred marriage of a god and goddess from pagan fertility worship and gains a good ground in its interpretation in the twentieth century,²¹⁶ because some scholars such as Meek and Kramer regard large portions of the Bible as cultic material.²¹⁷ The cultic theory could be developed into two stages which also depend on the earlier allegorical interpretation with the two main characters: God or Christ and Israel or Church are replaced by pagan deities, Tammuz and Ishtar in the Akkadian sacred marriage, and then secularized into the two characters in the Song as Solomon and the Shulammitte.²¹⁸

In the first stage, the cultic theory of the Song gets its new force from a catalog of Akkadian hymn titles which includes a series of titles or first lines of hymns of Ishtar

²¹⁰ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 60.

²¹¹ Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 74.

²¹² Scholars such as Carr, Gledhill, Longman, Goulder, and Garrett explain the term כַּלָּה in 4:8 which refers to the married bride in its normal meaning. See also the discussion of the aspect of marriage in point 1.2.3.2 of Chapter One.

²¹³ Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 74.

²¹⁴ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 145.

²¹⁵ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 44.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 72.

²¹⁸ Elliot, *Literary Unity*, 14.

published by Erich Ebeling (1923).²¹⁹ The most famous scholar for this kind of the theory is Meek who argues that the Song is similar to the Ancient Near East legend and rite, especially to the catalogue of Akkadian hymn titles.²²⁰ Meek suggests that the uncommon vocabulary in the Song originated in many Aramaisms, and also spends much time detailing the vocabulary of the Song and comparing it with foreign origins to show that pagan liturgies entered Israel.²²¹ Here, Meek understands that the characters in the Song as Solomon and Shulammitte are replaced by the male and female divinities, the plot tells of the fertility god's cyclic death and rebirth which symbolize the cycle of vegetation and fertility in nature celebrated in a recurrent yearly festival.²²² There are examples of how Meek sees the parallels of the Song to the Akkadian hymn titles:²²³

Line nine in the hymn "Come, take me! I give welcome to the son" refers to the union of Tammuz and Ishtar for the purpose of vitalizing life in nature as the expressions of the Song in 1:2ff; 2:6; 4:16; 7:12ff; and 8:1ff. Line fifteen "The day bringeth gladness, even joy of the heart" refers to the joy occasioned by the revival of the life and vegetation of the world, and parallels the Song in 3:11 which expresses connubial joy. Line twenty two "To the door of the lord she did come" refers to the house of Tammuz, and parallels the Song in 2:4 which Meek translates as "Bring me to the house of wine and look upon me with love." Therefore, Meek states that the cultic theory has its limits, like all other interpretations, but it would seem preferable to any other.²²⁴ Meek concludes his survey of the parallels as follows:

Even a casual perusal of the lines of the hymns listed above must convince the most skeptical of two things: (1) that these hymns were taken from the liturgy of the Tammuz-Ishtar cult, and (2) that the similarity between them and the songs in the book of Canticles is so close that both must belong together. The structure of the songs is the same (two lovers representing god and goddess wooing each other and alternating in the praise of each other's charms); the general theme is the same (love); many of the phrases are a lot identical; the figures are introduced in similar fashion; the lines breathe the same delight in love; and the intent of all is manifestly to bring about the awakening of life in nature. Both are liturgies of the fertility cult. The only difference is that one group has come from Babylonia and the

²¹⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 146.

²²⁰ Theophile J. Meek, "Canticles and the Tammuz Cult," *AJSL* 39 (1922-23): 1-14; idem, "Babylonian Parallels to the Song of Songs," *JBL* 43 (1924): 245-252.

²²¹ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 15.

²²² Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 72.

²²³ The Akkadian hymn in "KAR, IV, No. 158, Rev., Col. II," trans. Meek and his examples are cited in Pope, *Song of Songs*, 146-149.

²²⁴ Meek, *Song of Songs*, 96.

other from Palestine, where numerous influences tended to obscure and efface its original character.²²⁵

Meek believes that the meaning of love in the Song is derived from the Babylonian liturgy of the Tammuz-Adonis and Ishtar cult and adjusted to the ordinary Israelite practice of worshipping fruitful gods, a practice much denounced by the prophets.²²⁶

According to Elliott, Wilhelm Wittekindt is the first commentator to use a cultic theory for the whole Song. He finds the trail of a Jerusalem liturgy celebrating the wedding of Ishtar and Tammuz, and he completely reorders the Song to bring the rite into light.²²⁷ To him, the text of the Song is syncretistic and takes its various sections from Canaanite and Babylonian cult areas.²²⁸ However, Pope argues that Meek connects the Song with the cult of Tammuz-Adonis rather than the worship of the God of Israel, but the Song was not in its “original and offensive form as a Tammuz liturgy, it had been revised to render it innocuous and to harmonize it with the Yahweh cultus.”²²⁹ Pope also adds that the connection of the Song with the Tammuz cult is a weak interpretation because there is no clear “evidence from the cuneiform sources for the resurrection of Tammuz.”²³⁰ Schmidt dismisses Meek’s declaration that “many of the phrases are quite identical,” and he recognizes that a general resemblance is the woman’s frank invitation to come and taste love, but he insists that the most careful search shows not a single phrase that is quite identical, and no hint in the Song of either a god or a goddess, and lovers are used to praise each other’s charms.²³¹ Therefore, the idea is that love in the Song is derived from Akkadian hymn titles is unlikely, and doubted by many scholars as discussed above.

In the second stage, the cultic theory is based on the result of the discovery, translation, and publication of large numbers of Sumerian texts. The texts are spread out in museums around the world, and the texts are dated in the old Babylonian period, understood to reflect practices of the Neo-Sumerian empire centered at Ur (2100-1960 B.C.).²³²

²²⁵ Meek, “Canticles and the Tammuz Cult,” 13; idem, “Babylonian Parallels to the Song of Songs,” 252.

²²⁶ Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 72.

²²⁷ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 15-16.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 148.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

²³¹ N. Schmidt, “Is Canticles an Adonis Liturgy,” *JAOS* 46 (1926): 154-154.

²³² Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 16.

According to Kramer, the texts are a much more comprehensive account of the Damuzi/Inanna cult, and especially its focal point, the Sacred Marriage Rite as follows.

The discovery of new Sumerian texts shows that Damuzi is an early king of Sumer, and according to legend, he becomes Inanna's husband. So, Kramer assumes the Song as a sacred marriage between the Israelite king and a goddess.²³³ Kramer also shows that the Sumerian texts are marriage songs which are marked by great tenderness and full of celebration and rejoicing.²³⁴ Therefore, to him, the parallels between Sumerian songs and the Song become more remarkable. However, Kramer faces the same problems as Meek because the Song is not a religious text and its text does not have the sacred significance of their arguments on the cultic theory. There are some parallel vocabularies and themes in ancient literature of a ritual nature, with the Song, but the parallels are general ones. The proponents of the cultic interpretation think that the text of the Song is disordered and structureless, so it is necessary to reorganize the writing to bring a cultic aspect forward, but there is no agreement on what the order should be.²³⁵

Therefore, the cultic theory of the Song cannot be sustained and is doubtful because there are no references in the Song to the spring festival or to any ritual observance, and the meaning of love in the Song is human love, not divine love.²³⁶ Furthermore, there is the question of whether a text celebrating foreign rites and festivals would have been accepted in the scriptures of Judaism. It is hard to accept that such a text could have been deeply rooted in Israel to the extent that a part of the ritual could have achieved inclusion into the Hebrew canon.²³⁷

2.2.3.3 Funeral theory

The funeral theory is offered by Pope who suggests the meaning of love in the Song originates from cultic mortuary feasts in the Ancient Near Eastern *marzēah* festival.²³⁸ Pope sees participants gathering in the term *bêt-marzēah* (*marzēah*-house) which is a meal

²³³ Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 90-92.

²³⁴ Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 90-92.

²³⁵ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 17-18.

²³⁶ Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 8

²³⁷ White, *Language of Love*, 24.

²³⁸ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 228; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 45.

involving heavy drinking, eating, singing, and sexual acts in the context of a funereal cult. To him, the love and passion contrasted to the power of Death and Hell as found in the Song at 8:6a is the climax of the Song and the burden of its message, and he explains the connection of the *marzēah* with the Song as follows.

Throughout the Song the joys of physical love are asserted, but this singular mention of Death and his domain, Sheol, suggests that this fear may be the covert concern of the Canticle, the response to inexorable human fate with the assertion of Love as the only power that frustrates the complete victory of Death. The sacred marriage was a celebration and affirmation of this vital force. The inevitable circumstance in which Life and Love come into stark confrontation with Death is in mortuary observances, not only in the wake and burial but in the ongoing concern to commune with the departed and provide for their needs in the infernal realm world with offerings of food and drink.²³⁹

Pope does not give a detailed interpretation of the text in 8:6b, but he links the Song with cultic mortuary feasts. He sees the term “house of wine” in 2:4 as manifestly an elliptical expression for “house of the drinking of wine” and he suggests that certain aspects of the Song may be understood in the light of the significant and growing evidence that cultic mortuary feasts were love feasts celebrated with wine, women, and song.²⁴⁰ He also concludes that “the connection of the Canticle with the funereal feasts, as expressive of the deepest and most constant concern for Life and Love in the ever present face of Death adds a new insight and appreciation of our pagan predecessors.”²⁴¹

However, in the OT, the term *marzēah* is used in two places to imply that the practice is castigated as sinful (Amos 6:7; Jer 16:5), but the term is never mentioned in the Song.²⁴² Pope sees that there are parallels in the Song to funereal feasts in the Ancient Near East, but he does not apply the parallels to the whole Song to develop a sustained cultic interpretation.²⁴³ Furthermore, the reference to “Death” in 8:6 is an expression of the power of love in which the woman expresses her intense desire for union and possessing the man even though she has to pass the power of death.²⁴⁴ Therefore, the verse 8:6 does not mention

²³⁹ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 210-228.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁴² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 46.

²⁴³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 80.

²⁴⁴ See the discussion of the verse 8:6 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One.

someone who has actually died, and the Song has no evidence for the death and rebirth myth of a fertility god, but sexual love is the subject of the whole Song.²⁴⁵

2.2.3.4 Love poetry

In the second half of the twentieth century, most scholars interpreted the language of love in the Song as anthropological and in the literal sphere rather than spiritual and figurative, and there is a consensus to define the genre of the Song as lyric poetry.²⁴⁶ But there remain various opinions about the structure of the Song whether it is an anthology of poems or a poetic unity.

There are many scholars such as Falk, Gordis and White who reject the Song as a poetic unity.²⁴⁷ They believe the Song is an anthology of various long and short individual poems which are combined together into a book because they share the common themes, the same genre as love poetry.²⁴⁸ Falk insists that “search for structural unity necessitates a less sensitive reading of many subtle variations within the text.”²⁴⁹ She interprets the Song in a wider context which takes place in the cultivated or habitable countryside; the wild or remote places; interior environments; and in city streets, and also shows that the numerous geographic locations suggest multiple sources as Engedi (1:14); Mount Hermon (4:8); Lebanon (4:15); Damascus (7:5); Carmel (7:6) and Sharon (2:1).²⁵⁰ Similar to Falk, White explains, the Song is characterized by the diversity of its units and sees the Song as an anthology which is the best way to explain the variety of geographical references.²⁵¹ Thus, to him the individual units in the anthology come from different provenance and periods of time, and contain both archaic and later literary characteristics.²⁵² Finally, those who tend to see the Song as an anthology recognize a number of personae in the poems, as in the dramatic theory, with different speakers addressing different audiences: a king, a shepherd,

²⁴⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 84; and also Brenner, *Song of Songs*, 73.

²⁴⁶ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 18.

²⁴⁷ Marcia Falk, *Love and Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond, 1982); Gordis, *Song of Songs*; White, *Language of Love*.

²⁴⁸ Among the scholars who consider the Song as anthology, they disagree about the division and number of the individual poems in the Song. For example, Longman has 23 poems; Gordis has 29; Falk has 31; Keel has 42 (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 33; Carr, *Song of Songs*, 44).

²⁴⁹ Falk, *Love and Lyrics*, 67.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 88; see also Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 22.

²⁵¹ White, *Language of Love*, 33.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

a country girl, a city girl, male and female choruses, and unidentified speakers.²⁵³ However, there are a number of arguments for poetic unity, such as the repetitions and themes found throughout the Song. This interpretation is adopted in the thesis and will be discussed more fully in the next point.

There are many scholars who hold the theory of the unity of the Song, but there remain two different approaches to the structure which can be discerned, such as progression²⁵⁴ and scheme²⁵⁵ or chiasmic structure.²⁵⁶ In progression, there are some scholars such as Segal, Carr, Gledhill and Fox who explain the text of the Song in the logical progression of human love between a man and a woman, but even these scholars understand the love relationship and the approaches to the structure of the Song differently:

Segal suggests dividing the Song into three parts: 1:2-9 in which love is not yet “developed as a mutual passion”; 1:9-8:6 is “the celebration of mutual love”; and 8:6-14 is a conclusion related to part two.²⁵⁷ Carr suggests that the Song should be divided into five parts as 1:1-2:7 “Anticipation”; 2:8-3:5 “Found and Lost-and Found”; 3:6-5:1 “Consummation”; 5:2-8:4 “Lost-and-Found”; 8:5-14 “Affirmation.”²⁵⁸ Gledhill has postulated for the Song as a series of six cycles of movement. These are: the first cycle, passionate longings (1:1-2:7); the second cycle, springtime and showers (2:8-3:5); the third cycle, the lovers’ royal wedding (3:6-5:1); the fourth cycle, lost and found (5:2-6:3); the fifth cycle, beauty kindles desire (6:4-8:4); the six cycle: the security of love (8:5-14).²⁵⁹ Fox confirms the unity of the Song with “a tangle of parallels, cross-references, and echoes,” but he rejects that it is structured according to a narrative or schematic design.²⁶⁰ He recognizes that there is no single criterion to determine all unit divisions and they are not always decisive. Therefore, he divides the Song for the purpose of discussion by pointing out the natural pauses in the flow of thought and he mentions that the Song is like a

²⁵³ Elliot, *Literary Unity*, 22.

²⁵⁴ The logical progression means that the structure of the Song is the logical progression of love between the man and the woman. According to *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 2 N-Z, 2371, ‘logical progression’ is the action followed the order of events.

²⁵⁵ The scheme means some type of overall scheme or macro-structure in the text of the Song. According to *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 2 N-Z, 2711, the scheme is a table, an orderly list, or system of classification.

²⁵⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 30; and Elliot, *Literary Unity*, 22.

²⁵⁷ Morris H. Segal, “The Song of Songs,” *VT* 12 (1962): 471.

²⁵⁸ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 45.

²⁵⁹ Gledhill, *Message of the Song*, 43-49.

²⁶⁰ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 209, 224.

wandering river. It runs constantly yet twists and turns at unequal intervals. Sometimes sharp twists mark off short parts of flow; sometimes the river runs direct for a longer spread before turning.²⁶¹

Under ‘Scheme,’ there are some approaches found in the scholars below who consider the Song as a poetic unity but deny the logical progression. However, each one remains a different type of a whole scheme by the combination of things connected and adjusted by a system or chiasmic structure to present the text as the following.

Exum assigns the garden metaphor in 4:12-5:1 as the climax of the whole poem and suggests dividing the Song into six poetic units which relate to one another as parallel pairs organized in the scheme as 1:2-2:6 and 8:4-14; 2:7-3:5 and 5:2-6:3; 3:6-5:1 and 6:4-8:3.²⁶² Elliott shows that Exum’s analysis reveals insights of the various parts of the Song, but later she weakens her own case by finding as many connections from outside the related units as from within them.²⁶³ Fox explains there are three mistakes in Exum’s schema. First, she indicates “poems” as units which are different kinds of subdivisions and moreover the different “strophes” are a mixed bag. For example, Fox sees that there is no special link between 3:1-5 and 2:2-17; and 8:1-3 is not the same unit as the Praise Song in 6:4-10; he thinks that the limits chosen to mark the “poems” are not always selected from the places most suitable to the content, for example, 2:6 and 2:7 actually belongs to the same unit as 8:3 and 8:4 where the same combination of sentences occurs; and finally the parallels connect sections in the Song not linked according to the suggested schema such as 8:14 parallels to 2:17 and 4:6; 8:4 with 3:5 and 2:7; 8:2b with 3:4b; 5:16 with 2:4; 5:8 with 2:5b; 4:5b-6 with 2:16b-17.²⁶⁴

However, Garrett also suggests the unity of the Song has a chiasmic structure of thirteen cantos songs and is presented by a male and a female soloist with a chorus. His diagram of the structure is arranged with repetition, allusion to previous texts and sometimes differs with previous texts in paired songs.²⁶⁵ Thus, canto I (1:2-4) focuses on the man, while canto XIII (8:13-14) praises the lady in the garden; canto II (1:5-6) and XII (8:8-12) concern the “little sister”; canto III (1:7-8) is a series of questions of the woman, and canto XI begins

²⁶¹ Ibid., 225.

²⁶² J. Cheryl Exum, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” ZAW 85 (1973): 47-79.

²⁶³ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 26.

²⁶⁴ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 208.

²⁶⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 31-32.

the chorus addressing the woman; canto IV (1:9-2:7) and canto X (7:2[7:1E]-8:4) express love and the desire of the lovers; canto V (2:8-17) and canto IX (6:11-7:1[6:13E]) are the departure of the woman from the single life to her man; canto VIa (3:1-5) and canto VIIIa (5:2-8) describe how the woman is seeking her lover; canto VIb (3:6-11) and canto VIIIb (5:9-6:3) show the wedding ceremony of the lovers and their metaphorical reunification; canto VIIIc (6:4-10) and canto VIc (4:1-15) describe *wašfs*; and canto VII (4:16-5:1) is the central part of the chiasm which is the description of the sexual union of lovers on the wedding night.²⁶⁶

In short, both progression and scheme approaches are different. However, they may provide appropriate approaches to discover diversity of meaning of love in the Song.

2.2.4 Summary

The study of the interpretations of love in the Song helps the Vietnamese church to understand that the language of love is not only understood spiritually as the love between God and his people, or Christ and the believer or the church, but also understood literally as the love between a man and a woman. However, the literal meaning of love in the Song is interpreted in different ways. In the precursors of the literal interpretation, the Song is understood as the praise of Solomon to his beloved wife or the first love of Adam and Eve. In dramatic theory, it is understood as the marriage of Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh in the form of a drama with two- or three-character theory. In contemporary literal readings, the Song is connected to the contemporary marriage custom in Syria, derived from legends and ceremonies of sacred marriage of a fruitful god and goddess from pagan worship or from Babylonian liturgy of the Tammuz-Adonis and Ishtar, or from cultic mortuary feasts in the Near East. The understanding of the language of love through the precursors, dramatic, and contemporary aspects of the Song helps the church to become aware that there are diverse interpretations of the language of love in a literal meaning. However, all are not the best way to introduce the Song into the Vietnamese culture, because the language of love between a young man and woman found in Vietnamese literature is prolific and does not connect to gods and goddess. Therefore, the rich possibilities for interpretation of the Song allow conversations with its own love poetry. In this way, Vietnamese church might find a

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 33-35.

broader and more helpful repertoire for interpreting the Song than previously thought. But it is necessary to draw out some principles to discover the language of love in the Song before we turn to the next chapter.

2.3 The principles of discovering the meaning of love in the Song

Through the debate between the allegorical and literal interpretations, I consider the Song as love poetry and its language of love interpreted in the literal meaning as a better interpretation for the Vietnamese church context. There are principles drawn out as evident ways in which the church can discover the love in the Song.

2.3.1 Literal meaning of the Song

The study of the meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and the Song in the first chapter and the interpretations of the meaning in this chapter brings us to the conclusion that the primary meaning of love in the Song is the expression of passionate love and physical intimacy of the lovers from the beginning to the end. The understanding is an important aspect of human experience.²⁶⁷

The allegorical interpretations long ago decided on the Song with a spiritual meaning, the man in the Song being understood as God or Christ and the woman understood as Israel or the Church. Thus, they rejected the literal meaning of the Song and the effective message of the Song is thus not appreciated.²⁶⁸ However, there are literal interpretations seen from the early church, as Theodore of Mopsuestia,²⁶⁹ and until today, more and more interpreters understand that the Song is simply a poem of love between the man and the woman.²⁷⁰ Whether the Song is understood as an anthology or a poetic unity, the physical attraction and intense passion in the Song is God's gift.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Tremper Longman, "Song of Songs," in *DTIB*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005), 760.

²⁶⁸ Paridon, *Song of Songs*, 497-498.

²⁶⁹ See the study of Theodore in point 2.2.1.1 of this chapter.

²⁷⁰ Marc Zvi Brettler, "Drink Deep of Love" in *How to Read the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 226; Renita J. Weems, *The Song of Songs* (NIB, vol. 5; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 371; and Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 90.

²⁷¹ Daniel J. Estes, "Song of Songs" in *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 401.

More recently, there are interpreters who hold that the Song reads on multiple levels in which they argue for links in both sexual and spiritual meanings.²⁷² Especially, Longman understands the Song as a celebration of sexual love, the story of sexuality redeemed based on the effects of Gen 3, and sexual love understood as an illustration of the love of God and humanity.²⁷³ Davis suggests the Song reads with three levels such as “the incomparable joy of a faithful sexual relationship,” “the desire for loving intimacy both in sexual relationship and in relationship with God is fundamental to our humanity,” and “love of a beautiful land, the land of Israel.”²⁷⁴

I agree with the scholars above that after discovering the primary meaning of the Song which is to deal with human love, then the language of love could be used to convey other levels of meaning as Longman’s mention of “the more we understand about marriage, the more we understand about our relationship with God.”²⁷⁵ However, my focus on this thesis is to understand the language of love in its literal aspect as the author presents it. The woman in the Song is intoxicated by the feelings of love (1:2; 2:4), sick with love (2:5; 5:8), and also gives warnings to the daughters of Jerusalem and her lover (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15). In addition, she is anxious to seek her absent lover (3:1, 4; cf. 5:2-8), expresses her intense desire for union and possessing her lover (8:6, 7). Both lovers enjoy their love kisses (1:2; 7:10) and desire to keep themselves for one another (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). The man praises his beloved’s physical beauty that is the power of eroticism (1:9, 15; 6:4), expresses his strong desire for his beloved (4:8, 9), and he possesses her with the fullest of pleasure (5:1).

²⁷² Such as David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 145; Jerry Moye, “Song of Songs-Back to Allegory? Some Hermeneutical Considerations,” *AJT* 4:1 (1990): 120-124; Robin Payne, “The Song of Songs: Song of Woman, Song of Man, Song of God,” *The Expository Times* 107 (1996): 329-333; Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); Alicia Ostriker, “A Holy of Holies: The Song of Songs as Counter-text,” in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 36-54; André LaCocQue, *Romance, She Wrote: Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998); and Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs* (BCTP; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005).

²⁷³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 58-70.

²⁷⁴ Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Song* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 235-237; and see also Jenson, *Song of Songs*.

²⁷⁵ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 70.

2.3.2. *The poetic unity of the Song*

In the literal interpretation, the Song is considered both as an anthology and as a poetic unity. However, the anthology often encounters serious hermeneutical problems, because there is no single relationship and no single author envisioned and, on the whole, the meaning of the Song tends to become dim.²⁷⁶ Therefore, I adopt the Song as a poetic unity dealing with two lovers in their relationship of mutual love and fidelity,²⁷⁷ for the following reasons.

In the repetition, there are numerous verses, clauses, phrases and words repeated in many parts of the Song,²⁷⁸ such as “Oh, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves” (1:15; 4:1a); “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by gazelles or the hinds of the field. Do not stir up or awaken love, until it is ready” (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4); “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me” (2:6; 8:3); “My lover is like a gazelle or like a young stag” (2:9a; 2:17b; 8:14); “Pasturing amongst the lotuses” (2:16; 6:2-3); “My lover is mine and I am his” (2:16; 6:3; 7:11); “found” and “lost and found” (3:1-5; 5:2-8); “What is that coming up from the wilderness” (3:6a; 8:5); “Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle” (4:5a; 7:4). Especially, there are expressions from the beginning and the end of the book such as the mention of Solomon (1:1, 5; 8:11, 12); the companion (1:7; 8:13); the brothers (1:6; 8:8); and the expression of love of the woman to her lover (1:2-4; 8:6, 7). These expressions are a characteristic of Hebrew discourse and tend to support the general unity of the Song.²⁷⁹

In the character descriptions above, it is easier to recognize the two lovers speaking throughout the Song rather than through another third person as in the dramatic interpretation with three characters.²⁸⁰ The consistency of the Song cannot be separated from style, terminology and imagery in the Song and from expressions of the lovers. A few

²⁷⁶ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 31.

²⁷⁷ Murphy also insists that the unity of the Song is evident, even though he does not think that the Song is the work of a single poet (Roland Murphy, “The Unity of the Song of Songs,” *VT* 29 [1979]: 436-443; idem, “Cant 2:8-17-A Unified Poem?” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*, ed. André Caquot (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 310.

²⁷⁸ Landy assumes that the Song is a unity because of its thematic coherence, its erotic sense, the repetition of the same elements in diverse contexts such as leitmotiv, refrain, and episodes (Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* [JSOTSup 312; England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 37). Cf. Jacques Derrida, “La structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines,” in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: du Seuil, 1967), 409-428.

²⁷⁹ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 2.

²⁸⁰ See the three-character theory in point 2.2.2.2 of this chapter.

verses in the Song seem disconnected from others,²⁸¹ but the qualities of the lovers' language and their personae appear as coherent personalities.²⁸² The woman's voice is dominant throughout the Song such as her yearnings in 1:2-4, 2:6; 8:1-3; 7:9b-11, and her lovesickness in 2:5; 5:8. It is clear the woman shows her love and desire for her lover. The man shares the same qualities, even though his personality is less clearly developed.²⁸³ The lovers' affection and loyalty never fails nor is doubted. They admire and address each other in the same way, and express the same desire throughout the Song which is that they focus not about society and difficulties in the future, but on each other in what they see, feel, smell, hear and taste in their love.

The description of the countryside in the spring time is the setting found throughout the Song, as seen in 2:12-13.²⁸⁴ The themes "found" and "lost and found" as seen in 2:8-5:5 and 5:2-8:4 and leaving the city and going to the countryside are found throughout the Song. The further evidence of the unity is at the end (in 8:5-14) in which the woman is very brave to state the power of love. At the beginning of the Song, the two lovers seem ostentatious, even somewhat unfulfilled, but in the end they are satisfied in the union of their love relationship and experiencing the power of love as demonstrated in the Song. Thus, the progression approach seems a more natural understanding because of the flow of the Song from the beginning to the end.

2.3.3 The logical progression approach

Both the logical progression and scheme or chiasmic structure seem to be appropriate approaches to the Song. However, in this thesis I adopt logical progression as the principle of the unification in interpreting the meaning of love in the Song rather than the schematic design which argues for the organic model used as a principle of the unity of the Song. My reason for this adoption is the natural flow from the beginning to the end of the Song, in which the Song is bound by a network of repetitions of verses, clauses, phrases and words

²⁸¹ For example, the poem in 6:11-12 is unclear in its connection to the preceding poem and what follows.

²⁸² Fox, *Song of Songs*, 217.

²⁸³ Dianne Bergant, "My Beloved is Mine and I am His (Song 2:16): The Song of Songs and Honor and Shame," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 28.

²⁸⁴ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 218.

throughout, the consistency of character portrayal, and narrative framework as mentioned above.

Even though there is no clear agreement among scholars or translators about the precise divisions of the Song,²⁸⁵ the Song could be divided into four main parts and based on the clause such as “Do not stir up or awaken love, until it is ready” which appears in 2:7 of the first part, in 3:5 of the second part, and in 8:4 of the fourth part. Each part starts with ideas of arousal or with ideas of the invitation of the other when one of the lovers arrives as, “For your love is better than wine” in 1:2, 4; “Look! Here he comes” in 2:8; “Arise, come, my lover” in 2:10; “Open to me, my sister, my lover” in 5:2; and “What is that coming up from the wilderness” in 3:6, 8:5.

The first part of the division is “the beginnings in love” in 1:2-2:7 which describes the beginnings of love of the lovers, spoken by main characters as the man and his beloved, as well as the Daughters of Jerusalem. The second part is “binding in love” in 2:8-5:1 which is spoken by the lovers to express sexual intimacy, especially after the wedding (3:6-11). The third part is “difficulties in love” in 5:2-6:12 in which two lovers wrestle with difficulties with each other some time after their wedding. This part is spoken by the lovers, and the daughters of Jerusalem. The fourth part is “growing up in love” in 7:1-8:14 which is when the two lovers resolve the conflict and are growing further into their intimate relationship. This part is spoken by the lovers and the daughters. Therefore, the division of the Song could be divided into four main parts with a title for each poem as follows.

The title of the Song (1:1)

1. The beginnings in love (1-2:7)

1.1 Longing of love (1:2-4)

1.2 Black but beautiful (1:5-6)

1.3 A dialogue of the lovers (1:7-8)

1.4 An encouragement in love (1:9-11)

1.5 The fragrance of love (1:12-14)

1.6 Admiration in love (1:15-17)

1.7 Moving into a climax (2:1-7)

²⁸⁵ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 45. For example, KJV does not indicate speakers in the divisions; NIV indicates the divisions with speakers in them; and other translations have different divisions. There is no best division found in the Song.

2. Binding in love (2:8-5:1)
 - 2.1 The spring time of love (2:8-13)
 - 2.2 Increased longing (2:14-17)
 - 2.3 The pain in love (3:1-5)
 - 2.4 The lovers' royal wedding (3:6-11)
 - 2.5 The description of the woman's beauty (4:1-7)
 - 2.6 The delights of love (4:8-5:1)
3. Difficulties in love (5:2-6:12)
 - 3.1 Indifference and withdrawal (5:2-8)
 - 3.2 A joyous response (5:9-16)
 - 3.3 Reconciliation in love (6:1-3)
 - 3.4 The incomparable one (6:4-10)
 - 3.5 An exciting experience (6:11-12)
4. Growing-up in love (7:1-8:14)
 - 4.1 Beauty arouses desire (7:1-11)
 - 4.2 Love in the countryside (7:12-14)
 - 4.3 Increased intimacy (8:1-4)
 - 4.4 Power of love (8:5-7)
 - 4.5 Bringing contentment (8:8-10)
 - 4.6 A dialogue about love (8:11-14)

2.3.4 Summary

It has been demonstrated that a much richer reading of the Song can be made if it is first understood literally. This discussion of the history of interpretation has provided tools for opening up the interpretive possibilities for the Vietnamese church by providing some principles for reading the Song. First and foremost the Song is understood as love poetry dealing with human love in ancient Israel sung at Passover festivals. It is considered as a poetic unity dealing with the two lovers in their relationship. To interpret the language of love, it is more natural to adopt the logical progression approach in which the Song flows from the beginning to the end.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide for the Vietnamese church a survey of the meaning of love studied through the history of understanding of the Song in both allegorical and literal interpretations, and to find out how the language of love should be understood and interpreted for it.

The study of the prominent allegorical understandings in Jewish interpretive history such as Aqiba, Targum, and Midrash Rabbah, and in Christian writings such as Hippolytus, Origen, Gregory, Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, and Thomas Brightman, from 100 A.D. to the seventeenth century helps to recognize that each interpreter explains the meaning of love in the Song differently. For example, Targum explains the Song is the redemptive history of God's chosen people; Hippolytus assumes the Song is the marriage of the church and the Incarnate Word; Origen understands the Song as the perfect marriage-hymn; Bernard of Clairvaux interprets the Song as the union of the soul with God; Martin Luther interprets the Song as Solomon's intimate relationship with God and his reign over God's people; and Thomas Brightman shows that the Song is a prophetic history of the Church under both the Old and New Covenants.

In general, the allegories understand the language of love in the Song as the love of God for his people or Christ for his church or personal believers. Such understanding gives some meanings to the Vietnamese church in its spiritual walk with God. However, it is problematic as there is no key for allegorical interpretations in the text of the Song. The allegories are unwilling to accept the erotic with romantic language in the Song, and dismiss the surface meaning of the text by giving the Song fixed characters, presenting a spiritual story and creative imaginations.

The survey of the literal interpretations provides the Vietnamese church with the understanding that the Song is interpreted in what is written in the text that is an erotic meaning. However, there are many theories presented under the literal interpretations. In the precursors of the literal interpretations, Theodore refers the love in the Song to the love of Solomon and the dark skinned daughter of Pharaoh; Ibn Ezra explains the love as the praise written by Solomon to his favorite wife; Herder assumes the love as the first love of Adam and Eve; and Dramatic Theory understands the love as a marriage-song written into dramatic script with two or three characters. In the contemporary literal reading of the Song,

Wedding Theory assumes the love as a collection of Judean wedding songs; Cultic Theory implies that the love has its origins in rites of sacred marriage of a fertility god and goddess; Funeral theory gives parallels between the Song and cultic mortuary feasts in the Ancient Near East; finally, Love Poetry offers the love as anthropological and of the literal sphere.

Except for the Love Poetry, the theories have problems, such as; the difference of opinions of the kind of love in the Song - as seen in the precursors of literal interpretation; supplying the text with the imagination of the expositor and more information, as in Dramatic Theory; there is no evidence for the use of the Song as a wedding text; it is doubtful that the text celebrates foreign rites and festivals not recognized in Israel; and there is no sign for the death and rebirth myth of a fruitfulness god in the Song.

Therefore, there is no need to replace the erotic meaning of the text with allegory, drama, or any figurativeness, because the text of the Song clearly expresses the sexual relationship of the lovers which is similar to lyric poetry in Vietnamese literature and will be studied in the next chapter.

The principles suggested from the study of this chapter show that the meaning of the Song is to be understood literally. The Song is love poetry and its meaning of love is primarily understood as the love of two lovers with their longing, desire, feeling, concern, hope and fear as discovered through the aspects of love in chapter one. The Song's genre is lyric poetry with two main characters - a man and a woman - and its consideration is a poetic unity in a logical progression approach. These principles would provide a more effective interpretation of love in the present society and the church in Vietnam.

Finally, a disadvantage of the 'allegorical interpretations': that it can only be understood by those 'within'- those who know what the allegory is talking about. On the contrary, the 'literal interpretations' allow a conversation with those 'outside,' which is presumably a 'language' spoken and understood widely in Vietnam. Therefore, we now turn to Chapter Three to explore the language of love between the Song and Vietnamese love lyrics, in which similarities of the language of love can be discovered through various themes. The similarities will prove that lovers in both share the same ecstasy of human love and speak the same language (of love).

CHAPTER THREE

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE IN THE SONG AND LOVE LYRICS IN VIETNAMESE LITERATURE

Love language is attractive to all peoples. It is a special emotion expressed by two persons of different sexes, falling in love and looking forward in the same direction, longing for each other, desiring to unite in love, and carrying on their lives. As with other peoples, the love language between a man and a woman is an interesting subject for the Vietnamese people both old and young, from ethnic minorities to Kinh people,¹ from countryside areas to cities. This subject is found in the Vietnamese folk literature from time immemorial.² It is not only for praising ‘love,’ but also for instructing the people in ‘love,’ sometimes against old traditions about ‘love.’³ The subject of love enriches the life of people who like to talk and hear about love and express their love to one another, and who also want to be loved.

However, in the context of the Vietnamese church, especially the Protestant Evangelical Church, the tendency is to make the topic of love between men and women unmentionable and unholy, partly because of the impact of allegorical interpretations and

¹ Kinh people are the Vietnamese people who speak Vietnamese, distinguished from the ethnic minorities who speak other languages in the country. The ethnic minorities which have contributed their voices, especially their folk songs, to Vietnamese literature are Thái, Tày, Mường, Mèo, and Vân Kiều in the North of Vietnam and Ê-đê in Central Vietnam. See in Vũ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ, Ca Dao, Dân Ca Việt Nam* (Vietnamese proverbs, folk sayings and songs) (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học và Xã Hội, 1998), 761-807.

² Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 21-22.

³ Nguyễn Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn, Tình Yêu, Thơ* (Friendship, love, poetry) (Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 1990), 9-11.

Vietnamese culture in which the expression of erotic love and sexual desire are talked about only by two lovers in a private place.⁴

The purpose of a study of the language of love in the Song and the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature does not mean that there is a mutual influence between the language of love of the Song and that of Vietnam, or that Vietnamese language of love arises from the Song. But, it is to read the language of love in the Song into the Vietnamese context by comparing it with that of the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. By doing so, I hope that similarities can be discovered between the two to show that the language of love in the Song is not strange to the people, even though there are differences.⁵ Hence, a more suitable method can be drawn up for explaining and applying the principles of the meaning of love in the Song found in Chapter Two to the cultural milieu of the Vietnamese church.⁶ To compare the language of love in the Song with the love lyrics, I am using literary criticism to examine how love is expressed in both.

In this chapter, I will use my own experience and reference books to give an understanding of love in Vietnamese culture and general observations to show how ‘love’ is expressed in Vietnamese literature and folklore, classical poetry, and the new poetry movement. Then, I will underline various themes according to their expression of love in the Song and compare them with those of the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. I am not trying to study love in all music, literature, art, nor all the views of ‘love’ of Vietnamese literature. But I will focus on the love lyrics in ancient Vietnamese literature

⁴ See the summary in point 2.1.4 of Chapter Two.

⁵ I agree with Hoàng Sơn on cultural integration: that when Vietnamese people accept Christianity as theirs and the transformation of their life, Christianity must be Vietnamized by Eastern expressions, and brought into the literature, thought, and art of the people (Hoành Sơn, “Hội Nhập Văn Hóa và Tầng Nền của Tâm Hệ Việt Nam [Cultural Integration and the Foundation of Vietnamese Psychism]” in *Hợp Tuyển Thần Học [Anthology of theology]*, no. 16, VI [1996]: 57).

⁶ Richard mentions that “The Bible allows us to discover God’s revelation in the indigenous tradition, with the condition that the Bible is read and interpreted by the indigenous peoples in the native cultural and religious structures that are their own.” Cited in Pablo Richard, “Indigenous Biblical Hermeneutics: God’s Revelation in Native Religion and the Bible” in *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible*, ed. Daniel Smith-Christopher (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 265.

such as the folk sayings and songs, the classical poetry, and the new poetry movement, which are well known to the people.

The study of this chapter is divided into two parts: an understanding of love in Vietnamese culture and literature, and the comparison of the language of love of the Song to the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. I will describe language of love in the Song which is similar to that of Vietnamese literature. Therefore, love is close to the milieu of Vietnamese culture and literature and probably all cultures, even though they have some differences from each other.

3.1 An understanding of love in Vietnamese culture and literature

In Vietnamese culture and literature, love is the most prominent subject in many writings and poems of Vietnamese literature, especially love between a young man and woman.⁷

That love is the priceless treasure of the people.⁸

3.1.1 Love in Vietnamese culture

Love means “tình yêu” in a special sense that is the love between a young man and woman described widely in literary and artistic works and poetry in Vietnamese literature. In the old tradition, the Vietnamese people lived under the strict control of Confucianism and the moral lifestyle of Chinese culture.⁹ The principle of the sexual relationship of the people at that time was “Nam nữ thụ thụ bất thân” (*a man and woman*

⁷ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 25-26.

⁸ The Vietnamese cultural tradition originates from Hong Ban's time (2879 B.C.) when the country was named Van Lang. Therefore, Vietnam has nearly five thousand years of culture (4888 years) and the influence of Western culture began in the twentieth century (Lê Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa Việt Nam* [Vietnamese Culture] [Gardena, California: NXB Kim Án Quán, 2003], 147-148, 199).

⁹ Confucianism is a religion or philosophy of life and is popular among Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese. It teaches a woman three submissions (*tam tông*): submission to her father until she is married (*tông phụ*); submission to her husband after she leaves her father's house (*tông phu*); and submission to her eldest son when she is widowed (*tông tử*), and with four important virtues (*tứ đức*): ability with her hands (*công*); delightful appearance (*dung*); carefulness in speech (*ngôn*); and model behavior (*hạnh*). Therefore, according to Confucianism the father decides his daughter's marriage and she has a lower status than a man. See Nguyễn Đăng Liêm, “Indochinese Cross-Cultural Communication and Adjustment” in *Vietnamese Studies in a Multicultural World*, ed. Nguyễn Xuân Thu (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Culture Publications, 1994), 52.

are separated from each other).¹⁰ The husband and wife in a city could sleep in the same bed, but in the countryside a husband slept in a living room and his wife slept in a bedroom, and young men and women could not sleep in the same room, even if they were siblings.¹¹

In the old tradition young men and women were prevented from meeting each other. A man who takes liberties with somebody will be avoided by women and a woman who is immoral will be condemned by society and difficult to find a good husband. The young women in old noble families were confined in the house to prevent unhealthy sexual relationships.¹² In parties and festivals, all men stood or sat on one side and all women stood or sat on another side. A woman was considered to be on a lower level than a man.¹³ The future of a woman was controlled by her husband, father or mother-in-law.¹⁴ Therefore, women do not know what freedom is and they are put under the system of “tam tông” (*three submissions*) and “tứ đức” (*four important virtues*).¹⁵ Their life is compared to drops of rain which means that a woman does not have any choice for her future and relies entirely upon chance as in the following folk sayings:

Thân em như hạt mưa sa,
Hạt vào đài các, hạt sa ruộng cày.¹⁶
(*My life is as drops of rain,*
A raindrop falls in a palace and another falls in a field).

Parents often decided the marriage of their children. Young men and women, sometimes in the past, did not have a right to choose whom they love.¹⁷ Therefore, the following folk sayings describe a bitter expression of a woman who does not know her betrothed, and she dreams he is her neighbour.

¹⁰ Toàn Ánh, *Phong Tục Việt Nam* (Vietnamese Custom) (USA: Dai Nam, Co., 1969), 198.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Phúc Gia Ninh, *Những Tục Lệ Việt Nam* (Vietnamese customs) (California: Dunnigan Publisher, 2003), 15-16.

¹³ Phan Kế Bính, *Việt Nam Phong Tục* (Vietnamese custom) (Los Alamitos, NXB Xuân Thu, 1996), 58-63.

¹⁴ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 55.

¹⁵ See the note 9 in point 3.1.1 of this chapter; and see also Đào Duy Anh, *Việt Nam Văn Hóa Sử Cương* (Overview of the Vietnamese cultural history) (Glendale: NXB Dai Nam Co., 1983), 109.

¹⁶ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Lấy chồng chẳng biết mặt chồng,
 Đêm nằm mơ tưởng, nghĩ ông láng giềng.¹⁸
 (*Getting to marriage without knowing the husband's face..*
Lying down in the night, dream that he is a neighbour).

Gradually, the people forsook such control and following the old traditions. They became concerned with personal life and emotions which are the beginning of love and mutual affection between a man and woman as shown especially in Vietnamese folklore.¹⁹ However, the old tradition influences many families in many areas of the countryside even now. Therefore, a young man and woman are free to love each other, dreaming of an ideal person, and also to keep their love secret but, according to Vietnamese culture, they are not allowed to express their love freely. The Vietnamese do not have a dating system to lead up to marriage, but young men and women must obey their parents' decision on marriage matters, with a pre-arranged marriage system that shows their filial piety to their parents.²⁰ In the present time, the pre-arranged marriage system is not as strictly adhered to as in the past, and parents just give advice rather than make the decisions.²¹ However, this system also depends on the background of each family; educated families are much more flexible than families in the countryside. Therefore, to understand how beautiful and interesting the love language of young men and women in Vietnamese is, there is no better way than to have a look at the Vietnamese literature.

3.1.2 Love in the Vietnamese literature: General observations

The Vietnamese literature expresses various aspects of the life of the people - such as thoughts, feelings, love, and works.²² In the limits of this study, it is necessary to give a

¹⁸ Vũ Dung and Vũ Thúy Anh, *Ca Dao Việt Nam* (Vietnamese folk sayings), vol. 1 (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 2003), 1414.

¹⁹ Huỳnh Minh and Trúc Phượng, *Việt Nam Văn Học Bình Dân* (Vietnamese popular literature), (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Thanh Niên, 2003), 210.

²⁰ Nguyen Xuan Thu, "Vietnamese Family Moral Code" in *Vietnamese Studies in a Multicultural World*, ed. Nguyen Xuan Thu (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Culture Publications, 1994), 77.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 15.

general presentation of the Vietnamese literature and its love language in the three major components - folklore, classical poetry and the new poetry movement.

3.1.2.1 The Vietnamese folklore

The Vietnamese folklore came into being very early and had a profound effect on the spiritual life of the people. But it has been collected and compiled for only two hundred years.²³ The folklore contains the praise of beauty, humanism, love of goodness, legends, fairy tales, humorous stories, folk sayings, folk songs, epics, etc.²⁴ It has a tremendous vitality and has lived on to the present day.²⁵

Besides the restriction of Confucianism in the old traditions, the people in the past lived close to nature surrounded by bamboo hedges, rice fields, mountains, hills, rivers, and sea which, combined with the rich emotions, created the unique life written of in songs, poems and especially in the Vietnamese folk sayings.²⁶ The folk sayings reflect the custom of every region of Vietnam in every age concerning the life of the people. Especially, they contain verbal forms to express “love” of young men and women in the idyllic atmosphere of society. Its pattern is short with two, four or eight stanzas and often six-eight metre (*lục bát*) or variant six-eight metre (the same pattern as the folk songs).²⁷

When the folk sayings are sung at home and in a communal house or in the fields, they are called folk songs or they are common verses sung by the people.²⁸ The folk

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nguyễn Trúc Phương, *Văn Học Bình Dân* (Popular literature) (Los Alamitos: NXB Xuân Thu, 1970), 21.

²⁵ Dương Quảng Hàm, *Việt Nam Văn Học Sử Yếu* (Vietnamese historical literature) (Hà Nội: NXB Hội Nhà Văn, 2002), 8.

²⁶ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu Trong Ca Dao, Tục Ngữ, Dân Ca* (Love in folk sayings, proverbs and folk songs) (Đông Nai: 1997), 9-10.

²⁷ The most popular forms of Vietnamese poetry including the folk sayings and songs are six-eight metre which begins by alternating between six and eight words in each stanza, variant six-eight metre which has more than six words or eight words in each stanza, and seven-seven-six-eight word metre which has seven words in the first two stanzas; six words in the third stanza; and eight words in the last stanza. Each poem normally has two to eight stanzas (Quảng Hàm, *Sử Yếu*, 10-11; Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, p. 62). In addition, there are forms such as seven-lined stanza which is seven words in a stanza with eight stanzas in a poem and four-line poem which is seven words in a stanza with four stanzas in a poem (Dương Quảng Hàm, *Văn Học Việt Nam* [Vietnamese literature] [Hà Nội: Bộ Giáo Dục, Trung Tâm Học Liệu Xuất Bản, 1939], 9-47).

²⁸ Phạm Duy, *Đường về Dân Ca* (The way of folk songs) (Los Alamitos: NXB Xuân Thu, 1990), 5.

songs are short songs without authors and transmitted over many generations until today.²⁹ They are expressed in various forms and belong to the careers of the localities or the ethnic minorities from Northern, Central and Southern Vietnam. For example, “Hát Ghẹo” (*Gheo singing*) originated in Phú Thọ province and “Quan Họ” folk songs in Bắc Ninh province of the Northern part, but both are singing customs to make friendship with others in festivities such as Lunar New Year; “Hò Giã Gạo” (*Gia Gao chanty*) means to sing while pounding the rice and is rooted in the Central part; and there are “Hò Cần Thơ” (*Can Tho chanty*), “Hò Bạc Liêu” (*Bac Lieu chanty*), “Hò Gò Công” (*Go Cong chanty*), “Hò Lơ” (*Lo chanty*), “Hò Cấy” (*Cay chanty*) from the Southern part, these songs are lovable courtships of men and women heard along the Mekong River Delta.³⁰

In contrast to Confucianism, the language of love in the folk sayings and folk songs varies from simple to complicated, from romantic to serious, from sincere to humorous freely showing equality between men and women. The folk songs can be sung alternatively from group to group, going back and forth from one to the other. Those who sing are not entertainers, but all are part of the performance and everyone is welcome to join.³¹ They are sung by young men and women and heard everywhere from the North to the South of Vietnam, from the fields to rowers in rivers, or to festivals in villages.³²

The Vietnamese people are rich in emotion. Thus the folk sayings and songs are built on emotion rather than philosophy. They also record the love of both young men and women in all emotional aspects, and in difficulties because of ethics, morality and control of parents in the old tradition.

²⁹ Quảng Hàm, *Sử Yếu*, 9.

³⁰ Trần Quang Hải, “Tình Yêu trong Dân Ca Việt Nam (Love in Vietnamese literature)” in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình, và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (Paris: Định Hướng Tùng Thư, Trung Tâm Nguyễn Tường Tô, 2002), 271-280.

³¹ Nguyễn Tấn Long and Phan Canh, *Thi Ca Bình Dân* (Popular poetry), vol. 3 (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Học, 1993), 7-13.

³² Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 56.

3.1.2.2 The classical poetry

The classical poetry dates from before Đường's time (618-907) in China and reflects the art of the feudal system through many centuries in Vietnamese history.³³ It is cramped by laws of composition in which it is hard for modern Vietnamese to appreciate the beauty of the poetry. However, behind the difficulties, the classical poetry contains unique characters and full creativeness in the writings of famous poets such as Nguyễn Trãi, Nguyễn Du, Nguyễn Gia Thiều, Nguyễn Công Trứ, Cao Bá Quát, Tú Xương, etc.³⁴ 'Love' was a subject forbidden in the feudal system, but it was carried on secretly and sometimes exploded violently.³⁵ The prominent writings in this type of poetry were "Chinh phụ ngâm" (*Lament of the Warrior's Bride*) in the first half of the eighteenth century,³⁶ "Cung oán ngâm khúc" (*A Royal Concubine's Complaint: Stanzas*) in 1741-1798,³⁷ and "Truyện Kiều" (*The Tale of Kiều*) in 1765-1820.³⁸ The first two writings are the lament of a warrior's wife when she is far from her husband and the complaints of a palace maid who is given up by a king in feudalism.³⁹ The last writing "Truyện Kiều" of Nguyễn Du composed in six-eight metre is a beautiful love song about the love relationship of Thúy Kiều and Kim Trọng.⁴⁰ "Truyện Kiều" is a lively writing enjoyed through many centuries and with which writings later cannot compare.

3.1.2.3 The new poetry movement

The written literature, first collected around the tenth to thirteenth century is the literature works written in *Han* (Chinese characters) and *Chu Nom* (ancient Vietnamese

³³ Quảng Hàm, *Văn Học*, 18, 27.

³⁴ Đức Nam, *Tình BẠN*, 11.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Đoàn Thị Điểm (trans.), *Chinh Phụ Ngâm Khúc* (Lament of the warrior's bride) (Glendale: Dai Nam Co., 1982), 76.

³⁷ Ôn Như Hầu, *Cung Oán Ngâm Khúc* (A royal concubine's complaint: stanzas), ed. Tôn Thất Lương (Houston: Zieles Co., 1980), 9.

³⁸ Dương Quảng Hàm, *Quốc Văn Trích Dẫn* (National literature quoted) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Trẻ, 2005), 109, 115, 123-124; idem, *Sử Yếu*, 309-313.

³⁹ Quảng Hàm, *Quốc Văn*, 109-123.

⁴⁰ Nguyễn Du, *Truyện Kiều* (The tale of Kiều), trans. Huỳnh Sanh Thông (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), xix-xxi.

script),⁴¹ but in the twentieth century literature was written in Vietnamese *Quoc Ngu* (Romanized national language).⁴² The written literature as prose and poetry has changed very quickly in terms of quantity, genre, and form. Especially, the poetry developed vigorously to culminate in the new poetry movement.⁴³

In the past, the poets expressed their emotion in love poetry in traditional forms. But over recent decades, there have been hundreds of beautiful poems composed with different forms. Most of them are nature poems, lyrical poems and countryside poems. These poems are composed with no particular limits on lines or words, and no prosody which represents a reaction against the classical poetry which keeps strictly to rules both to the numbers of lines and prosody in a poem.⁴⁴ They also contribute a new shape to the new poetry movement in Vietnam which is properly dated from 1932.⁴⁵

Most poets in this movement are capable of composing love lyrics with high inspiration and deep emotion and are influenced by the French poets.⁴⁶ In classical poetry, poets used to describe majestic landscapes such as high mountains, wide rivers, and beauties of nature such as a bright moon, cool wind, autumn chrysanthemum, and spring orchids. They also praise the faithful heart, filial piety, or sadness in sentiment, and always mention serious love which is expressed secretly and gently in a love

⁴¹ In the past, Vietnamese borrowed Chinese characters as the national writing, but later it was replaced by ancient Vietnamese scrip which read according to Vietnamese pronunciation but still kept Chinese sound and meaning of a word (Phạm Thế Ngũ, *Việt Nam Văn Học Sử Giản Ước Tân Biên: Văn Học Truyền Khẩu Văn Học Lịch Triều Hán Văn* [Historical Vietnamese literature, reducible writing: Vietnamese unwritten literature in the Han dynasties], vol. 1 [Glendale: Dai Nam Co., 1981], 53-57).

⁴² Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 17.

⁴³ Quảng Hàm, *Sử Yếu*, 421-422.

⁴⁴ Maurice M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*, trans. D. M. Hawke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 165. The main forms of the new poetry are different from classical ones. It is not limited; the words in each line can be 1 to 12 words, normally 6, 8, and 12 words and does not keep very much to the laws of prosody, number of lines or words, and parallels as in Đường Thi poetry or classical poetry which is cramped by keeping the number of lines, the words in each line, prosody, rhyme, and genre (Quảng Hàm, *Sử Yếu*, 110). For further investigation on these forms see idem, *Văn Học Việt Nam*, 1-47; and idem, *Sử Yếu*, 109-125; Phạm Thế Ngũ, *Việt Nam Văn Học Sử, Giản Ước Tân Biên: Văn Học Lịch Triều Việt Văn* (Historical Vietnamese literature, reducible writing: Vietnamese literature in the past dynasties), vol. 2 (Glendale: Dai Nam Co., 1981), 38-41.

⁴⁵ Hà Minh Đức, “Thơ Tình Lãng Mạn Trong Phong Trào Thơ Mới” (Lyrical Poem in the New Poetry Movement) in *Thơ Mới Tác Phẩm và Dư Luận* (New poetic work and public opinion), eds. Tuấn Thành và Anh Vũ (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Học, 2003), 295. See also in Maurice M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*, 165.

⁴⁶ Thế Ngũ, *Văn Học*, vol. 2, 548.

relationship.⁴⁷ In the new poetry movement, poets use all imageries found around them from the sky to the sea, a rice field, and lotus ponds to express all feelings in one's heart in different states from a crazy desire to a bitter disappointment.⁴⁸

A representative of the new poetry movement is Xuân Diệu who is called the king of the love lyrics in a paradise garden of those who are in love. He expresses his love so passionately that he feels far from his beloved even when she is beside him, feels cold in his heart even when loved deeply and he sometimes loves nonsense, loves one who does not love him, even one who loves another one. Thus, he is in immense sadness and causeless sorrow.⁴⁹ There are other famous poets of love lyrics such as Hàm Mặc Tử, Nguyễn Bính, Vũ Hoàng Chương, Huy Cận, Tế Hanh, etc., and each of them expresses his inspiration in the poems differently.⁵⁰ These recent poets are concerned with new characteristics and different aspects of love such as a time of joy, desire, praise, freedom in love, and other similar expressions.

Finally, love between a young man and woman means “tình yêu” and expressed in all aspects of the love relationship secretly and tenderly and recorded in Vietnamese literature. In the past, young men and women were prevented from showing their love to each other, but in the present, they are free to do so. However, in both times the love is often used to describe feelings of love and burning desires which nothing can prevent lovers from sharing with one another.

3.2 The language of love in the Song and love lyrics in Vietnamese literature

To read the language of love of the Song in the Vietnamese context, I will underline various themes of love expressed in the Song to compare with similar themes in love lyrics in Vietnamese literature, because a similarity of the love language is expressed between the man and the woman in both. The chosen themes in the Song are nature imagery, lovesickness, dialogue between the lovers, the heart and passion of love, and

⁴⁷ Quảng Hàm, *Sử Yếu*, 432.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1993), 161-165.

⁵⁰ Minh Đức, “Thơ Tình,” 296.

the signs of love. They will be compared with similar themes underlined in the love lyrics of Vietnamese literature at the level of thoughts, especially focusing more on the Vietnamese folklore and classical poetry.

3.2.1 The nature imagery

As in any poetry in the world, Hebrew and Vietnamese poetry binds closely with nature imagery. The imagery is used to convey thoughts and emotions through similes and metaphors as found both in the Song and Vietnamese literature.

3.2.1.1 The nature imagery in the Song context

In the Song, the love language of the lovers is connected to the idyllic atmosphere in Palestine through lively imagery. Thus, nature imagery is found often in the Song such as flowers, fruits and trees, animals and birds, vines and vineyards, garden, water, mountain, hill, fountain, pool, wind, and dew. Especially, images such as gardens (גַּנִּים), vineyards (כַּרְמֵי), (tiny spring) flowers (נִצְנִים), trees (עֲצִים), and fruits (פְּרִים) are found in various poems in the Song used as the tropes of “simile” and “metaphor” which are chief among various poetic devices and are widely used in Hebrew poetry.⁵¹

There are poems which describe the relationship of the lovers in the idyllic atmosphere in the Song. The first poem in Song 2:8-13 describes the man’s urgent invitation to his beloved to share the delights of springtime when nature changes to new life.⁵² It is the most beautiful depiction of nature in the Song, especially verses 2:10-13. In these verses, the tiny spring flowers (הַנִּצְנִים) are seen amongst the new shoots of undergrowth with multicolor, and the sound of the migratory turtledove (קוֹל הַתּוֹר) is heard and which also points to a change of season (as seen in Jer. 8:7),⁵³ and the time for

⁵¹ Richard S. Gerstenberger, “The Lyrical Literature” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker (California: Scholars Press, 1985), 416.

⁵² Dianna Bergant, *The Song of Songs* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 30.

⁵³ Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs: A Philological Analysis of the Hebrew Book* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Sup 17. Paris: Peeters, 2005), 128-129.

singing and pruning (עַת הַזְמִיר) has come, the fig tree (הַתְּאֵנָה) has sprouted her early fruits, and the budding vines (הַגְּפְנִים סְמָרֵר) fill the air with fragrance.⁵⁴

The images associated with springtime are attractive and full of vitality. The winter rains (הַסָּתוּ)⁵⁵ are over, to indicate that springtime has arrived with a new life (2:11) and traditionally, it is a time for love.⁵⁶ The beauty of the springtime is shown through the image of (winter) rain (נָשָׁם) that has ceased (הִלֵּף) and gone away (הִלָּף) which emphasises that the rainy season is totally past, over and gone.⁵⁷ This image with the verb הִלָּף connects ideally with the man's invitation for the woman to go out or "come away [RSV]" (לְכִי-לָךְ) in 2:10 and (לְכִי) in 2:13.⁵⁸ The connection forms the beautiful springtime in 2:10-13 and also draws attention to the time when the woman should come outside with her lover in order to enjoy the sights, sounds, smells of early spring, and new shoots coming out to bring forth blossoms and fragrances.⁵⁹ Therefore, the lovers' love expressed in images of the springtime gives new life and hope that invade the lovers' hearts with passionate love. The love urges them to invite each other to see the flourishing and burgeoning of their love and to enjoy its wonder. In 2:8-13, the term זְמִיר in 2:12 from the root זָמַר has a double meaning, "pruning and singing."⁶⁰

נִרְאוּ הַנְּצָנִים בְּאֶרֶץ The flowers appear in the earth
 עַת הַזְמִיר הַגִּיעַ The time of pruning and singing has arrived
 וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ: And the sound of turtledoves is heard in our land.

The term זְמִיר in the second line is parallel with "the flowers" in the first line and at the same time, is parallel to "the sound" in the third line. Therefore, זְמִיר could be

⁵⁴ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 30.

⁵⁵ The term סָתוּ (Qere סָתוּי) is hapax legomenon in the OT and an Aramaism. It may refer to rain as well as winter (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 394; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 139);

⁵⁶ Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *Song of Songs* (New York: United Bible Societies: 1998), 72.

⁵⁷ The two asyndetic verbs: הִלֵּף הִלָּף are similar in orthography and sound as a wordplay to heighten the effect of the subject "rain" (נָשָׁם) in 2:11 (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 394; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 139).

⁵⁸ There is a slight difference between לָךְ in 2:10 and לְכִי in 2:13 because of a transcriptional error by a scribe in 2:13. However, there is no difference in the meaning of translation between the two verses (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 100).

⁵⁹ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 76; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 127.

⁶⁰ Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2004), 156, 159.

read as “Janus” parallelism within these lines.⁶¹ It is also called as synonymous-sequential because the first meaning “pruning” in the second colon parallels with the first colon, and the second meaning “singing”⁶² in the second colon parallels with the third colon.⁶³ The use of “Janus” in the verse is one of the unique arts of parallelism of Hebrew poetry to present a brilliant description of the spring time with its rebirth of life.⁶⁴ The description highlights the beautiful nature imagery of the poem in 2:8-13.⁶⁵ In

⁶¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 127.

⁶² It is difficult to decide the ambiguous meaning of זְמִיר from the root זָמַר which means either “to sing” or “to prune.” The meaning “to prune” is supported by many ancient versions as above and parallel with the clause נִרְאוּ הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ “the flowers appear in the earth” in 2:12a. The meaning “singing” is parallel with קוֹל הַתּוֹר “the sound of turtledoves” in 2:12c. The study of the term זְמִיר shows that it has double meanings which make sense in the context and give a better understanding the meaning of the verse. Therefore, I adopt Garrett’s translation of the phrase as “the time of pruning and singing arrives” (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 156, 159). Cf. Isa 24:16; 25:5; Ps 95:2; Job 35:10.

⁶³ Parallelism is recognized as the most well-known form of Hebrew poetry (Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* [Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988], 48). Its purpose is to convey the common perception of an intention into the field of a new perception (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, INC., Publishers, 1985], 10). Through many centuries, the term “parallelism” is understood as the repetition of the components of one line of verse in the following line or lines and it could be a repetition of meaning, words, sound, rhythm, morphology, grammar or any combination of these (Edward L. Greenstein, “How Does Parallelism Mean?” in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature*, A Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement: 1982 [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982], 43). However, recently there are various categories identified which contribute to an understanding of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Greenstein understands that parallelism is used to refer to an equivalently structural thought: the repetition in the syntactic patterning of a line to line and it depends totally on grammatical character not only on the surface structure of the line but also at the level of deep structure (Greenstein, “How Does Parallelism Mean?” 41-70). Schökel defines parallelism as an important basic operation of language, that of “articulation” which is “articulation of sound, syntactic articulation, articulation of semantic fields, of rhythm” (Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 51). Berlin assumes that parallelism is commonly considered to contain only semantic and grammatical correspondences in dealing with the repetition of the same or similar sequence of consonants of sound pairs in parallel lines (Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985], 2, 103). Petersen and Richards conclude that parallelism appears in the relations of semantic grammatical correspondence and antithesis, and to understand the variety of parallelism used in Hebrew poetry one must study each word as well as its relationship in each colon, multi-colon, and the whole poem (David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 35). Watson explains that “parallelism belongs within a larger group of mathematical analogues and cannot be exalted to the rank of ‘the characteristic of Hebrew poetry’” (Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* [JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986], 118). According to Watson’s explanation, there are five categories of parallelism in Hebrew poetry such as gender-matched parallelism; parallel words-pairs; number parallelism; staircase parallelism; and other types of parallelism: synonymous-sequential; vertical parallelism; and “Janus” parallelism (Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 123-159).

⁶⁴ M. Timothea Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 70.

⁶⁵ The beautiful nature is also found in elsewhere in the OT such as the beautiful and wonderful creation in Ps 104, the sunrise has qualities of a “bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion” in Ps 19:5, the beautiful

the burst of new life in the beginning of the springtime, there is the fig tree (הַתְּאֵנָה) which begins to put forth its figs and ripens with reddish and yellowish streaks the fruit and the vines (הַגְּפְנִים) blossom to give off their scent in 2:13.⁶⁶ The fig tree and vine are also used together as a pair frequently to signify a symbol of peace and security in 1 Kgs 4:25; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10.⁶⁷

The next poem in Song 6:11-12 is the woman's contemplation of signs of spring which is a time of love. It describes the woman's invitation to her lover to go down with her to the nut orchard (אֶל-גִּנַּת אֲנֹז),⁶⁸ to look at the blossoms of the vines (הַגְּפְנִים) of the valley (Song 7:12; cf. Eccl 12:5), and to see whether the vines have budded and the pomegranates (הַרְמָזִים) are in bloom in 6:11 and something unexpected happens to her in 6:12.⁶⁹ The images in this poem may be used to express the idea of delight, excitement, and surprise of the lovers. Finally, the poem in Song 7:12-14 shows a series of images: vines, vineyards, pomegranates, and mandrakes (הַיִּזְרְאִים) which give forth fragrance in the spring growths. The images describe a flood of love overwhelming the lovers when they are alone in the field without being observed by others.⁷⁰

flowers in Isa 40:6, the beautiful olive tree in Hos 14:6, and all kind of tree that are pleasant to the sight in Gen 2:9; the vine budded and blossomed and its clusters ripened into grapes in Gen 40:10; and the picture of the vine shaking off its green grapes and the olive tree tossing its buds and blossoms in Job 15:33 (DBI, "Beauty," 83; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* [AB 7C; Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1977], 396).

⁶⁶ Pope, *Song of Songs*, 397.

⁶⁷ Menachem Kellner, *Commentary on Song of Songs, Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 44; and also Longman, *Song of Songs*, 121.

⁶⁸ The precise meaning of אֲנֹז is uncertain. However, in Rabbinic literature it helps us to identify it as a walnut (see in Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 79).

⁶⁹ The poem in 6:11-12 is unclear in its connection to the preceding poem and what follows. Therefore, the two verses can be treated as a short poem. Since the verse is the most difficult in the Song and there is no effective solution which has been provided by interpreters (see in John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* [Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975], 46). The literal translation of the verse might be "I did not know; my soul/life set me; chariots of Ammi-nadib" (Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 176). Falk mentions that it is impossible to translate the verse into English because it is unintelligible (Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* [HarperSanFrancisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990], 187). The verse may describe an excited feeling that before the woman knows herself she is transported to the chariot with a prince who is her lover.

⁷⁰ Cf. 1 Sam 20:5, 11: David and Jonathan; Ruth 3: Ruth and Boaz, see in Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 254.

In nature imagery, gardens, vineyards and vines which appear throughout the Song, have a long tradition in the ancient Near East; from the beginning they are related to the paradisiacal garden area of the gods.⁷¹ In the OT, the garden (גֶּדֶן) is mentioned for the first time as God's creation for humankind in Gen 2-3. It is often used in comparison with the garden in the Song, as the cyclic plan of Gen 2 is revealed and echoed in the Song;⁷² the Song is also explained as the images and motifs of the myth of the garden;⁷³ or connected to the garden by imagining humans in a garden of love.⁷⁴ The garden in Genesis is created for humankind, and the gardens and vineyards in the Song are often used to refer to places where lovers share their love and at the same time are symbolized as referring to female sexuality. The narrative in Genesis is a story of humankind with pain, suffering, and loss because of disobedience, while the Song is about the delights of the relationship of the two lovers. However, it seems that the love relationship between Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis is restored in the Song through the union of the two lovers.⁷⁵

The gardens and vineyard in the Song are used as a metaphor to refer to the woman or her sexual power.⁷⁶ The gardens (4:12, 15, 16; 5:1; 6:2, 11; 8:13) are the place for a rendezvous of lovemaking,⁷⁷ and used as an erotic symbol. In the wisdom literature, such gardens are used as sources of pleasure as in Prov 5:15-19 where the husband is satisfied with his own wife and in Eccl 2:4-6 where the gardens are extended to include vineyards, fruit trees, and pools of water.⁷⁸ Love in gardens is a theme often used in

⁷¹ Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: A Study in the Poetic Language of the Song of Songs* (JSOTSup 203; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1995), 102, 104.

⁷² Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 146, 152. Lys draws a parallel between the garden of Eden and the function of the Song, and he writes "Le Cantique n'est rien d'autre qu'un commentaire de Gen. 2," without substantiating the relationship (Daniel Lys, *Le plus beau chant de la création* [Paris: Cerf, 1968], 52).

⁷³ Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," *JBL* 98 (1979), 513, 524.

⁷⁴ David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 91-139.

⁷⁵ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 105.

⁷⁶ Carey E. Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 61-62.

⁷⁷ Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs: Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 286.

⁷⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 195; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 161.

Egyptian love lyrics.⁷⁹ The nut garden in Song 6:11 and the vineyard in 7:13 do not refer to the woman's body, but they are a place of tryst for the man and the woman to share their love.

The vineyards (1:6, 14; 2:15; 7:13; 8:11-12) are the setting for the Song and sometimes used as a symbolic facet referring to the woman or to her relationship with her lover and a common agricultural image used for sexuality.⁸⁰ They give juicy grapes and are good to taste; when grapes are fermented they intoxicate those who drink them. The grape harvest is also mentioned as a natural setting for love image in Judg 21:20-22 describing joyful, dancing daughters and wives.⁸¹ The vineyard in 1:6 seems to be used as a metaphor to refer to the woman's body as when the woman asks the daughters of Jerusalem not to look at her, for she does not keep her own vineyard. In Song 1:14, the woman describes her lover as a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyard of En-gedi (cf. 4:13; 7:13).⁸² He praises the woman's beautiful body as the palm tree in 7:8, 9 in which her breasts are like the clusters of the vine that gives pleasure and strongly attract the man as the man finds satisfaction only in the breasts of his own wife in Prov 5:19-20.⁸³ At the end of the Song, the vineyards are mentioned again to refer to Solomon's vineyard which refers to his harem (1 Kgs 11:3) and the woman's own vineyard in Song 8:11, 12 which is totally different from Solomon's (cf. Isa 7:23).⁸⁴ The image of sexuality becomes clearer in Song 8:12 where the woman assumes that she is

⁷⁹ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 283-285.

⁸⁰ Walsh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 61; Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 98; and *DBI*, "Vine, Vineyard," 916.

⁸¹ Walsh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 61.

⁸² According to Wright, En-gedi is the same as Hazazon-tamar (Gen 14:7) situated upon the west shore of the Dead Sea (Josh 15:62). In the time of Solomon (Song 1:14), palms and vines were cultivated here, and it was the place where David took refuge from Saul (1 Sam 24:1) and the children of Ammon, Moab and Mt. Seir attempted to invade Judah by way of En-gedi (2 Chron 20:2) (George Frederick Wright, "En-gedi," *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 3088). Keel also mentions that the vineyard of En-gedi was the luxuriant oasis in the desert near the Dead Sea and known as a royal garden from the end of the seventh century B.C. onward (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 67). It is hidden and private and also a romantic place or the place of love (Longman, *Song*, 106). Furthermore, Ogden and Zogbo explain that En-gedi literally means "the spring of a young goat" that has a euphemistic sense connected with fertility. Thus, the vineyards of En-gedi in 1:14 may refer to the woman's genital region (Zoden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 45).

⁸³ Walsh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 116; and Keel, *Song of Songs*, 246.

⁸⁴ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 282.

the only one who gives herself sexually to her lover.⁸⁵ Finally, vines are frequently employed in the Song to refer to sexuality in the most sensual of all biblical poems.⁸⁶ The blossoming vines are signs of spring time described in a variety of ways (2:12-13; 6:11; 7:13) in which the lovers see the prospering and blooming of their love.

Flowers are employed frequently in the Song for both lovers (2:1; 2; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2, 3; 7:3) to portray an imagery of great attractiveness which implies the woman's purity and simplicity.⁸⁷ In the OT, they imply the temporary nature of human life (as in Ps 103:15; Job 14:2; Isa 28:1; 40:6-8).⁸⁸ However, the flowers in the Song are imagery associated with the lovers' love. Their sensuous characteristic through colours, shapes, scents, delicacy of touch are similar to the delightful sexuality of physical love and give the famous similes and metaphors in the Song.⁸⁹ The similes are a comparison of two objects indicated by the participles such as like or as (כְּ).⁹⁰ Both the similes and metaphors are found in the Song such as when the woman describes herself as a flower (חֲבַצְלֵת) of Sharon,⁹¹ a lotus (שׁוֹשַׁן) of the valleys (2:1);⁹² or as a lotus (שׁוֹשַׁן) among the thorns (2:2; cf. 6:8-10). She compares her lover to beds of spices (כְּעֵרוֹגַת הַבְּשָׂם), yielding fragrance and his lips to lotuses (שׁוֹשַׁנִּים) dripping with flowing myrrh (5:13).

⁸⁵ DBI, "Vine, Vineyard," 916.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 81.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ DBI, "Flowers," 295.

⁹⁰ Petersen and Richards, *Hebrew Poetry*, 50.

⁹¹ Snaith and Exum mention that the noun חֲבַצְלֵת (2:1) does not mean "rose" as in many English translations, because "rose" only appeared in the region of Sharon in the 3rd century B.C., but "crocus" grew freely in the plain of the Sharon (John G. Snaith, *Song of Songs* [NCBC; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993], 27); J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* [Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2005], 113). Goulder shows that the woman compares herself to a plain wild flower which no one can identify, it may be the crocus, or the *Lilium Colchicum*, but the rose of the plain is not the rose of Sharon (Michael D. Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs* [JSOTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986], 18) Longman also agrees that the woman compares herself to a common flower among many rather than a particular flower as "rose" which came to Israel after the Old Testament period (Tremper Longman, *The Song of Songs* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 110-111). No one knows exactly what kind of flower חֲבַצְלֵת refers to. Therefore, it is better to translate חֲבַצְלֵת as "a flower" which is supported by the LXX (Greek expression) which translates the phrase הַשָּׂרוֹן חֲבַצְלֵת as "a flower of Sharon" (2:1) as in NAB. The translation makes sense in the context because the woman is humbly describing herself as a common flower among many.

⁹² See the study of the noun שׁוֹשַׁנָּה (2:1) in note 298 in point 1.2.2.2 of Chapter One.

The man also describes his beloved's breasts as fawns feeding (כְּשֵׁנֵי עֵפְרָיִם) among the lotuses (בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים) (4:5). He is in the garden (עֵרְוָה), feeding among the lotuses (שׁוֹשַׁנִּים) (6:2, 3). And again the man depicts his beloved's waist as a heap of wheat encircled by lotuses (בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים) (7:3). The lotus is often employed to decorate the pillars of the capitals of Solomon (see 1 Kgs 7:19, 22) and the washing basin in the temple (see 1 Kgs 7:26; 2 Chron 4:5).⁹³ In the Ancient Near Eastern art and love poetry, it represents a number of important connections such as a figure of creation, life, fecundity, regeneration, and love.⁹⁴

The mention of an apple tree (תְּפֹיִת) in Song 2:3 and 8:5 surpassing all other trees refers to the image of the man who is the woman's shelter.⁹⁵ Among the trees in gardens, the apple tree is a prominent symbol in love poetry in the Ancient Near East for its erotic connections.⁹⁶ There is the fig tree (הַתְּאֵנָה) in 2:13 pictured as putting forth the sweetness of juices into unripe figs to show that the time is ready for the progression toward the intended perfection and this was commonly used as a sexual symbol in the Ancient Near East.⁹⁷ The man also compares his beautiful beloved to the splendor of the palm tree (הַתְּמָר) (7:8) which is one of the oldest cultivated fruit trees in the ancient Near East and a source of food and drink, and building materials.⁹⁸ The palm tree is tall and a man has to climb it to reach the enticing clusters represented as his beloved's breasts. It is a metaphor to refer to the senses of sight, touch, smell, and taste that denote sexual intimacy in which the man enjoys the fruits of love with his beloved. The palm

⁹³ The lotus is one of the special symbols known from Egypt to Syria in the first millennium B.C. (see in Keel, *Song of Songs*, 80; and also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114).

⁹⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114; Keel, *Song of Songs*, 80.

⁹⁵ The precise nature of "an apple tree" is not certainly identifiable derived from the root נָפַח "Breathe," "flow upon" to suggest a fragrant fruit with sweet taste (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 132). The apple was not native to Israel at that time and it could be understood as a sweet citron such as an apricot (G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* [TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984], 89). However, the apple tree figures significantly in ancient Near Eastern love poetry, and also the ancient Greeks and Romans for its erotic association (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 149). Therefore, it is possible to identify תְּפֹיִת as "an apple tree" with its refreshing taste rather than an apricot.

⁹⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114.

⁹⁷ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 99; and also notes: 66 and 67 above.

⁹⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 238.

tree is also seen through its images as the “tree of life” marked on the temple precincts of Jerusalem (see 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35; Ezek 40:16-41:26).⁹⁹

Fruits (פְּרִיִם) in the Song are used as metaphors to refer to fullness of love and the maturity of the lovers.¹⁰⁰ The apples in 2:3 (cf. 2:5; 7:9) bring joy to the woman and cure her from lovesickness in her lover’s absence. In the great longing for her lover, the apples and raisin cakes are deliciously used as metaphors to imply a way of prolonging and increasing enjoyment (2:3-5).¹⁰¹ Their fragrance on the woman’s breath in 7:9 in the larger context refers to the excitement of joy of the lovers.¹⁰² The pomegranates appear in 4:3 and 6:7 to describe the woman’s cheeks as seen through her veil.¹⁰³ They are as similes to indicate sweetness and sensual pleasure of the lovers.¹⁰⁴ The pomegranates are a symbol of life used to decorate the capitals of Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 7:18, 20, 42; 2 Kgs 25:17; Jer 52:22-32) and the hems of the priests’ robes (Exod 28:33, 34; 39:24-26).¹⁰⁵ Finally, mandrakes or love apples in 7:14 are mentioned located in the Mediterranean and they are used as aphrodisiacs (cf. Gen 30:14-16) in various cultures.¹⁰⁶ They bring forth an exotic fragrance that is a hint of the erotic nature,¹⁰⁷ and had a place in folklore to describe sexual love between a man and a woman and human fertility in biblical and post-biblical time.¹⁰⁸

In short, the relationship of the lovers in the Song is expressed in the idyllic atmosphere in which gardens, vineyards and vines, flowers, trees and fruits are converted into similes and metaphors to catch the readers’ attention through the disparity between two objects which are considered similar to discover multiple meanings. The nature imagery is used frequently to convey the deep expression of love of the lovers

⁹⁹ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 242.

¹⁰⁰ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 86.

¹⁰¹ The raisin cakes were used in the cult of Canaanite goddesses (Hos 3:1; cf. Jer 7:18; 44:19); see Exum, *Song of Songs*, 116; and Keel, *Song of Songs*, 85.

¹⁰² Walsh, *Fruit of the Vine*, 116.

¹⁰³ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 143; and Exum, *Song of Songs*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ The mandrake is used in the story of Rachel’s offering Leah a night with Jacob (see in Exum, *Song of Songs*, 116).

¹⁰⁷ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 92.

¹⁰⁸ Paridon, *Song of Songs*, 411.

with appealing and flooding in a sensuous and sexual sense.¹⁰⁹ It presents a rich cultural tradition and the social background of Palestine in the love poetry and is referred to unlimitedly in various literary contexts such as the Mesopotamian and Egyptian love poems.¹¹⁰

3.2.1.2 The nature imagery in the Vietnamese context

In Vietnamese literature, the love language in the folk sayings and the classical poetry also reflect the nature imagery as found in the Song. In the nature imagery, young men and women go together to work in the fields and farms and show their love to each other. The imagery used often connects various scenes in daily life of the Vietnamese people, especially fields, gardens, flowers, and lesser bamboo, which are engraved upon their mind.

Young men and young women in the countryside of Vietnam often go to work in the early morning when the early dew is still on leaves of trees and grass sparkling under the sun. Then, in the evening they carry baskets of grass and hoes on their shoulders, coming home on the familiar paths between the yellow rice fields and rows of bamboo trees. There are light evening winds from the rice fields flowing through their hair exposing their lovely faces full of energetic life. Like in the Song, the attractive atmosphere of the idyllic country side in Vietnam encourages the young men and women to share their feelings and their desires, and express their love to one another as through the following folk sayings.¹¹¹

Cô kia cắt cỏ một mình,
 Cho anh cắt với chung tình làm đôi.
 Cô còn cắt nữa hay thôi?
 Cho tôi cắt thế làm đôi vợ chồng.¹¹²
*(You are cutting the grass alone,
 Let me cut with you as a couple.
 Whether you continue to cut or not?
 Let me cut with you as a husband and wife).*

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Hunt, *Poetry in the Song of Songs: A Literary Analysis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 138.

¹¹⁰ White, *Language of Love*, 108-109; see also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 47.

¹¹¹ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 210-211.

¹¹² Phạm Duy, *Đặc Khảo về Dân Nhạc* (The especial folk songs) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Học, 1972), 93.

The folk sayings, with six-eight metre and rhymes B above,¹¹³ describe love between a young man and woman blossoming in the dawn when dewdrops are in the grasses; when the young woman is cutting grasses, the young man wants to join her and he declares his love to the young woman.¹¹⁴ The beginnings of love between the lovers often develop in the fields through happy songs that draw men and women closer and show their feelings of love to each other, even challenging each other as follows.

Cô kia đi đường này với *ta*,
 Trồng đậu, đậu tốt, trồng cà, cà sai.
 Cô kia đi đường ấy với *ai*,
 Trồng bông, bông héo, trồng khoai, khoai hà!¹¹⁵
 (*You go this way with me,*
Planting bean which grows well, planting an eggplant which produces plenty of
fruits.
You go that way with another man,
Planting a rose which is withered, planting sweet potato which has weevils!)

¹¹³ The sixth word “*mình*” in the first line of the poem is accented with “*huyền*” (˘) called rhymes B. The sixth words of each line “*mình*,” “*ình*,” “*thôi*,” and “*đôi*” bind the lines in the folk sayings together in harmony. In Vietnamese, words called “*bằng*” are the words with non-accented or accented with “*huyền*” (˘) and words called “*trắc*” are words accented “*sắc*” (ˊ), “*hỏi*” (ˇ), “*ngã*” (˜), and “*nặng*” (ˋ) (Quảng Hàm, *Quốc Văn*, p. 23). In a poem, when two syllables have similar sounds either “*bằng*” (B) (even tone) or “*trắc*” (T) (uneven tone) this is called assonance e.g., anh, đành, thanh, vành, mạnh are assonances in “*bằng*” (B); đáng, nặng, măng, đặng, đặng are assonances in “*trắc*” (T). Assonance is an important factor in keeping the rhyme and is important in Vietnamese poetry. Rhyme in a Vietnamese poem is based on assonance of a pair of words within words in a line, in two lines, in lines in a poem; or in the last word of each line in a poem. Rhyme kept within pairs of words in a line, two lines and in lines of a poem is called prosody. Prosody is the connection of rhymes within each two lines in a poem. The connection of two lines must be based on assonance of pairs of words either in “*bằng, bằng*” (B, B) or “*trắc, trắc*” (T, T). The prosody is kept strictly in Đường Thi poetry and sometimes in the classical poetry. It is called out of rhyme when a poem does not keep properly the prosody (Huỳnh Sanh Thông, ed., and trans., *An Anthology of Vietnamese Poems* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996], 10-22). The new movement poetry does not cramp very much in the laws of prosody, number of lines or words, and parallels as in Đường Thi poetry or classical poetry (Sanh Thông, *Vietnamese Poems*, 22). There are two ways to rhyme in the new movement. First is the rhyme in the middle of a line in which the last word of the first line rhymes with a word in the following line. Second is the rhyme in the last word which is expressed in four ways as alternative rhyme in which pairs of “*bằng*” (B) and “*trắc*” (T) are alternative rhyme, except the first line; cross rhyme in which the last word of the first line rhyming with the last word of the third line and the last word of the second line rhyming with the fourth line; clasp rhyme is in a poem with four lines, where the last word of the first line rhymes with the last word of fourth line and the last word of second line rhymes with the last word of the third line; and three words’ rhyme is the last word of the first line rhyming with the second and fourth and the third line is a different rhyme from the three lines (Lê Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca: Ngôn ngữ Tác Giả và Tác Phẩm* [Poetry: language, author, and work] [Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 2002], 7-18).

¹¹⁴ Trúc Phương, *Văn Học*, 222-224.

¹¹⁵ Tấn Long and Canh, *Thi Ca*, 119-120; and Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 249.

In the folk sayings in six-eight metre, the young man asks the young woman to go with him because what they do will be fruitful.¹¹⁶ He also challenges the young woman that if she follows another man, what she does will not be good and there will not be happiness in her future. This is the simple declaration of love from the young man to the young woman when both are working in the field.¹¹⁷ As in the case of the Song, the man challenges the woman by inviting her to rise up and come away with him from her place in order to see the flourishing and burgeoning in the springtime and share the delights of love together (see Song 2:10-13). In this practice, the ethics controlled by the old tradition are limited only in small families or in special situations in which some people have to stand as victims of the old tradition. But to young men and women, there is nothing to limit them expressing their love to one another when they are working together in the fields where they sing joyful folk songs.¹¹⁸

Similar to the Song, the love relationship of the man and the woman in love lyrics in Vietnamese literature is connected to the peaceful atmosphere of the countryside in which the lovers enjoy their simplicity of life. But there are different situations such as that of the lovers in the Song who are familiar with vineyards and pasturing the flocks of sheep (Song 1:7); the lovers in the Vietnamese folk sayings are familiar with their agricultural works in fields. The lovers in the Song and the Vietnamese folk sayings are free to show their feelings through nature imagery and desire to belong to each other with challenges. In the poem in Song 2:8-13, the man challenges the woman by inviting her to come and enjoy with him the new season in the spring time. There is a new life awaiting them that is associated skillfully with lively images of blooms, pruning, songs of turtle doves, and the budding of fig trees and vines. In the folk sayings, the young man also challenges the young woman to pay more attention to him not to any other man because there is hope and fruitfulness in her future associated with simple images of bean, an eggplant and sweet potato in their field. However, the images of the spring time

¹¹⁶ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 249.

¹¹⁷ Trúc Phương, *Văn Học*, 226-227.

¹¹⁸ This does not mean that they can destroy all the morals and ethics when they are not under the control of their family, especially their parents (Ta Van Tai, *The Vietnamese Tradition of Humans Rights* [US: University of California, 1988], 212-222, and Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 37).

in the Song are used skillfully to show a beautiful nature which cannot be found in the Vietnamese love lyrics.

In the scenic landscape of the Vietnamese countryside, young men and women express their love through simple imageries around them such as moon, stars, cloud, wind, plants, tree, flower, and especially the peach garden. Even though the theme of the garden is not a long tradition in the Vietnamese literature, in the idyllic atmosphere, the peach blossom, branches of peach, and the peach garden have imprinted in bold on the Vietnamese culture and the mind of the people for a thousand years.¹¹⁹ There, the folk sayings skillfully use the metaphor of the peach garden as standing for a woman, in simple and common language to express love such as:¹²⁰

Mưa xuân lác đác vườn đào,
 Công anh đắp đất ngăn rào trồng hoa.
 Ai làm gió táp mưa sa,
 Cho cây anh đổ cho hoa anh tàn?¹²¹
 (*Light rain in the peach garden at the spring,
 My labor is to cultivate the ground, make a fence and plant rose.
 Who causes wind and rain,
 To fell the peach tree and to ruin my roses?*)

The folk sayings describe the lament of the young man because he is not fulfilled in love. The light rains fall down in the peach garden in the spring time to make the peach tree not only blossom and bear fruits but also to shoot new buds. The image symbolizes the lively spring season with happiness and hope in future.¹²² Hence, the man spends his time and energy to protect the peach garden by cultivating the ground, making a fence to secure the garden, and planting roses. The garden is a metaphor to refer to a young woman whom the young man has tried to pursue with hope. Ironically, there is someone who causes storms and rains in the garden to bring the peach tree down and

¹¹⁹ Lý Khắc Cung, *Nghìn Khuôn Mặt Việt Nam* (Thousand faces of Vietnamese) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa, 1993), 101-103.

¹²⁰ The peach garden may have originated in Taoist Eden where the peach tree takes 3.000 years to blossom, the peach blossom takes 3.000 years to bear fruits, and the fruits take 3.000 years to ripen. Whoever achieves this fruit will gain immortality (Huỳnh Sanh Thông, ed. and trans., *The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979], 266).

¹²¹ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 222.

¹²² Khắc Cung, *Nghìn Khuôn Mặt*, 103.

ruin the roses. The metaphors here show that the man is disappointed about the woman who does not respond to his love and complains that all his time and efforts to keep her as the peach garden are wasted.¹²³ The reason is that in the past, the parents had absolute authority over their children's marriage and that concerned "Môn đăng hộ đối" (*a suitable alliance*), which means the similarity of social background between bride and bridegroom's families,¹²⁴ but not about love of their children. Therefore, the lovers have to separate from each other and obey the parents for filial love.¹²⁵ There is another rose garden used in the folk sayings as follows.

Bây giờ mận mới hỏi đào,
 Vườn hồng đã có ai vào hay chưa?
 Mận hỏi thì đào xin thưa
 Lối thì có lối, vào *chưa* ai vào.¹²⁶
 (*The plum asks the peach,
 Whether someone has come to the rose garden or not?
 The peach answers to the plum,
 Having a path, but no-one has come to the garden yet*).

In Vietnamese love language, young men and women do not express their love directly, but often use allusions.¹²⁷ As seen in the folk sayings above, the indirect language used by a young man through metaphors are the plum as the young man, the peach as the young woman, and the rose garden as the young woman's heart. The questions and answers through metaphors seem to playfully discover the woman's love relationship, but at the end they become loving words to show feelings of a young man and woman when love starts to blossom in their hearts.¹²⁸ In Vietnamese, "hoa" (flower) originated from Chinese, sometimes called "bông." The rose garden means "Hoa hồng"

¹²³ Trúc Phượng, *Văn Học*, 235.

¹²⁴ Toàn Ánh, *Phong Tục*, 198.

¹²⁵ Trương Tửu, *Kinh Thi Việt Nam* (Vietnamese poetry) (Houston: NXB Xuân Thu, 1995), 139, 141.

¹²⁶ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 214.

¹²⁷ Mặc Giao, *Một Cách Nhìn Khác Về Văn Hóa Việt Nam* (A different view about Vietnamese culture) (California: NXB Tin Vui, 2004), 260-261.

¹²⁸ Doãn Quốc Sỹ, *Người Việt Đáng Yêu* (Lovely Vietnamese people) (Sài Gòn: NXB Tương Lai, 1965), 86-87.

garden or “Bông hồng” garden which is often used in Vietnamese literature as a metaphor to refer to beautiful love or a beautiful woman.¹²⁹

As indicated before, the garden in the Song and the Vietnamese sayings is similarly used as a metaphor for the woman. However, the garden in the Song traditionally connects to a paradisiacal garden area of the gods and is a special topic in Mesopotamian sacred marriage songs.¹³⁰ The vineyard does not appear in Vietnamese literature but in the Song it is repeatedly used to give a lively picture of grapes making people feel good in eating and intoxicated to drink its juice. But, there is no particular implication of garden in the Vietnamese literature. Therefore, the peach garden or the rose garden in the Vietnamese sayings simply refers to the woman whom the young man pursues and has hope in. The rose garden is not found in the ancient world of Palestine, but is normal with many countries in the modern day.¹³¹

There are various kinds of flowers in Vietnam, but the lotus is a prominent flower used broadly in Vietnamese literature to express their thoughts and feelings of love of a young man for a young woman. It has a great meaning in the Vietnamese tradition and is used as a central symbol of Buddhism to show purity in body, word, and in spirit which originated from Hinduism.¹³²

Hôm qua tát nước đầu *đình*¹³³
 Để quên chiếc áo trên *cành* hoa sen
 Em được thì cho anh *xin*
 Hay là em để làm *tin* trong nhà?
 Áo anh sút chỉ đường tà
 Vợ anh chưa có, mẹ *già* chưa khâu,
 Áo anh sút chỉ đã *lâu*,
 Mai mượn cô ấy về *khâu* cho cùng . . .¹³⁴
 (*Bailing water into the field at the communal house in the village yesterday,*
I forgot the shirt on a lotus leaf)

¹²⁹ Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca*, 43.

¹³⁰ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 287.

¹³¹ See the discussion of the Song 2:1 on notes 91 and 92 of this chapter.

¹³² Sanh Thông, *Vietnamese Poetry*, 252.

¹³³ In decades past, the Vietnamese village people often used buckets to bail the water from a water pool for their rice fields.

¹³⁴ Bùi Mạnh Chi (ed.), *Văn Học Nhân Gian: Tuyển Tập* (Folklore literature: underlining works) (Hà Nội: NXB Giáo Dục, 2002), 416.

*You may pick it up, but return it to me
 Or do you keep it as a credit in your house?
 My shirt is unstitched in the lap
 I haven't a wife yet, my mother hasn't stitched it yet,
 My shirt has been unstitched for a long time,
 Would you like to help me to stitch it tomorrow . . .)*

The folk sayings with six-eight metre and rhyme B describe the young man who expresses his love to the young woman subtly through the image of a shirt and a lotus leaf. Normally, the Vietnamese seldom take off their shirts when they are working in a field under the sun. The shirts cover their body and help them to endure scorching sun, high wind, heavy rain, and frost in severe weather. How can the man forget his shirt on a lotus leaf? The lotus leaf is big in size, but it is too weak to hold a shirt upon it. Here, the poet skillfully uses a paradox of the image to describe a reality of life in which the shirt is a metaphor for the young man and the lotus leaf is a metaphor for the young woman.¹³⁵ The verb “to pick up” the shirt describes an unintentional act, but it means predestination in love in the particular situation of the man and the woman.¹³⁶ Therefore, he trusts in her and wants her to be part of his lonely life. He also believes in a long-sealed fate that may bind their life together. The expression of love secretly makes the young woman feel excited to think about her future.¹³⁷ To Vietnamese people, the lotus is a fond and familiar image as described in the following folk sayings:

*Trong đầm gì đẹp bằng sen,
 Lá xanh, bông trắng, lại chen nhụy vàng.
 Nhị vàng bông trắng lá xanh,
 Gần bùn mà chẳng hôi tanh mùi bùn.¹³⁸
 (In the pond nothing is as beautiful as a lotus,
 Green leaves and white flowers with yellow pistils.
 The yellow pistils with white flowers and green leaves,
 Although close to the smell, but never affected by its smell).*

¹³⁵ Trúc Phương, *Văn Học*, 222-224.

¹³⁶ Huy Phong and Nguyễn Thùy, *Ca Dao và Dân Ca* (Folk sayings and songs) (San Jose: Mekong-Ty Nạn Publisher, 1990), 189, 110.

¹³⁷ Trúc Phương, *Văn Học*, 226-227.

¹³⁸ Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa Việt Nam*, 171.

The lotus usually grows up in a pond but is never affected by the mud in the pond and rather its flower brings forth fragrance.¹³⁹ In Vietnamese literature, the lotus is often used as a metaphor for purity in an impure world and the generous heart of the people.¹⁴⁰ In the Song, the lotus is also found widely to portray an image of purity and simplicity which refers to the woman and her character (2:1, 2; 5:13; 4:5; 6:2, 3; and 7:3) rather than to both the people and young women as found in the Vietnamese love lyrics. For such a heuristic comparison, one would find such a common use of distinct image between these two bodies of literature to be curious.

Besides the usage of the special image of the lotus, there is a normal flower mentioned to refer directly to a young woman. A following short poem in the Tale of Kiều with rhyme B belongs to the classical poetry which combines both flower and bee to describe the two lovers:

*Tình nhân lại gặp tình nhân,
 Hoa xưa ong cũ mấy phen chung tình.*¹⁴¹
 (A love partner meets another love partner,
 The old flower and bee had loved each other).
 (The Tale of Kiều; chapter X, verse 3143)

There is the repetition “tình nhân” used twice in the first line of the verses to focus on the love relationship of the two lovers. The young man and woman are compared to a flower and a bee to describe that both lovers attract each other as does the bee which needs the sweet pistils of the flower.¹⁴² The bee and flower are used to skillfully convey the mutual attraction of lovers and indicate the idea of love through feelings.¹⁴³ Therefore, it is hard to make the lovers forget each other, even though they could not become husband and wife because of the injustice in their situation. As in the

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Sanh Thông, *Vietnamese Poetry*, 252.

¹⁴¹ Hồng Huy, *Đọc Kỹ Truyện Kiều* (Carefully reading from the tale of Kieu) (Toronto: Langvan Publisher, 1998), 90; and also Nguyễn Du, *Truyện Kiều* (The tale of Kieu), trans. Bùi Kỳ and Trần Trọng Kim (California: NXB Dai Nam, 1968), 204.

¹⁴² Nguyễn Du, *Dẫn Giải Truyện Kim-Vân-Kiều* (Interpretation of the tale of Kim-Van-Kieu), ed. Huyền Mặc Đạo-Nhân (North Sunshine, Vic: Thai Han, 2004), 289

¹⁴³ Vo Phien, “The Vietnamese Language and People Abroad,” in *Vietnamese Studies in a Multicultural World*, ed. Nguyen Xuan Thu (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Culture Publications, 1994), 97.

Song, the attraction between man and woman is also portrayed as lively through metaphors and similes that are the art of Hebrew love poetry. The attraction is associated with metaphors such as the fragrance of perfumes and refers not only to an identification of the man but also to his reputation which is so powerful and attractive to the woman (1:3);¹⁴⁴ he is as a sachet of myrrh with a sweet smell, lodged between her breasts (1:13) and as a cluster of henna in the vineyards of En-gedi, which refers to a romantic place (1:14), etc. The metaphors in the Song express the deep meaning of intimacy, attraction and delights of love. Unlike in the Song, the image of the flower and bee used in the Tale of Kiều brings echoes of bitterness or pains in love.

Furthermore, there is the imagery of lesser bamboo often found in Vietnamese love lyrics. The lesser bamboo is used as a metaphor to refer to the honorable man in the folk sayings as follows:¹⁴⁵

Trúc xinh trúc mọc đầu đình,
Em xinh em đứng một mình cũng xinh.¹⁴⁶
(*Lesser beautiful bamboo grows in front of a communal house
You are beautiful, even when you stand alone also beautiful*).

The lesser bamboo is associated with a drongo, dragon, or a cloud as similes. They are used for comparison between two objects to show feelings of emotion secretly with participles “như” (like) and “bằng” (as).

Thiếp xa chàng như rồng nọ xa mây,
Như con chèo bẻo xa cây măng vôi.¹⁴⁷
(*I am far from you like a dragon is far from a cloud,
Like a drongo far from lesser bamboo*).

The lines of the folk sayings above describe the confidence of the young woman when she is as far from her lover as a dragon is far from a cloud or a drongo is far from

¹⁴⁴ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 92.

¹⁴⁵ Nguyễn Xuân Quang, *Cá Dao Tục Ngữ, Tinh Hoa Việt Nam* (Folk sayings, proverbs, Vietnamese quintessence) (Anaheim: Y Học Thương Thục Publisher, 1992), 162-164. See also Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca*, 46.

¹⁴⁶ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 81.

lesser bamboo.¹⁴⁸ A dragon is assumed to live under water or in clouds.¹⁴⁹ So, it cannot live without water or clouds. The drongos are solitary, usually resting in some convenient tree-perch or in lesser bamboo from which they can sally some passing insects.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the drongo also cannot live without the lesser bamboo. The similes and metaphors express a love relationship of a young woman in the countryside who longs for a close relationship with her lover.¹⁵¹ To the Vietnamese people, the lesser bamboo or bamboo tree is a symbol of the native country.¹⁵² Even though there are changes in the hustle and bustle of big cities and gloomy fields of the countryside, the lesser bamboo image does not fade from the people's mind. From the folk sayings, proverbs, songs of the old days unto the music and paintings of today, the image of lesser bamboo still moves the hearts of the Vietnamese people not only to refer to a honorable man but is also a reminder of their native place which echoes the lullabies of mothers.¹⁵³ The images of dragon, drongos, and lesser bamboo are special in Vietnamese culture but not found in the Song. The difference shows that love lyrics of every culture have its own characteristics and distinctive images.

In short, in the Song the nature imageries are used figuratively to increase the expression of the love language. Similarly, in the folk sayings and the Tale of Kiều, the nature imageries are used in the love poems as a natural setting in which young men and women are free to express their love to each other. Vineyards and pasturing the flocks are common in the context of the Song but the agricultural works and fields are common in the context of Vietnamese literature. The gardens in the Song provide a rustic setting to the love poems and also refer to a person. This is similar to the garden in the Vietnamese literature when a man falls in love with a woman and asks her “Vườn hồng

¹⁴⁸ Drongos are insectivorous birds usually black in color with a deeply forked tail and natives of Asia, Africa and Australia, also called drongo shrikes (P. R. Colston, “Drongo,” in *The Encyclopedia of Birds*, eds. C. M. Perring and A. L. A. Middleton [New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986], 430-431).

¹⁴⁹ To Oriental countries, dragon is the masterpiece of creative art with a long history. In reality, dragon belongs to artistic works because it does not exist in the natural world (Sanh Thông, *Vietnamese Poetry*, 245).

¹⁵⁰ Colston, “Drongo,” 430.

¹⁵¹ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 81.

¹⁵² Xuân Quang, *Ca Dao*, 162-164.

¹⁵³ Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca*, 46.

đã có ai vào hay chưa?” (*Does someone come to the rose garden or not?*). The garden refers to an image of love either consummated or not. However, the gardens, vineyards, and vine in the Song are often used figuratively in the ancient Near East and in the OT to bring deep expressions of the love language with which the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature cannot compare. The flowers are used in both poetries to refer to the good characters of a woman, especially the lotus with a long tradition and meaning in both cultures. The nature imagery through lively simile and metaphor are arts used widely in both Hebrew poetry and Vietnamese poetry. However, there is some imagery found in a culture but not others, such as the symbol of the lesser bamboo and of a bee found in the Vietnamese literature, but the erotic meaning of the apple tree, fig tree, palm tree, pomegranate, mandrakes, and even apples are found in the Song as well as elsewhere in the OT.

3.2.2 Lovesickness

In the Song, the theme of lovesickness is reflected in 2:1-7 and 5:2-8, especially verses 2:5 and 5:8 focus on explicit terms that the woman is sick with love (כִּי־חֹלֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי). The man also expresses his lovesickness such as “you have stolen my heart” (לִבִּבְתִּינִי) in 4:9 and “turn your eyes away from me” (הֲסִבֵי עֵינֶיךָ מִנֶּגְדִי) in 6:5.

After the rendezvous with the lover at the banquet house where the lovers intoxicate in their love relationship in Song 2:4, the woman is swooning with desire in 2:5.¹⁵⁴ The noun חֹלֶת “disease or sickness” is derived from the verb חָלָה, “become weak, tired, ill, feel pain, weak” (as used in Gen 48:1; Judg 16:7, 11; 16:17; cf. Isa 57:10).¹⁵⁵ In the context of the Song, the woman is not physically sick with some disease but her experience is a loss of physical strength because of the effect of her deep

¹⁵⁴ See the translation and discussion of 2:5 in point 1.2.1.2 of Chapter One.

¹⁵⁵ *BDB*, “חָלָה” 318; R. K. Harrison, “חָלָה,” in *DOTTE*, vol. 2 (1997), 140-143; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 114.

desire for her lover, which has made her feel pain in her heart, with loss of appetite.¹⁵⁶ The sickness can only be healed by the presence of her lover and her eating and drinking of the delights of love-making. Therefore, the woman requests the man directly to sustain her with raisins and refresh her with apples (2:5). The request reflects her deep desire for more of his love.

In addition, the woman expresses her lovesickness in the Song (5:2-8) in which the phrase *שְׁחֹלַת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי* in 2:5 is repeated in 5:8 but in a different context. When she is lying in bed alone (as found in 3:1) in longing for her lover at night, her lover knocks on the door and wants to come in to her. But the woman does not respond to him immediately which makes him go away. The lover's absence makes the woman strongly desire his presence and she is painfully aware of her own stupidity. Therefore, she adjures the daughters to tell him her situation (5:8; cf. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4) because of her lovesickness.

הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem:
אִם-תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת-דֹּדִי מִה־תִּגִּדוּ לוֹ If you find my lover, what shall you tell him?
שְׁחֹלַת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי That I am sick with love!

The expression of lovesickness (*חֹלַת*) in 5:8 emphasises that the woman deeply longs to be with her lover. Not only the woman, but the man is also lovesick in the terms of triumph of his beloved by a glance in the repetition of *לִבְבִתִּינִי*, “You have stolen my heart” in 4:9.¹⁵⁷ The repetition is a staircase parallelism in a form of a tricolon which proceeds in steps as a 3-fold repetition of the same word and ellipsis in which the expected repetition of the initial word in the third line is missing in Song 4:9:¹⁵⁸

לִבְבִתִּינִי אָחַתִּי כֻלָּה You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride,
לִבְבִתִּינִי (בְּאַחַד) [בְּאַחַת] מֵעֵינַיִךְ You have stolen my heart with one of your eyes,
בְּאַחַד עֵנֶק מִצְוֵרֵינִי (You have stolen my heart) with one bead of your necklace.

¹⁵⁶ Harrison, “חלה,” 142; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 115-116.

¹⁵⁷ See my translation of the verse 4:9 in point 1.2.3.2 of Chapter One.

¹⁵⁸ Elliott, *Literary Unity*, 103.

The repetition in the verse emphasises the man's strong desire for his beloved which is undiminished because what she has done for him stirs up his feelings.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the man is also captured by his beloved through tresses of her hair in 7:6 as:

רֵאשִׁיךָ עָלַיךָ כַּבְּרִמֶּל	Your head crowns you like Carmel,
וְדִלֵּת רֵאשִׁיךָ כְּאַרְגָּמָן	and your flowing locks are like purple;
מֶלֶךְ אָסוּר בְּרֵהָטִים:	a king is held captive in the tresses.

The woman's head is compared to Carmel (כְּרִמֶּל) which is the famous mountain range in the Mediterranean near Haifa as mentioned in Isa 35:2; Amos 1:2; Jer 46:18.¹⁶⁰ The comparison expresses the symbol of greatness, stateliness, majesty of the woman's head and she stands proud like the mountain.¹⁶¹ Moreover, כְּרִמֶּל in the Song sounds like כְּרִמִּיל to mean "purple" or "crimson" that describes the colour of the woman's hair.¹⁶² There is another expression of the man's lovesickness in his asking her beloved "Turn your eyes away from me" (הֲסִבִי עֵינַיךָ מִנִּנְדִי) in 6:5 because they have confused him.¹⁶³ The man has lost his control before the beauty of his beloved and is overpowered by her loveliness. However, he still longs to stare at his beloved as in 2:14 where he wants not only to see and hear from her,¹⁶⁴ but also to gorge entirely on her person as described in the whole Song (4:1-7; 6:4-10; 7:1-7).

The lovers' feelings of lovesickness are a special expression of love in the Song. It describes their anxiety when one is absent or occupied totally by the power of love. Lovesickness is a common experience of love in reality of life in both old and modern

¹⁵⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 15.

¹⁶⁰ Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 104; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 185.

¹⁶¹ Paridon, *Song of Songs*, 381; cf. Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 183; Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 200. In addition, כְּרִמֶּל "Carmel" is also explained as "orchard" or "vineyard" (e.g., Isa 10:18; 16:10; 29:17; 32:15-16; Jer 4:26; 48:33) to express that the woman's hair completes the beauty of her body as a pleasant garden in a special landscape with its choice fruits (4:12-5:1). See in Exum, *Song of Songs*, 236-237; and Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 243-243.

¹⁶² Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 183; and Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 200.

¹⁶³ That the woman's eyes are very beautiful and seductive is also mentioned a few times in 1:15, 4:1 and 9 (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 147). The man asks his beloved to turn her eyes from him because הִרְהִיבֵנִי which is translated as "they dazzle me" (NEB); "they overwhelm me" (NIV, NIB, NRSV); or "they disturb me" (RSV); and Lys translated as "car eux m'ensorcelent" (Lys, *Le plus beau chant de la création*, 234).

¹⁶⁴ Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 178.

times as in other poetries such as in Tamil and Egyptian lyrics,¹⁶⁵ and also expressed widely in Vietnamese literature. When a man and woman are falling in love, they are joyful and happy in each other, and when one is absent they are sorrowful and long for one another.¹⁶⁶ It is a disease which affects the body of lovers as the folk sayings below.

Nhớ anh em chỉ nằm dài,
 Ăn cơm thì nghẹn, nước mắt chảy hoài không khô.¹⁶⁷
 (*Missing you I just want to lie down,*
Eating rice is hard, dropping tears are never dried).

The folk sayings describe that when the young woman is sick with love, she wants to lie down in bed to think of her lover. The lovesickness makes her tears run down and she even has no appetite. As in the Song, the woman desires her absent lover wholeheartedly when she tells the daughters of Jerusalem that “I am sick with love” (5:8). But the daughters cannot help; only her lover can cure her sickness. In the following folk sayings, the lovesickness also recalls what the man has said even when the woman is working.¹⁶⁸

Chiều chiều mang giỏ hái dâu,
 Hái dâu không hái nhớ câu ân tình.
 Sớm mai bưng kiếng ra sân,

¹⁶⁵ For example, in the ancient Tamil lyrics:

“You, maid of the hill country,
 Who has pretty bamboo-like upper arms
 That can heal my love sickness and debility
 And who walks beautifully,
 Will you come with me? ...” Cited in Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil*

Love Song (AnBib 118; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 217-218; 295.

In Ancient Egyptian lyrics as:

“Seven whole days I have not seen (my) sister.
 Illness has invaded me,
 Should the master physicians come to me,
 Their medicines could not ease my heart,
 More potent than any medicine is my sister for me,
 (I) see her - then (I) become healthy.” (Papyrus Chester Beatty I, Group A, no. 37A). Cited in

Keel, *Song of Songs*, 88; and Fox, *Song of Songs*, 55.

The songs above show that the absence of a lover partner causes a sickness but her or his presence is like a medicine to heal the sickness.

¹⁶⁶ Vo Phien, *Literature in South Vietnam 1954-1975*, trans. Vo Dinh Mai (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Culture Publications, 1992), 188.

¹⁶⁷ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 75.

¹⁶⁸ Trúc Phượng, *Văn Học*, 231-232.

Kiểm bông lá hẹ chín mười phần thương anh.¹⁶⁹
*(Afternoons, I bring a basket to collect mulberry leaves,
 I forget to collect them but remember your loving words.
 Early morning, I carry a flower pot to the yard,
 The flower with small leaves, but I love you so much).*

The man's loving words that echo in the young woman's ear and are imprinted so boldly in her mind that she forgets to collect mulberry leaves. Therefore, when she carries flower pots in a morning, her heart is full with love and desire for her lover.¹⁷⁰ This is similar to the woman in the Song, who asks her lover to strengthen and refresh her more with the delights of love making through the images of raisins and apples (2:5). In the following folk sayings, lovesickness makes the woman long for nothing else but her lover:

Dù ai cho bạc cho vàng,
 Không bằng được gặp mặt chàng hôm nay.
 Dù ai cho nhẫn đeo tay,
 Không bằng được thấy chàng ngay bây giờ.¹⁷¹
*(Even though someone gave me silver or gold,
 Not as good as to see my lover today.
 Even though someone gave me a ring,
 Not as good as to meet my lover right now).*

The young woman in the folk saying shows her strong desire for her lover's presence. His presence is more satisfactory to her than the gift of silver, gold, or than wearing rings. The woman in the Song also seeks urgently for her lover's presence that is the only cure of her sickness (5:8), even though the watchmen apprehend and maltreat her on the way (5:7). Similar to the Song, the man is also sick with love as described in the folk saying as follows.

Đêm nằm ở dưới bóng trăng,
 Thương cha nhớ mẹ không bằng nhớ em.¹⁷²
*(Lying down under the moon at midnight,
 Loving the father and missing the mother are less than I miss you).*

¹⁶⁹ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 219.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 75-76.

¹⁷² Ibid., 58.

The folk sayings describe that when the young man is sick with love, he strongly desires his beloved more than others, even his parents who sacrifice their life to bring him up. Desire is the reason for binding a man and a woman into oneness to fulfill God's intention as in Gen 2:22-24. It is desire when the woman in the Song states powerfully that nothing can separate her from her lover, even death, fire, many waters, rivers, and wealth, as seen in 8:6, 7,¹⁷³ because he is hers and she is his (2:16, 6:3; 7:11). In the folk sayings, when a young man and woman fall in love it does not mean that they can live together as a husband and wife. There is time to complete the preparations for marriage: the offer of marriage, engagement, and the wedding.¹⁷⁴ The engagement or betrothal made before the marriage ceremony also existed in ancient Israel.¹⁷⁵ The lovers in the Song have to restrain their sexual union until their wedding day-taking place in 3:6-11.¹⁷⁶ The waiting time makes the lovers in the folk sayings long to see each other in daily work, feel painful or lonely, and toss and turn in bed all through the long nights. Therefore, the man longs for his beloved and wishes to meet her as:

Ước gì em là con chim xanh,
 Đậu trên vành nón để anh được gần.
 Ước gì em hóa đặng con tằm,
 Nhả tơ dệt lụa, đêm nằm cùng anh!¹⁷⁷
*(I wish I were as a green bird,
 To perch in the hat brim to be near to you.
 I wish I were as a silk worm,
 To reel and weave silk, lying with you in the night time!)*

In the folk sayings, the man borrows imagery from the scenery around to express his strong desires and feelings of love naturally. He sees his beloved as a green bird

¹⁷³ See the study of Song 8:6, 7 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One.

¹⁷⁴ Phan Thuận Thảo, *Tìm Hiểu Phong Tục Việt Nam Xưa và Nay: Tục Lệ Cưới Gả, Tang Ma của Người Việt Xưa* (An Understanding of old and new Vietnamese customs: engagement, wedding, funeral ceremonies of Vietnamese) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Tổng Hợp, 2005), 7-49.

¹⁷⁵ Such as Rebecca's promise of marriage was in Mesopotamia and her marriage was in Canaan (Gen 24:67, Jacob had to wait for seven years before marriage (Gen 29:15-21), Merab was promised to David (1 Sam 18:17-19) and Mikal was promised to David (1 Sam 18:26-27). See in Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 32-33.

¹⁷⁶ In the logical progression of the Song, the poem in verses 3:6-11 could be "the lovers' royal wedding" and the time before the wedding day is the time of the beginnings of love and preparations for marriage of the lovers (see the study of the logical progression approach in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two).

¹⁷⁷ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 75.

which follows him everywhere and brings joy to him and as a silk worm which makes him warm and to be close to her.¹⁷⁸ The reality is that he longs for his beloved's presence as the man in the Song who is lovesick because of the triumph of his beloved on him through her beautiful eyes and the tresses of her hair (4:9; 7:6). Lovesickness is also a special theme in classical poetry, not only in the Vietnamese folk sayings, to describe feelings and emotions of lovers secretly. It is expressed especially through the Tale of Kiều as:

Một mình nàng, ngọn đèn khuya,
 Áo đầm giọt lệ, tóc se mái sầu.
 Phận rầu, rầu vầy cũng rầu,
 Xót lòng đeo đẳng, bấy lâu một lời!¹⁷⁹
*(I am alone with a lamp in the midst of the night,
 My dress wets with tears, my hair dries with sorrows.
 Sorrows for the fate, sorrows and sorrows,
 Pain pursues me everywhere, for the oath!)*
 (The Tale of Kiều, chapter IV, verse 695)

The Tale of Kiều describes the love relationship between Kiều and Kim Trọng. When Kiều cannot express her love freely to Kim Trọng because of the preventions of the old tradition or the feudal system, she expresses her emotion and feelings in her tears with a painful heart.¹⁸⁰ On the contrary, the lovers in the Song do not encounter preventions that make them remain hopeless and sorrowful of their future; they enjoy their love relationship and their desires are fulfilled.

Lovesickness is often the main theme in the new poetry movement and a source of inspiration for poets. Especially, Xuân Diệu expresses the theme in interesting poems with the man's strong desire for love such as:¹⁸¹

Anh nhớ tiếng, anh nhớ hình, anh nhớ ảnh,
 Anh nhớ em, anh nhớ lắm, em ơi!
 Anh nhớ ảnh của ngày tháng xa khơi,
 Nhớ đôi môi đang cười ở phương trời,
 Nhớ đôi mắt đang nhìn anh đắm đắm.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca*, 128.

¹⁷⁹ Hồng Huy, *Truyện Kiều*, 31; and Du, *Truyện Kiều*, 95.

¹⁸⁰ Du, *Kim-Vân-Kiều*, 91; and also Thế Ngũ, *Văn Học*, 375-376.

¹⁸¹ Sanh Thông (ed. and trans.), *Anthology of Vietnamese Poems*, 23.

*(I miss your voice, appearance, and your image,
I miss you, I miss you so much, my beloved!
I miss your images of years ago,
I miss your smile at a direction of the sky,
I miss your eyes looking at me passionately).*

In the poem above, “anh nhớ” (*I miss . . .*) means “long to see” or “waiting for” and repeated five times. The repetition is parallelism used as a character of Vietnamese poetry including not only rhyme but also idea and genre.¹⁸³ The repetition of “nhớ” (*to miss*) conveys a power of captivation. Xuân Diệu describes his fond remembrances about his beloved in detail. He evokes not only her voice which resounds in his ears, her appearance and image which are stirring up in his mind including her images of year ago, her smiles and eyes which are drawn back to him as if she were in front of him. As the man in the Song, he is captured by his beloved’s eyes, one jewel of her necklace, and her beauty (4:9, 6:5) that flame him with desires and overwhelms him with feelings of love. In lovesickness, Xuân Diệu cannot cast out his fond remembrances which have the power not only to burn his heart with strong desires, but also to feel as lonely as lying in dew¹⁸⁴ as noted in the following poem.

Tương tư ăn phải miếng mồi,
Đứng đi trên lửa, nằm ngồi trong sương.
Phải duyên, phải lứa thì thương,
Để chi đêm thắm ngày trường, hỏi em!¹⁸⁵
*(Lovesickness is like eating a bait,
Standing in fire, lying in dew.
If it is a long-sealed fate, as a good couple we have to love each other,
My darling, don’t let me wait for long nights and days!)*
(Hỏi [Question]- Xuân Diệu)

¹⁸² Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 89-90.

¹⁸³ The new poetry in Vietnamese literature does not rhyme strictly. In genre, if words in a line are verb, noun and adjective, the following line must have the same genre. The genre parallelism is that ideas in both lines have to parallel each other in a pair of clauses, phrases, or words (Quảng Hàm, *Quốc Văn*, 26-27).

¹⁸⁴ Phạm Thế Ngũ, *Việt Nam Văn Học Sử, Giản Ước Tân Biên: Văn Học Hiện Đại* (Historical Vietnamese literature, reducible writing: modern literature), vol. 3 (Glandale: Dai nam Co., 1996), 162.

¹⁸⁵ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 147.

Xuân Diệu seems not able to stand in this situation and remains sorrowful and dissatisfied. Perhaps, there are difficulties because of many reasons such as disagreements between the parents of the young man and the young woman, gaps between rich and poor in the lovers' situation, or a love partner who has to stay dutiful to the parents rather than pursuing their love for one another.¹⁸⁶ The reasons make Xuân Diệu suffer for love through the nights. The love relationship between the man and the woman in the Song may not be affected by classes in society, but the woman is also controlled by her brothers who have an authority to force her to work under the sun (Song 1:6).

The lovesickness theme is found quite frequently in the Song and in Vietnamese folk sayings, classical poetry, and the new poetry movement of Vietnamese literature. As with other lovers in the world, the absence of the love partner is a cause for lovesickness and it cannot be healed by using medicine or rites of a religion, but only by the presence of the love partner which is the best medicine to bring a cure and satisfaction to the love-sick. The theme in both lovers describing the longing for the partner's presence is complicated by the usage of figurative language which expresses not only the longing for the love partner's presence, but also physical desire. They depict the woman as writhed in her heart by the longing for her lover's presence in bed, and she has no appetite; the man is also attracted by his beloved which makes him long for her presence. However, the difference is that the lovers in the Song carry on their love with hope and enjoyment, whereas in Vietnamese love lyrics the lovers sometimes remain with immense sadness because their desire cannot be fulfilled and there is no hope for their future.

3.2.3 The dialogue of the lovers

The Song is love poetry which makes extensive use of dialogue exchanged between the lovers,¹⁸⁷ as often seen in the OT.¹⁸⁸ There are other characters in the Song apart from

¹⁸⁶ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 220.

¹⁸⁷ Dialogue can be divided into four categories as (1) interior monologue (soliloquy): the speaker addresses no one in particular as seen in most Egyptian love songs, (2) exterior monologue: the speaker addresses another person who is understood as present and listening and in this category one can hear only

the two lovers; the daughters of Jerusalem; friends; the mothers and the brothers, but of course, the lovers are the main characters. The lovers speak to each other about passion, devotion, difficulties in their love, and respond to what they hear from the other through dialogues, especially in Song 1:7-2:7; 4:8-5:1; 7:1-14; 2:14-17; and 8:13-14.

The first dialogue in the Song is from 1:7 to 2:7 where one can note an interesting exchange in which the lovers speak in the ear of each other, hear each other's words and respond to each other intimately¹⁸⁹ (as the changes of speaker in Jer 14:11-15:3; 42:1-6; Zech 1-6; Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3). They exchange love in a tender language privately, such as when the woman calls her lover: "(you) whom my soul loves" (שָׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי) which is a sobriquet the woman uses for the man in 1:7; cf. 3:1-4¹⁹⁰ or "my lover" (רוּרִי) in 1:13, 14, 16; 2:3. The man calls her: "most beautiful of women" (הַיְפֹתָה בְּנָשִׁים) in 1:8, "my darling" (רַעֲיָהּ) in 1:9, 15; 2:2.¹⁹¹ The woman responds to him over in 1:12-14 by expressing her joyful heart in his presence. The lovers exchange admiration in love (1:15-17) such that the man praises the woman's beauty (הַנְּךָ יְפֹתָה "Oh, you are beautiful") twice in 1:15 and the woman also responds to him by praising his physical beauty in the same words (הַנְּךָ יְפֹתָה) in 1:16.¹⁹² The repetitions create impressions that the lovers are perfect in each others' eyes. Then, both lovers are moving toward a climax of mutual admiration and passionate love in 2:1-7. In the dialogue, the lovers enjoy their

one side of dialogue, (3) double monologue: a lover's words are conjoined to the other's ("the Crossing"), and then to the double monologue in which the speakers alternate ("the Stroll"), and (4) dialogue: the speakers speak and respond to each other, not used in the extant Egyptian poems (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 259-265).

¹⁸⁸ Such as the book of Job with a series of speeches placed adjacently rather than a true dialogue between the speakers, and the dialogues mostly in prophetic poetry (e.g., Jer 14:11-15:3; 42; Isa 3:6-7; 29:11-12; 56:3-7; Ezek 18; Hos 5:15-6:6; Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3; Zech 1-6; and the books of Daniel and Malachi). See in Schökel, *Hebrew Poetics*, 170-179.

¹⁸⁹ Exum describes 1:5-2:7 as a dialogue in the Song because verses 1:5-8 fit well to the antiphonal character of the rest of the dialogue (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 100). However, I take the first dialogue which is started by the woman speaking directly to her lover in 1:7, as Murphy describes 1:7-2:7 as a dialogue (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 134).

¹⁹⁰ "Soul" refers to the whole person as in Gen 2:7; Ps 103:1 (Xavier Léon-Dupour, "Soul," in *DBT*, 495; Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 33). See also Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 137.

¹⁹¹ See the discussion of רַעֲיָהּ from which is derived רֵעַ "friend, companion, fellow, associate" in point 1.1.5 of Chapter One.

¹⁹² Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 108.

love from the field of the shepherds (1:7, 8) to the magnificent world of the horse-loving Pharaoh (1:9-11)¹⁹³ and finally to a meeting place of intoxication (2:4-6).¹⁹⁴

The second dialogue in the Song is the delights of love 4:8-5:1 which describes the lovers' words absorbed into the mind and heart of each other.¹⁹⁵ The man expresses how the woman has stolen his heart by her eyes, sweet lips (4:9-11), and her locked garden as a fountain, referring to the source of his desire and pleasure (Song 4:12-16a; cf. Gen 26:19; Jer 18:14);¹⁹⁶ and the exchange of the lovers in 4:16b-5:1 in which the woman does not hesitate to invite the man to eat choice fruits in his garden. The man naturally responds to her by eating his honeycomb with honey (as in 1 Sam 14:27) and drinking his wine with milk in the garden in 5:1.¹⁹⁷ Now, the lovers share the fulfillment of their desire joyfully (5:1) as described in Prov 5:19; 7:18. In this dialogue, the man calls his beloved as "bride" or "my bride" (כַּלְיָה) six times (4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1) and "my sister" (אָחֵתִי) four times (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1) to express endearment, intimacy and permanence in the lovers' desire for union.¹⁹⁸

The third dialogue is from Song 7:1-14¹⁹⁹ in which the lovers' words are entwined with each other. The man praises the physical charm of his beloved that leads him to admiration and his desire for sexual union (7:2-9). Then, the two lovers express their mutual affection (7:10) in which the man continues to praise the woman's mouth and she responds to him by offering the sweetness of her mouth.²⁰⁰ The lovers enjoy discovering themselves together through metaphors of fruits of love such as "the vine has budded";

¹⁹³ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 56.

¹⁹⁴ Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 17.

¹⁹⁵ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 321.

¹⁹⁶ Verse 4:16 can be spoken by either the man or the woman (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 161). It seems 4:16ab to be spoken by the man, but 4:16b is certainly spoken by the woman (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 200).

¹⁹⁷ See the study of the verse in point 1.2.3.3 of Chapter One.

¹⁹⁸ In Egyptian and Mesopotamian love poetry, the lovers often refer to each other as "brother" and "sister" (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 171; and Keel, *Song of Songs*, 163).

¹⁹⁹ The identity of the speakers in 7:1 is difficult. But it can be understood that the woman is requested to "come back" by her friends who in the first half of the verse want to gaze on her beauty. The last half could be spoken by either the man or the woman. I identify the speaker as the woman who recognizes herself.

²⁰⁰ See the study of 7:10 in point 1.2.2.1 of Chapter One.

“the grape and pomegranates have blossomed”; and “the fragrance of mandrakes or mandragoras” (7:12-14) which is considered to be an aphrodisiac (as in Gen 30:14-16).²⁰¹

In addition, there is a short dialogue in Song 2:14-17 in which the lovers are greatly responsive to each other.²⁰² In the dialogue, the man desires to hear his beloved’s voice and to see her lovely face (2:14) and the woman enthusiastically responds by giving a warning that the foxes need to be caught to guard their relationship of love (2:15).²⁰³ Foxes are often understood as having destructive behavior in the OT and as ravagers of vineyards in world literature (see Judg 15:4, 5; Neh 3:35 (4:3[E]); Ps 63:11 (10[E]); Ezek 13:4; Lam 5:18).²⁰⁴ However, she continues to affirm that “my lover is mine and I am his” which is the most beautiful line in the Song (2:16; 6:3; 7:11).²⁰⁵ The line is in the same style (and spirit) as the so-called covenant formula in Jer 7:23; 11:4; Ezek 34:30, 31; Hos 2:23.²⁰⁶ Therefore, she desires to be united with her lover in confusing language that she wants him to leave but also to be with her at the same time (2:17)²⁰⁷ through images such as gazelle, stag, and mountains (2:8, 9; 8:14).²⁰⁸ The

²⁰¹ Pope provides the history of the literary use of the mandrake (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 647-650).

²⁰² As in Zech 1-6 when God and the angel talk to Zechariah and he responds to them enthusiastically, and in Amos 7:1-9 when Amos asks for God’s forgiveness and He responds to him immediately.

²⁰³ Verse 2:15 is considered as symbolic in which the noun שׁוּעָלִים “the foxes” refers to young men and the noun כְּרָמַיִם “the vineyards” refers to the love of the woman and her lover (See Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminar of America, 1954], 82). It is clear that the woman is threatened by young men (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 130). The threat is emphasised by the repetition parallel of שׁוּעָלִים “the foxes.” The “catching of the foxes” means to protect the woman from the threat of the young men.

²⁰⁴ Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Word of God, Song of Love: A Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 91; *DBI*, “Animals,” 30.

²⁰⁵ See the study of Song 2:16 in point 1.2.2.2 of Chapter One; and also André Feuillet, “La formule de l’appartenance mutuelle (2,16) et les interprétations divergentes du Cantique des Cantiques,” *Révue Biblique* 68 (1961): 5-38.

²⁰⁶ The mutual belonging in the Song is similar to the covenant formula “I will be their God, and they will be my people” in the OT (Jer 7:23; 11:4; Ezek 34:30). It is not to deny that the marriage metaphor in the Scripture is used to describe the relationship between God and humanity. But the primary meaning of love in the Song is focused on the thesis of a sexual relationship as in the study of the previous chapters (cf. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 125).

²⁰⁷ The meaning of 2:17 is ambiguous because the meaning of עַד שִׁפּוּהַ הַיּוֹם, the imperative סָב, and the phrase עַל-הָרִי בָתָר in the verse are unclear and can have different interpretations. The ambiguity of the phrase עַד שִׁפּוּהַ הַיּוֹם could refer both to morning and evening and is translated in literal meaning as “Until the day breathes and the shadows flee” which retains the ambiguity and could refer to both meanings as morning and afternoon. The imperative סָב is another ambiguous meaning, understood as “return” or “turn aside.” It could mean the woman sending the man away and calling him to her at the

images are often associated with love in the ancient Near East and mentioned as proverbs in the OT as in 2 Sam 2:18; 1 Chron 12:9 (8[E]); Isa 35:6; Hab 3:19.²⁰⁹

Finally, a short dialogue is also seen in 8:13-14 to express eagerly a yearning for union. The man desires to hear the woman's voice (8:13; cf. 2:14),²¹⁰ and the woman responds to him by inviting him to come to her as quickly as a gazelle or young stag upon the mountains of spices (8:14) at the end of the Song which is similar to 2:17. The yearning for union at the end shows that the lovers' love is never complete but it is still continuing.²¹¹

There are plenty of folk songs about the love relationship between men and women in Vietnamese literature.²¹² Generally speaking, most Vietnamese people live by agriculture in a fertile land and the young men and women have to work hard under the sun in their field. Therefore, singing folk songs makes them not only feel enjoyment while completing their heavy work, but also helps them carry on their life. In addition, singing folk songs draws men and women near to one another and gives them chances to build up their love relationship from accidental meeting to a moment of leave-taking that

same time (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 132). In the phrase *עַל-הָרֵי בֶּתֶר*, no one knows where the mountains of *בֶּתֶר* "Bethel" are, and it is translated as "On the mountains of Bethel" in OVB, KJV, ASV; "On the mountains of Xe Doi" in NVNB; "On the rugged hills" in RSV, NIV; "On the cleft mountains" in ESV; "For the hills of spices" TNK. However, the meaning "the mountains of Bethel" seems more likely in the context and is supported by Vulgate, Aquila, and Symmachus, and in the Jerusalem Talmud stated as "the mountains of Beithar" - a place near Jerusalem with gazelles running (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 116).

²⁰⁸ For Haupt, "the mountains of spice" in 8:14 and 2:17 refer to the vulva (Paul Haupt, "The Book of Canticles," *AJS* 18 [1902]: 233); and Lys refers the mountains of separation to the woman's breasts (Lys, *Le plus beau chant de la création*, 134-135).

²⁰⁹ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 89-94; and Longman, *Song of Songs*, 126.

²¹⁰ In 8:13, the verb *הִיוֹשְׁבֵת* "O, you who dwell" is Qal active feminine singular participle. The verb shows that the woman is being addressed by the man. The expression is similar to that in 2:14 where the man addresses his beloved. Another difficulty is whether the noun *לְקוֹלֶךָ* "for your voice" is the object of the phrase *מִקְשִׁיבִים הַחֲבֵרִים* "companies are listening" in the second colon or the verb *הִשְׁמִיעֵנִי* "let me hear" in the last colon. I accept both cases, because it is not clear about the companies' function in the verse; either they help the man for the search, or they are rivals listening for the woman's voice (Longman, *Song of Songs*, 221). In the context, it is clear that the man yearns to be united with his beloved and hears her voice and in either case, the companies are there also trying to listen for the woman's voice. Cf. Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations* (New York: KTAV, 1974), 102; Lys, *Le plus beau chant de la création*, 308.

²¹¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 262-263; Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 105.

²¹² Phạm Duy, *Dân Nhạc*, 57-58.

makes young men and woman long fondly for each other.²¹³ If a young man and woman become husband and wife, the fields, farms, paths with green bamboo rows in the idyllic scenes will remain memories for them and there will be no more lament and longing for each other. Like the dialogues of the lovers in the Song, one of the forms in Vietnamese folk songs is a dialogue which is sung back and forth by country men and women while they are working, especially seen through “Hát Ví” (*Vi song*) and “Hát Phường Cây” (*Phuong Cay song*).²¹⁴

The content of the “Hát Ví” reflects all expressions of love, passionate love in favorable circumstances with dreams in the future or in adverse circumstances with suffering, disappointments, and sorrows.²¹⁵ It is also called “Hát Đúm” (*Đúm song*) to mean that young men and women sing to make friends with each other.²¹⁶ Love is always close to activities of daily life and the natural landscapes of the people.²¹⁷ The rhyme in folk songs plays an important role in conveying emotions and ideas such as “Hò” of the southern part of Vietnam when a man courts a woman in the spring time as:

Nam: Hò ơ à . . .

Cô kia má đỏ hồng hồng,
Xin cô cho biết (cô) có chồng hay chưa?

(Man: Hò ơ à . . .

*The young woman is pink cheeked
I like to know whether you are married or not?)*

Nữ: Hò ơ à . . .

Thân em như tấm lụa đào,
Phất phơ trước gió biết vào tay ai à.²¹⁸

(Woman: Hò ơ à . . .

*I am like a piece of silk,
Floating in the wind, I do not know who I belong to).*

²¹³ Minh and Phượng, *Văn Học*, 226.

²¹⁴ Vũ Thị Thu Hương, *Ca Dao Việt Nam: Những Lời Bình* (Vietnamese folk sayings: comments) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 2000), 15.

²¹⁵ Phạm Duy, *Dân Nhạc*, 92-95.

²¹⁶ Phạm Côn Sơn, *Văn Hóa Phong Tục Việt Nam, ABC* (Vietnamese culture and customs, ABC) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Văn Hóa Dân Tộc, 2002), 617-618.

²¹⁷ Thu Hương, *Ca Dao*, 16.

²¹⁸ Trần Quang Hải, “Tình Yêu trong Dân Ca Việt Nam” (Love in Vietnamese folk songs) in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình, và Hội Nhập* (Paris: Định Hướng Tùng Thư, Trung Tâm Nguyễn Tường Tộ, 2002), 271.

Throughout the folk songs, the man paying attention to the young woman with pink cheeks means that she is beautiful. He wants to have a relationship with her by calling her as “cô” to ask directly whether she is married. “Cô” in Vietnamese refers to a young girl or young lady who is free to dream about her future husband.²¹⁹ The woman responds to him figuratively by comparing herself to a piece of silk which is on sale to imply that she is available for him. The thoughts of the folk songs are simple and easily understood in the country.²²⁰ Similar to the Song, the dialogues in the folk songs are mainly between the man and the woman who also speak to the ear of each other and respond directly to each other according to what they hear. However, the difference is that the lovers in the Song use many similes and metaphors to convey their deep thoughts and emotions of love in lovely images in their dialogues. The woman in the Song is compared to a mare in Egyptian chariots to describe her beauty (1:9); or as a lotus between thorns to show the woman’s uniqueness (2:2). The man is described as a sachet of myrrh and a cluster of henna blossoms to show an expression of joy in the woman over the man’s presence (1:13, 14), or an apple tree among trees in the forest to imply that he is the woman’s delights of love (2:3).

The next dialogue in the folk songs is “Hát Phởng Cây” originated from Nghệ Tĩnh. The dialogue is often sung in the night time of the rice planting season by both men and women. The content of this form is always about the love relationship sung in four parts as “Hát Chào” (*Greeting song*), “Hát Thăm” (*Visiting song*), “Hát Kết” (*Ending song*), and “Hát Tiễn” (*Good-bye song*). The dialogue below is the last part “Hát Tiễn.”²²¹

Nam: Ra về răng được mà về?

Bức thư ai gửi, lời thề ai trao?

(Man: How can I go home?

Who will send the letter, who will give the oath?)

Nữ: Ra về răng dứt, răng đành?

²¹⁹ Hồng Kim Linh, “Tiến Trình Định Duyên Lập Phận Theo Cung Cách Ngôn Ngữ Việt Nam” (The process of the fate in marriage according to the manners of the Vietnamese language) in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình, và Hội Nhập* (Paris: Định Hướng Tùng Thư, Trung Tâm Nguyễn Tường Tô, 2002), 113-127.

²²⁰ Quang Hải, “Tình Yêu,” 281.

²²¹ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 657-660.

Ra về bỏ múi tơ mảnh ai quay?
*(Woman: How do you go home?
 You go home, who will weave the silk?)*

Nam: Ra về lòng lại dặn lòng,
 Cam chua chớ phụ, ngọt bòng chớ ham.
*(Man: I go home, remember my advice,
 Don't give up the sour orange, don't love a sweet pomelo).*

Nữ: Vì cam nên quít đèo bòng,
 Vì anh cần mẫn, nên lòng em mơ.
*(Woman: For the orange, mandarin orange has a burden,
 For you are hard working, I dream about you).*

Nam: Ra về bẻ lá cấm đây,
 Đến mai ta nhớ chốn này ta qua.
*(Man: Going home, plucking a leaf put here,
 Tomorrow I remember to come to the place).*

Nữ: Trăng khuya soi bóng anh đi,
 Thấy chân anh bước, ruột thì quặn đau!²²²
*(Woman: the moon at night shines the way I go,
 Looking at your steps, my heart is painful!)*

The “Hát Tiễn” describes the expression of love of the young man and woman freely in which the lovers do not want to be separated from each other.²²³ The man procrastinates about going home because he desires to give confidences and promises to the woman. In the same way, the woman wants to pull him back reasoning about who will continue to weave the silk? Reason tells us that she feels lonely if he goes home, but the lovers cannot help it; the woman in the Song, who desires her lover to go but also to pull him back with her (2:17).²²⁴ The man in the “Hát Tiễn” reminds the woman that she should not forget him, but must keep her heart faithful to him and not follow other men with their sweet words through the metaphors: the sour orange and a sweet pomelo. The reminder is similar to the woman’s warning in the Song in which the woman reminds her lover to protect their love by catching the foxes which will destroy their love (2:15). The woman in “Hát Tiễn” above responds to the reminder of the man by insisting that she loves and dreams about him because he is a diligent person. In the Song, the woman also

²²² Ibid., 660.

²²³ Côn Sơn, *Văn Hóa*, 548-552.

²²⁴ See note 207 above.

describes her lover who is outstanding among others and has no equal (2:3; 5:10). Then the man promises that he will come to her again tomorrow and makes a sign with leaves to remember the way he will go through. The woman follows his footsteps leaving under the light of the moon that causes her heart to writhe.

As all the lovers in the world and in the Song, they enjoy each other's presence, but feel anguish when they are separated from each other. Furthermore, the lovers in the "Hát Tiễn" address each other as "anh" to the man and "em" to the woman when their love has blossomed in their heart. The words "anh" and "em" are love language (of the lovers) to show their strong emotion to each other.²²⁵ In the Song, the lovers also address each other by various sweet names in tender language such as "my lover" to the man, and "my darling," "my bride," and "my sister" to the woman (cf. dialogues in 1:7-2:7; 4:8-5:1).

Dialogue between the lovers is a characteristic of love poetry found in the Song and in Vietnamese literature.²²⁶ They have various forms and images. The lovers in both do not hesitate to express their intimate thoughts and feelings of love to each other. They show their love in various ways, in the exchange of their thoughts of love such as warnings in both, the confusion of the woman in the Song when her lover leaves her (2:17) and the lovers in Vietnamese "Hát Tiễn" who do not want to be far from each other. The lovers in both often express their feelings in love language such as "anh" and "em" in Vietnamese folk songs, and "my lover", "my darling", "my sister or bride" in the Song. However, the difference is that in the idea of mutuality in the Song, the woman expresses her desire positively as describing her lover as a sachet of myrrh lying all night between her breasts (1:13); desiring his left hand under her head and his right hand to embrace her (2:6); inviting him to come to her as in a garden, to taste the sweetness of

²²⁵ In the love relationship, the man often calls himself as "anh" (I) in the first person and is called as "anh" (you) in the second person by his beloved, and the woman often calls herself as "em" (I) in the first person and is called "em" (you) in the second person by her lover. In the Vietnamese language, the gender (masculine and feminine) is identified through the context which often relates to the subject even though the subject plays the first person or the second person in a clause or a speech. It is distinguished from "you" and "I" in English (cf. Kim Linh, "Tiến Trình Định Duyên Lập Phận," 122-123).

²²⁶ Dialogue is not used in the extant Egyptian poems because they do not need it (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 263-264). It is absent in the early classical Tamil Akam poems (Mariaselvam, *Song of Songs*, 240).

love (7:12-14; 8:14). The lovers in Vietnamese folk songs always express their desire tenderly through images around them but the lovers in the Song often use various similes and metaphors to convey their deep thoughts and love. However, the difference shows that the expression of love in the Song and Vietnamese folk songs reflects the particular traits of Hebrew and Vietnamese culture and each presents the richness and diversity of their own culture.

3.2.4 *The heart and passion of love*

In the Hebrew Bible, לֵב “heart” is the most important word in the vocabulary of anthropological terms.²²⁷ It is used to refer to the inner parts of the body (see 1 Sam 27:37; Jer 4:19; 23:9; Hos 13:8), identified as being an inaccessible and hidden organ inside the body (see Prov 15:11; Ps 44:21) to convey feelings, wish, reason, decisions of the will.²²⁸ Therefore, the heart represents in the first place the bodily organ which is associated with the mind or discerning ability on fear; love, courage, anger, joy, sorrow, hatred are always ascribed to the heart.²²⁹ In the Song, לֵב is not mentioned frequently, but it is found in 3:11; 4:9; 5:2 and 8:6a to refer to the centre of the emotions and thoughts,²³⁰ and the passion of love in 8:6b, 7.

The clause “on the day of gladness in his heart” (בְּיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לְבוֹ) in Song 3:11 describes the wedding day which is a joyful day in the heart of the man (cf. Eccl 5:19 (20[E]); Isa 30:29; Jer 15:16) with promises for the lovers’ future and it begins a new journey in their life.²³¹ In Song 4:9, the man states that his beloved is the reason for confusions in his emotions through just one look or a glance of the woman’s eyes,²³² or one jewel of her necklace, which is enough to capture his heart (לִבִּי בְּחֵינֵי),

²²⁷ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 40.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-58.

²²⁹ J. I. Marais, “Heart” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 4184; Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 40.

²³⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 131.

²³¹ Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 45; Keel, *Song of Songs*, 137; and Exum, *Song of Songs*, 150.

²³² It is difficult to translate the phrase בְּאַחַד מֵעֵינַיִךְ in 4:9 because the noun מֵעֵינַיִךְ means “eyes” in feminine, but בְּאַחַד means “one of” in the masculine (Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 66). It is translated as “with one of thine eyes” (ASV, KJV), and “a glance of your eyes” (OVNB, NVNB, ESV, NAS, NIV, and TNK).

“You have stolen my heart”).²³³ The repetitions לִבְבַּתִּי in 4:9 focus not on the heart of ownership but on the willing heart of the man when his feelings and desires of love overwhelm him.²³⁴

In Song 5:2-8, the woman tells the daughters of Jerusalem about the night-time visit of her lover, when she was sleeping but her heart was awake (אָנִי יָשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עָר, “I slept, but my heart was awake”) in 5:2. The heart here focuses more on the seat of feelings to mean that the woman’s mind is awake to hear her lover’s voice.²³⁵ The woman asks the man to set herself as a seal on the heart of her lover (שִׂימֵנִי כַחֲתָם עַל-לִבְךָ, “Set me as a seal upon your heart”) in 8:6a.²³⁶ The heart of the man plays a positive role in which the woman wants to mark herself on the central part of her lover’s being (cf. Deut 11:18, Prov 3:3; 7:3).²³⁷

The love relationship of the lovers is based on the passionate love seen throughout the eight chapters of the Song in which the lovers desire each other greatly such as the woman’s desire for intoxication in love from kisses of her lover (1:2),

Gordis holds that בְּאַחַד in masculine is a scribal error of בְּאַחַת in feminine and the error also crept into the following phrase עֵינַי בְּאַחַד (Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 85). However, it is unnecessary to emend בְּאַחַד to בְּאַחַת because Pope states that parts of body are employed as masculine as seen in Job 21:20 and Zech 4:10, and the phrase is translated literally as “with one of your eyes” which reflects “the goddess of multiple eyes” as seen in ancient world (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 481). Many translations solve the difficulty of עֵינַי בְּאַחַד by supplying “glance” which makes good sense in the context because ‘the beautiful eyes as doves’ have already been mentioned in 1:15 and 4:1 translates the phrase as “a glance of your eyes” (Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 52).

²³³ The phrase עֵינַי בְּאַחַד in 4:9 is of uncertain meaning. It seems to be connected either with “neck” or “necklace.” Gordis suggests that the noun עֵינַי has two meanings “neck” and “jewel,” but the latter is preferable in the context, as seen in Prov 1:9 which designates the objects hung around the necks of women, and the noun צִוּרָן is derived from צִוּרָה “neck,” and it means “ornament for neck, necklace,” not “neck” (Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 86). Furthermore, Stadelmann explains that עֵינַי is a unit of מְצִוּרָנַי “your necklace” which refers to more than a single “strand of beads or jewels strung together” (Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* [New York: Paulist Press, 1990], 122). The parallel in the verse suggests that the meaning of the third colon must fit into the preceding colon. Therefore, the meaning “one jewel of your necklace” of the phrase is preferable.

²³⁴ See the translation of verse 4:9 in point 3.2.2 of this chapter.

²³⁵ Cf. the “thoughts” of their hearts’ in Gen 6:5.

²³⁶ The seal could be worn on the neck (Gen 38:18) or on the hand as a ring (Jer 22:24) to show identification or signature purposes (Roland Murphy, “Dance and Death in the Song of Songs,” in *Love & Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, eds. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, Conn: Four Quarters Pub Co., 1987), 118.

²³⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 250.

embraces (2:6. 8:3), the urgent invitation of the man to his beloved in the springtime (2:8-13) or his request to hear her voice and see her face (2:14).²³⁸ Especially, the woman expresses her passionate love to possess her lover even though she has to face the power of death in Song 8:6b.²³⁹ Her love is as strong as death²⁴⁰ and as relentless as Sheol to mean that she never gives up her love (cf. Hos 13:14; Ps 49:7-8, 16 (15[E]),²⁴¹ and the power of her love is also compared to the image of flames of fire. Therefore, many waters or floods cannot quench the flames of her love, all rivers cannot sweep it away and it is futile to use wealth to gain love (Song 8:7; cf. Isa 43:2).²⁴²

As in the Song, the heart and passion of love in Vietnamese literature are often described by the depth and power that urge lovers to overcome all difficult situations to protect their unchanging love. The ‘heart’ always represents emotions and thoughts of lovers seen through the following Vietnamese folk sayings and a love poem in the new poetry movement.

*Lòng em đã quyết thì hành,
Đã cấy thì gặt với anh một mùa.*²⁴³
(*My heart decides to do something,
Transplanted rice seedlings will be harvested with you at the same time*).

In Vietnamese, “lòng” means “heart” which is used to refer to loving words such as “tiếng lòng” (*the voice of the heart*).²⁴⁴ It is also called “bụng dạ” or “lòng dạ” which is the belly or viscera in the body and used to imply character, a peace of mind,

²³⁸ The man’s request to see his beloved’s face is similar to Moses’ request to see the Lord’s glory in Exod 33:18 (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 106).

²³⁹ See the expression of the power of love of 8:6-7 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One; and also Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Love and Death Once More (Song of Songs VIII 6),” *VT* 47 (1997): 385-386. In the OT, there are women who protect the life of their loved one, even though they have to fight against the merciless, violent, and insulting assault which are equivalent to death - such as Michal (1 Sam 19:9-17), Abigail (2 Sam 25), the wise woman Maacah (2 Sam 20:14-22), or the heroic Rizpah (2 Sam 21:8-14) (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 274).

²⁴⁰ The strength of love is compared to death which is one of the most powerful figures found in ancient Israel (Murphy, “Love and Death,” 118).

²⁴¹ Keel, *Song of Songs*, 275.

²⁴² Murphy, “Love and Death,” 119.

²⁴³ Kiều Vãn, *Tình Yêu*, 78.

²⁴⁴ Lê Văn Đức, “Tim (Heart)” and “Tâm (Heart),” in *Việt Nam Tự Điển* (Vietnamese dictionary), ed. Lê Ngọc Thu, vol. 2 (Sài Gòn: NXB Khai Trí, 1970), 1363, 1386.

steadfastness.²⁴⁵ The heart in the folk sayings above represents steadfastness in the emotions and thoughts of the young woman. When falling in love with a man, she decides to follow him steadfastly to the end and accepts what happens to him in future. As analyzed previously, the woman in the Song also shows that her heart is awake to hear her lover's voice (5:2); her faithfulness to her lover is as a seal set on the man's heart (8:6a) which can not be broken. There are folk sayings which show a consistent heart of the woman through the repetitions of "lòng" and "dạ" such as:

*Lòng lại dặn lòng dù non mòn biển cạn,
 Dạ lại dặn dạ dù đá nát vàng phai.
 Dù cho trúc mọc thành mai,
 Em cũng không xiêu lòng lạc dạ, nghe ai phỉnh phờ.²⁴⁶
 (The heart tells the heart even though the mountain is worn out and the sea is dried.
 The heart tells the heart even though the rock is crumbled and the gold has lost
 colour.
 Even though the lesser bamboo becomes an apricot,
 I will not be soft hearted and change my heart to listen to somebody's cajoling
 voice).*

As the woman in the Song mentioned before, the consistent heart of the woman in the folk sayings shows her faithfulness to her lover by oaths through images as a mountain, a sea, a lesser bamboo, and an apricot, which cannot change their nature. But even if the images could change to become other things; she never changes her love for another man who may persuade her. Furthermore, the heart of love also has a special significance for the poets in the new movement, especially in Huy Cận's poetry as:

*Em ơi hãy ngủ anh hầu quạt đây,
 Lòng anh mở với quạt này,
 Trăm con chim mộng về bay đầu giường . . .²⁴⁷
 (My beloved, sleep, I fan you,
 My heart opens with the folding fan,
 A hundred birds in dreaming fly back to the head of your bed . . .)*
 (Ngậm ngùi [Compassion] – Huy Cận)

²⁴⁵ Lê Văn Đức, "Bụng (internal organs/viscera)," "Dạ (stomach)," "Lòng (internal organs/viscera)," and "Tâm (Heart)," in *Việt Nam Tự Điển* (Vietnamese dictionary), ed. Lê Ngọc Thu, vol. 1 (Sài Gòn: NXB Khai Trí, 1970), 140, 344, 823-824.

²⁴⁶ Dung and Thúy Anh, *Ca Dao*, 1439.

²⁴⁷ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 87.

Happiness does not come easily to everybody, but in love the man shows his emotion to his beloved by taking care of her, even fanning to lull her to sleep. He needs to unfold the fan when he is fanning, as at the same time his heart also opens with many dreams about her. In the Song, the man also shows the joy in his heart on the wedding day (3:11) and his heart is stolen by the woman (4:9).

Similar to the Song, the passion of love is described abundantly in the folk sayings and songs. It leads the young man and woman faithfully to commit to loving each other. The commitment of faithfulness in marriage is a prominent characteristic of the Vietnamese people in the past especially and also in the present, such as:

Yêu nhau tâm trí hao mòn,
 Yêu nhau đến thác vẫn còn yêu nhau.²⁴⁸
*(Loving each other makes the mind worn out,
 Loving each other until death, still love each other).*

The folk sayings above are the oath of lovers to show their passionate love which binds them together. Even though they have to face difficulties in life, they still carry on their love until the end of their life even if one of them has passed away.²⁴⁹ The oath in the folk sayings is similar to the power of love in the Song which is a force to help the lovers to overcome all difficulties and trials in their life because “love is as strong as death” (8:6b). Therefore, love is also described as a flame of fire with its burning longings in the heart of the lovers, as in the folk sayings following:

Anh thương em như lửa nọ cháy rừng,
 Dù cho lở núi tan rừng anh cũng thương.²⁵⁰
*(I love you as a flame of fire,
 Even though the mountain is broken, the forest is scattered I still love you).*
 Or Nhớ ai bồi hồi bồi hồi,
 Như đứng đồng lửa, như ngồi đồng than.²⁵¹
*(Missing someone with a harassing longing,
 As standing on a flame or sitting on a heap of burning charcoal).*

²⁴⁸ Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 262.

²⁴⁹ Tấn Long and Canh, *Thi Ca*, 87.

²⁵⁰ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 65, 74.

²⁵¹ Phan Thị Hồng Lam and Nguyễn Tấn Hưng, *Một Dòng Ca Dao, Câu Hồ, Câu Đố Miền Nam* (A folk saying, A folk song, and a southern riddle) (North Carolina, USA: NXB Miệt Vườn, 1991), 142.

In the folk sayings, the burning longings are described through such similes as a flame, the broken mountain, the scattered forest, in fire, burning charcoal, which cause great pain to the lovers. Love also means “missing someone” (nhớ ai), to show the deep feelings of love and their distraught minds. It is a special moment, but it is also a concentration, pressing, burning and shining as a sacred fire.²⁵² The fire does not burn in a temple, but in the hearts of two lovers, with amazing promises as a long-sealed fate for their life made at the time when the two lovers looked at each other in love.²⁵³ Similar to the Song, the power and energy of love of the lovers is described as “its flashes are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (8:6c). By this love, the lovers in the following folk sayings willingly climb up mountains, cross forests and rivers.²⁵⁴

Yêu nhau tam tứ núi cũng trèo,
 Ngũ lục sông cũng lội, thất bát cử thập đèo cũng qua!²⁵⁵
 (*Loving each other, willing to climb through three and four mountains,
 Crossing five and six rivers and overcoming seven, eight, nine, and ten mountain
 passes!*)

In Vietnamese, there are two abstract terms “yêu” (love) and “thương” (love) with the same meaning to express the extremely important feelings of love between a man and woman.²⁵⁶ The images of numbers of mountains, rivers, and mountain passes used in the folk sayings refer to difficulties and trials which lovers are facing. The passionate love gives the lovers extraordinary strength to overcome every obstacle in their life to be with each other.²⁵⁷ The woman in the Song also expresses that there is nothing which can separate or prevent her from her lover (8:7a), even many waters, floods, mighty rivers, or the raging waters of the sea cannot quench her love.²⁵⁸ Not only the woman, the man also in the Song willingly overcomes all obstacles to reach his beloved such as leaping over mountains and bounding over hills (2:8).²⁵⁹ Furthermore,

²⁵² Minh Đức, “Thư Tình,” 297.

²⁵³ Anh Hiền, *Thơ Ca*, 126.

²⁵⁴ Côn Sơn, *Văn Hóa*, 838-839.

²⁵⁵ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 30.

²⁵⁶ Phien, “The Vietnamese Language,” 97.

²⁵⁷ Trúc Phương, *Văn Học*, 267.

²⁵⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 254.

²⁵⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 120.

there is numerical style also used to express passionate love which is to watch, to wait, to look, to long and to seek for each other to fulfill their desires as noted in the following folk saying:

*Một chờ, hai đợi, ba trông,
Bốn thương, năm nhớ, bảy tám chín mong, mười tìm.*²⁶⁰
(One is to watch for, two is to wait for, and three is to look for,
Four is to love, five is to think of, seven, eight and nine are to long for, and ten is to seek for).

The folk sayings reflect heartfelt love, purity and insistence through the continuous numbers: one to ten. The increase of numbers focuses on nothing else but the desire for love which is so urgent and rapid-fire that lovers have to seek each other to satisfy their desire.²⁶¹ The numerical style is also found in the Song to show the passionate love of the lovers. The man in the Song does his best in his joyful day by using “sixty warriors” to surround the palanquin (3:7) to indicate comprehensiveness,²⁶² and he also shows that his beloved is unique and the perfect one in his eyes (6:9) in comparing her to a sequence of increasing numbers such as “sixty queens,” “eighty concubines,” and “countless women” (6:8), which represent a large and indefinite quantity of women of all types.²⁶³ The same applies to the woman who describes her lover that he is outstanding above others in her estimation through the number “ten thousand” (5:10).²⁶⁴ In addition, in the expression of passionate love a young man and young woman in the folk sayings below express their desire for each other by words from the bottom of their hearts through sharing what they have with another such as:

Yêu nhau cởi áo cho nhau,

²⁶⁰ Anh Hiên, *Thơ Ca*, 126.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² William Taylor Smith, “Number” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 6413.

²⁶³ The device is similar to the numerical style in Biblical and Semitic poetry such as ‘there are three things and four things (sixty and eighty represent 3x20 and 4x20)’ which refer to “ascending numeration” for pointing a large and undefined number, as in Prov 30:15, 8, 21, 24, 29; Job 5:19; Amos 1:3. See in Robert Gordis, *Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 94; Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Some Ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Song of Songs,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed*, eds. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey and Wilfred G. E. Watson (JSOTSup 195; England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 258. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 180.

²⁶⁴ Smith, “Number,” 6413; and also Longman, *Song of Songs*, 170.

Về nhà mẹ hỏi qua cầu gió bay.²⁶⁵
*(Love is willing to take out a jacket to give to each other,
 Coming home the mother asks, for passing a bridge the wind blows it away).*

Love means “to give” and gives all including the lovers’ lives to each other. So, taking out a jacket to give to each other will result in scolding by the mother, but the lovers still do it for their love.²⁶⁶ Therefore, love means to do the best for the one who is loved and it is regretful when there is nothing to give. This love is also portrayed in the Song such as in the joyful day, the man does his best to show how precious it is by making a litter with the wood of Lebanon which is the best quality wood²⁶⁷ with sixty mighty men to guard around it and decorated with gold, silver, purple dye, and with its interior inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem (3:6-10).²⁶⁸ Therefore, there is no class distinction or difference between the rich and the poor or high position and low position as the expression in the following folk sayings:

Yêu nhau mọi việc chẳng nề,
 Dù trăm chỗ lệch cũng kê cho bằng.²⁶⁹
(Love is willing to do every thing,

²⁶⁵ Huỳnh Văn Công, “Gia Đình Người Việt Nam tại Hải Ngoại” (Vietnamese family in overseas countries) in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình, và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (Paris: Định Hướng Tùng Thư, Trung Tâm Nguyễn Trường Tộ, 2002), 100.

²⁶⁶ Việt Chương, *Từ Điển Thành Ngữ, Tục ngữ, Ca Dao Việt Nam* (Vietnamese idiom, proverb, folk sayings dictionary), vol. 2 (Đồng Nai: NXB Đồng Nai, 1996), 826.

²⁶⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 149.

²⁶⁸ Verses 6-11 describe a procession with soldiers and a litter on the day of wedding. Verse 10 describes one by one the different parts of the litter. But the most difficult part is the last colon **תּוֹכּוֹ רְצוּף אֶהְבֵּה מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם** of the verse, because of the uncertain meaning of the clause **תּוֹכּוֹ רְצוּף אֶהְבֵּה**. The participle **רְצוּף** is derived from the root **רָצַף** with different meanings such as: “fit together,” “fit out,” “pave,” “join together,” “build,” “arrange in a line,” “fitted out” (*BDB*, “רְצוּף,” 954). There are many possible translations of the participle **רְצוּף**. But in relation to the meaning “pavement,” **רְצוּף** may be translated as “inlaid.” The noun **אֶהְבֵּה** occurs several times in the Song with the meaning “love,” but there are arguments on the meaning “love” of **אֶהְבֵּה**. With many possible translations of the noun **אֶהְבֵּה** such as it is derived from a Ugaritic root **אהבת** meaning “leather” (White, *Language of Love*, 45); Fox translates the clause **תּוֹכּוֹ רְצוּף אֶהְבֵּה** as “Its interior inlaid with stones,” by emending the noun **אֶהְבֵּה** to either **אֶבְנִים** “stones” or **הַבְּנִים** “ebony” with the letter **נ** taken from the first word of **יְרוּשָׁלַם מִבְּנוֹת** “the daughters of Jerusalem” in the phrase of the colon (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 126); and Pope suggests that even though the text does not mention “ivory,” the meaning “ivory” reminds us of Solomon’s great ivory (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 446). However, it seems natural to translate **אֶהְבֵּה** as “love” which fits the context well and also relates to the Arabic cognates (Longman, “Note no. 33,” in *Song of Songs*, 134). And finally, “love” is the theme of the Song.

²⁶⁹ Kiều Văn, *Tình Yêu*, 65.

Even a hundred of rough places, will make smooth).

The lovers share not only what they have with each other but also accept each other's situation without differences to protect their love.²⁷⁰ In the Song, there is the expression of the mutual belonging and exclusiveness of the lovers for each other in the three repetitions "My lover is mine and I am his" in 2:16; 6:3; and partially in 7:11.²⁷¹ The repetitions express the lovers' entire absorption in each other and make no distinction between them and also there is no space for others.²⁷²

The passionate love in the Song and Vietnamese love lyrics is similar. The lovers are burning with desires which cannot be stamped out in their heart. It is described through powerful images of many waters or floods, flames, river, and even wealth (8:6, 7) in the Song, and mountains, forests, flames, burning charcoal in Vietnamese love lyrics. However, the woman in the Song shows her strong desire for her lover without any hesitation, while the man in the Vietnamese love lyric is more active to express his desire than the woman.

As in other literature,²⁷³ the heart is also used as an expression of desire for the other in the Song and in Vietnamese literature through terms such as "lòng" (*heart*); "bụng dạ" (*belly*) or "lòng dạ" (*viscera*). The heart of love is the centre of thoughts, decisions and especially the centre of emotions of lovers in both. It shows the power and passion of love which urges lovers to overcome difficulties to be united and remain faithful in love. The Vietnamese folk sayings and songs describe the passionate love of lovers through the numerical style as found in the Song. Similarly, the folk sayings also

²⁷⁰ Việt Chương, *Từ Điển*, vol. 2, 826.

²⁷¹ Cf. notes 205 and 206 in point 3.2.3 of this chapter; and also the study of 2:16 in point 1.2.2.2 of Chapter One.

²⁷² Exum, *Song of Songs*, 210.

²⁷³ The heart is described as a centre of emotions of lovers in Tamil poetry as:

"My heart has gone with the man of the hill;
Will it ever come back?
Or will remain with him
Where it wants to live? . . ." (Aink. 295). Cited in Mariaselvam, *Song of Songs*, 228.

And in Egyptian poetry as:

"The brother roils my heart with his voice,
Making me take ill" (P. Chester Beatty I, Group A, no. 32A). Cited in Fox, *Song of Songs*, 104.

compare the passionate love with death and a flame of fire in which the lovers willingly keep their commitment in marriage faithfully. However, the description of passionate love in Song 8:6 and 7 is more powerful than in the folk sayings through the continuing comparisons in the verses to emphasizing that it is possessive and exclusive. This type of love is the unique nature of the Song in Hebrew poetry, whereas the folk sayings convey the type of love in simple language collected from different sources.

3.2.5 *The signs of love*

The love relationship of the lovers is described through various expressions of signs of love, especially kissing, embracing, smelling, and tasting. The signs convey deep desires for love and one of the characteristics seen in many poems of the Song.

Kisses (נְשִׁיקוֹת) are the sign of love of the lovers in the Song. The poems in Song 1:2-4 and in 2:1-7 show the longing for love of the woman who expresses her desire to her lover straightforwardly. The Song begins with the longing of the woman for the kisses of her lover in a secret rendezvous, for his kisses are more intoxicating than wine (כִּי-טוֹבִים הָרֵיחַ מִיַּיִן) in 1:2.²⁷⁴ There are a romantic kiss and sexual involvement also seen in Prov 7:13 where the woman kisses the man.²⁷⁵ The desire for kisses from the mouth is the opening of the lovers to each other and willingness to take another into oneself.²⁷⁶ It conveys a strong expression of the meaning of love through the rest of the Song. A similar longing in 1:2 is expressed in 8:1-4 where the woman desires for her lover to be as her brother in order that she can kiss him freely in public without the embarrassment of social disapproval (see Gen 29:11).²⁷⁷ In 7:10, the lovers enjoy a deep kiss as the best wine.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Wine is also known to bring pleasure to gods and human beings as in Judg 9:13; Ps 104:15 (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 44).

²⁷⁵ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 48.

²⁷⁶ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 9.

²⁷⁷ Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (BST; Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 48.

²⁷⁸ See the study of 7:10 in point 1.2.2.1 of Chapter One.

Embraces of the lovers are mentioned a few times in the Song. To overcome lovesickness, the woman desires the support of the man (2:5) and describes his embrace (וּמִיְנוּ תְחַבְּקֵנִי) “his right hand embraces me”) in 2:6. The embrace conveys sexual implications as seen in Prov 5:20.²⁷⁹ When the woman searches for her lover in the night, and finally finds him, she states that she will hold on to him and would not let him go until she can bring him to her mother’s house (אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי) in 3:4. The mother house is a place where matters relating to the lovers’ marriage may be discussed as in Gen 24:28, 67; Ruth 1:8-9,²⁸⁰ and also refers to a comfortable place of intimacies of the lovers in Song 8:2.²⁸¹ After the longing for the kisses (8:1), the woman desires physical intimacy as in “his left hand over my head and his right hand embraces me” in 8:3 (cf. 2:6).

The setting of love in the Song is the idyllic atmosphere associated with fragrances. The language of fragrances is suggestive of intimacy of the lovers.²⁸² The poem in Song 1:12-14 shows the woman describing the attraction of her scent when she is in her lover’s presence. Then she admires her lover in terms of fragrances as “a sachet of myrrh” (צָרוּר הַמֶּר) in 1:13 as seen in Prov 7:17 and Esth 2:12 in connecting with marriage and lovemaking,²⁸³ and “a cluster of henna blossoms” (אֲשָׁכֵל הַכַּפֹּר) brought from the vineyards of Engedi in 1:14.²⁸⁴ In the poem in Song 4:8-5:1, the man expresses his delight with his beloved’s fragrance, “How much more pleasing is your love than wine, the fragrance (רִיחַ) of your perfumes, than any spice” (4:10) and “the fragrance (רִיחַ) of your garments is like the fragrance (רִיחַ) of Lebanon” (4:11) known as the fragrance of Lebanon’s cedars (cf. Hos 14:7[6E]).²⁸⁵ The garden in 4:14 is described as a fragrant place which is full of fragrant spices such as nard, saffron, cane, cinnamon with

²⁷⁹ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 61.

²⁸⁰ Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 159.

²⁸¹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 130-131.

²⁸² Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 51.

²⁸³ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 43.

²⁸⁴ See note 82 in point 3.2.1 of this chapter.

²⁸⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 173.

all scented woods to suggest the intensity and fullness of the man's feelings of love (cf. Prov 7:17).²⁸⁶

The tasting of food and drink is the symbolism of sexual pleasure of the lovers in the Song. The woman shows that his fruit is sweet for her taste to refer to the intimate relationship with her lover (2:3).²⁸⁷ Song 4:11 expresses the man's admiration for his beloved as "Your lips drip honey, O bride; honey and milk are under your tongue." Honey and milk (or milk and honey) could be a familiar expression for satisfaction and abundance in biblical Hebrew (e.g., Isa 7:22; Job 20:17; Deut 32:14).²⁸⁸ Then he also sees her in images in the Song such as a locked garden, a sealed fountain (4:12), and a well of living water (4:15) which imply the woman who does not open her treasures to all others, but only to him, the one invited to eat and drink the delicacies in the garden and the well.²⁸⁹ The expression of בְּאֵר, "a well" in Song 4:15 is similar to בְּאֵר which supplies flowing water as in Prov 5:15-19; 23:27 used as a metaphor for the woman who is the source of sexual delight and satisfaction to her lover.²⁹⁰ Similar imagery to 4:11 is shown in 5:1 in which the man states that he has come to his garden to eat (אָכַל) and drink (שָׁתָה) his vine and milk. The verb בּוֹא, "come to" or "enter" is often used to convey a technical sexual meaning in the Hebrew Bible (Prov 5:15; 7:18).²⁹¹ Another image of eating and drinking seen in Song 8:2 is the woman who desires to give her lover to drink יַיִן הַרְקָח, "spiced wine," and עֵסִים רְמוֹן, "pomegranate juice" (cf. 4:13). The special references to tasting are described in Song 5:16 where the mouth of the man is sweet and all of him desirable (חֶפְזוֹ מִמְתַּקִּים) and in Song 7:10 where the mouth of the woman is like the best wine (כֵּיִן הַטּוֹב).

²⁸⁶ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 138.

²⁸⁷ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 112.

²⁸⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 173.

²⁸⁹ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 155; and also Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 50, 106.

²⁹⁰ R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 89.

²⁹¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, INC., Publishers, 1985), 202; and see also Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 32. Similar to 4:15, there is the phrase מְקוֹרַיִם חַיִּים "the spring of living water" in Jer 2:13 in the nuptial context, but it is a metaphor for God (cf. Jer 2:2-3).

In old Vietnamese tradition, lovers are prevented from showing their desire freely because it contravenes ethical behavior. But their desire for love increases in their heart which nothing can prevent. Therefore, it is not strange to see in Vietnamese folk sayings and classical poetry as below in which lovers overcome walls of ethics in the old tradition to show their sexual pleasure such as:²⁹²

Cầm tay em như ăn bì nem gói cuốn,
 Dựa lưng nàng như uống chén rượu ngon.²⁹³
*(Holding your hands is like eating the fermented pork roll,
 Leaning on your back is like drinking the best wine).*

The power of sexual pleasure urges lovers to touch, to hold, and to be close to each other. It is the reason that causes the man in the folk sayings above to yearn to hold his beloved's hands and lean on her back. The acts make him satisfied in his desire as if he were eating the fermented pork roll which is the special dish in Vietnamese traditional foods and drinking the best wine. Similarly the lovers in the Song show their satisfaction in sexual pleasure through images such as the best wine (1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:10); honey, honeycomb, wine and milk (4:11; 5:1); a pleasure garden of pomegranates with choice fruits, and henna with nard (4:13). The satisfaction in the Song is also compared with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, all the finest spices (4:14); garden spring and the well of fresh water (4:15); and spiced wine and the nectar of the pomegranate (8:2). Even though sexual love described in the folk sayings is unlike that in the Song, such as that the man always shows his desire and it is expressed not as strongly as in the Song, the signs of love still exist. There is another expression of sexual pleasure experienced by lovers as in the following folk saying:

Đêm nằm gối gấm không êm,
 Gối lụa không mềm bằng gối tay em.²⁹⁴
*(Lying at night on the brocade pillow which is not as soft,
 And on the silk pillow which is not as tender as lying down on your hand).*

²⁹² Tấn Long and Canh, *Thi Ca*, vol. 2, 197.

²⁹³ Dung and Thúy Anh, *Ca Dao*, vol. 1, 401.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 881; also Tấn Long and Canh, *Thi Ca*, vol. 2, 265.

The folk saying depicts all things which do not fulfill the man's desire even though he is lying down on an expensive and beautiful pillow. Only the "lying on your hand" is an image of embrace of lovers that makes the man feels happy and satisfied. In reality, the young men and women know not only to work hard in fields but also to show their sexual love after a working day, and appreciate moments of kiss and cuddle.²⁹⁵ As in the Song, the woman shows her sexual desire to her lover such as to be laid on her lover's left hand and embraced by his right hand (2:6; 8:3). But the difference is that the image of embrace in the folk sayings is more subtle and the man's desire is more positive than the woman's. The following verses in Vietnamese classical poetry describe the signs of love through caressing manners, when Kiều comes to Kim Trọng's house and they talk and drink wine together all night long:²⁹⁶

Hoa đèn càng tỏ thức hồng,
 Dầu mà cuối mắt càng nồng tấm yêu,
 Sóng tình dường đã xiêu xiêu,
 Xem trong âu yếm có chiều lả lơi.
 Thưa rằng đừng lấy làm chơi;
 Rẽ cho thưa hết một lời đã nao! . . .
 Đã cho vào bậc Bó-kinh,
 Đạo tông phu lấy chữ trinh làm đầu.²⁹⁷
*(The lamp-wick is brighter,
 To see clearer the faces of each other with passionate love,
 Their violent amatory desire seems to be soft-hearted,
 And the caress tends to be out of control;
 Replying that don't play;
 Let me finish my word! . . .
 Entered on the Bo-kinh class,
 Submitting to a husband, must place virginity above all else)*
 (The Tale of Kiều, Chapter XIV, verses 490-500)

Under the light of the lamp, Kim Trọng sees clearly Kiều's face that makes his sexual desire for her increase and he seems to sink into the endless caresses of his beloved.²⁹⁸ But Kiều reminds Kim Trọng not to let his sexual desire get out of control.

²⁹⁵ Tấn Long and Canh, *Thi Ca*, vol. 2, 265.

²⁹⁶ Du, *Kim-Vân-Kiều*, 69.

²⁹⁷ Hồng Huy, *Truyện Kiều*, 26-27.

²⁹⁸ Du, *Kim-Vân-Kiều*, 75.

She mentions the term “Bố-kính” to mean sackcloth trouser and thorn hairpin that refer to a legal wife and virtuous woman and she must place her virginity above all else.²⁹⁹ According to the old Vietnamese tradition and also in the present, virginity is very important because it shows a decent and virtuous woman who will be respected by others as in a Vietnamese proverb “Chữ trinh đáng giá ngàn vàng” (*the virginity is as precious as a thousand of gold*).³⁰⁰

Virginity in Vietnamese classical poetry is similar to that in the Song. The woman in the Song warns the man that their sexual love needs to be protected from enemies, such as the foxes that are ravagers spoiling the vineyards that need to be caught (2:15); and the woman’s brothers who are protectors give her a moral lesson about the rewards of virginity and the punishment for sexual freedom (8:8, 9).³⁰¹ The brothers in the history of Israel have authority to protect the honor and virginity of their sister (see Gen 34; 2 Sam 13:22-33).³⁰² Virginity is sexual purity and a virtue prized greatly in women in the world of the OT as in Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:13-21; and Prov 5:15-21.³⁰³ Therefore, the woman’s virginity is closely interwoven with personal or even family honor in the Hebrew culture as also in Vietnamese culture, and there has been common belief that the loss of virginity before marriage is a matter of deep shame in both cultures.³⁰⁴

In addition, on the level of general ideas and thought on this study one cannot ignore studying the signs of love in the new poetry movement in Vietnamese literature. Its poets reject old traditions in which lovers could not express their love to each other freely.³⁰⁵ Similar to the expression of signs of love in the Song, the poets in the movement express signs strongly through the sexual pleasure of lovers. Among the poets, Xuân Diệu finds new and fresh ways to compose his poetic lyrics, such as the love which brings happiness and blossoms into full life along with the desire for mouth kisses:

²⁹⁹ Du, *Kim-Vân-Kiều*, 74.

³⁰⁰ Việt Chương, *Tự Điển*, vol. 1, 324.

³⁰¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 258.

³⁰² Hess, *Song of Songs*, 243.

³⁰³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 218.

³⁰⁴ Hendrik Viviers “Clothed and Unclothed in the Song of Songs” in *OTE* 12/3 (1999): 619-620; and also Việt Chương, *Tự Điển*, vol. 1, 324; Thuận Thảo, *Phong Tục Việt Nam*, 33.

³⁰⁵ Minh Đức, “Thơ Tình,” 299.

Một buổi sáng Thần Vui hăng gõ cửa,
 Tháng Giêng ngon như một cặp môi gần.³⁰⁶
*(A morning, a joyful god knocks at the door,
 January is as nice as a close pair of lips).*
 (Vội Vã [Hurry Up]-Xuân Diệu)

*Or Anh xin làm sóng biếc,
 Hôn mãi cát vàng em.
 Hôn thật khẽ, thật êm,
 Hôn êm đềm mãi mãi.
 Đã hôn rồi, hôn lại,
 Cho đến mãi muôn đời,
 Đến tan cả đất trời,
 Anh mới thôi dào dạt . . .*³⁰⁷
*(I want to be waves,
 To kiss you as yellow sands.
 Kissing very gently and softly,
 Fond and forever kisses,
 Kissed already, kiss again.
 Until forever,
 Until the earth and the sky disappear,
 I will stop my desire . . .)*
 (Biển [Sea]-Xuân Diệu)

Kissing is a power of love to bring joy according to Xuân Diệu. It is described as the nice weather of January with all scenes turning over under the sunshine at the beginning of spring.³⁰⁸ Xuân Diệu portrays kisses through the very interesting image of waves which crash gently on to the shore with yellow sands again and again to show his strong desire to kiss his beloved intimately not only once but forever. As indicated before, the woman in the Song also longs for kisses from her lover's mouth (1:2) and wishes him as her brother in order that she would kiss him even in a public place (8:1), and the man describes kisses as the best wine (7:10). In addition, Xuân Diệu expresses the signs of love as:

Em phải nói, phải nói và phải nói,
 Bằng lời riêng nơi cuối mắt đầu mày,
 Bằng nét vui, bằng vẻ thẹn, chiều say,

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 149.

³⁰⁸ Minh Đức, "Thơ Tình," 299.

Bằng đầu ngả, bằng miệng cười tay riết!³⁰⁹
(You must say, say, and say,
By your own word or the end of your eyes, beginning of your eyebrows,
By joy, by feeling shy in the afternoon,
By a nodding of the heads, smiles, and a pressure of the hands!)
 (Phải nói [Must say]-Xuân Diệu)

Xuân Diệu shows his strong desire to hearing, talk, look, smile, and to embrace his beloved. To him, love must reach its satisfaction and climax in every moment that reveals complete desire and emotion of love.³¹⁰ The desire for each other is also found in the Song with the lovers desiring to hear from each other (2:8, 2:14; 8:13); talk to each other through dialogues (1:7-2:7; 4:8-5:1; 7:1-14); look for each other (3:1-5; 5:2-8); and to embrace each other (2:6; 8:3). However, the old Vietnamese tradition remains in the mind of the people. So, the young man always has the right to express his love or his desire first, but in the Song the lovers are equal in their love relationship, the woman desiring for kisses of her lover in the beginning of the Song as “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (1:2). Hoàng Chương is an excellent poet of the lyrics of the new movement.³¹¹ He also talks about the burning kisses of his beloved and intoxication of the wine of love at a time when nobody can prevent or separate them as follows:³¹²

Hãy buông lại gần đây làn tóc rối,
 Sát lại gần đây nữa cặp môi điên.
 Rồi em sẽ diều anh trên cánh khói,
 Đưa hồn say về tận cuối trời quên.³¹³
(Let come near the tangled hair,
Draw close a pair of crazy lips.
Then you will carry me up on wings of smoke,
Bring drunken souls to the end of the sky).
 (Quên [Forgetting]-Vũ Hoàng Chương)

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 296.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 296-297.

³¹¹ Thi Vũ, *Bốn Mươi Năm: Thơ Việt Nam 1945-1985* (Forty years: Vietnamese poetry 1945-1985) (Paris: Thi Vũ và Quê Mẹ, 1993), 11.

³¹² Nguyễn Tấn Long and Nguyễn Hữu Trọng, *Việt Nam Thi Nhân Tiền Chiến* (Vietnamese prewar poets), vol. 1 (Los Alamitos: NXB Xuân Thu, 1989), 564-565.

³¹³ Phạm Thanh, *Thi Nhân Việt Nam Hiện Đại* (Vietnamese modern poets), vol. 1 (Los Alamitos: NXB Xuân Thu, 1997), 186-187.

The poem above portrays the image of lovers sinking passionate kisses which make their souls fly high in the air and lead them into a happy horizon.³¹⁴ Similar to the Song, the kisses of the lovers are more intoxicating than the best wine (1:2; 7:10). Another poet is Đinh Hùng with his own characteristics.³¹⁵ He describes interesting pictures in a variety of signs of love in his poem, such as kissing, smelling, and tasting.

Em giống ai, ta điên rồi không biết,
 Nụ hôn đầu tê dại đến tâm can.
 Say vô cùng hương vị cặp môi non,
 Thoáng xiêm áo nhớ mùi hương da thịt . . .³¹⁶
*(Who is like you? I am crazy, don't you know,
 The first kiss numbs all of my heart
 Drunken by fragrance of the young lips,
 Glancing at the dress recalls your fragrance . . .)*
 (Hương Trinh Bạch [Pure Fragrance]-Đinh Hùng)

The language of love in the eight-word metre of Đinh Hùng's poem describes pleasant feelings through the fragrances. He depicts the first kiss that makes him intoxicated by the fragrance of the young lips of his beloved. The fragrances used here refer to the physical attraction of lovers that causes him to go into an ecstasy of delight as if to be numbed to the bottom of his heart.³¹⁷ As mentioned before, the fragrances in the Song are used not only to refer to the fragrance of the woman (4:10-11), but also refer to the fragrance of both lovers associated with love in the idyllic atmosphere (1:12-14; 4:14). Đinh Hùng also portrays the sweet taste through kisses as follows.

Cặp môi em, xuân thắm nét hoa rừng,
 Anh mê uống nhụy thơm tràn vị ngọt.³¹⁸
*Your lips are as the spring with forest flowers,
 I love to drink the fragrant pistil with the sweetness).*
 (Ân Tình Dạ Khúc [Love Song]- Đinh Hùng)

³¹⁴ Minh Đức, "Thơ Tình," 302-303.

³¹⁵ Thi Vũ, *Bốn Mươi Năm*, 454-456. Nguyễn Tấn Long and Nguyễn Hữu Trọng, *Thi Nhân*, vol. 3, 730-731.

³¹⁶ Tấn Long and Hữu Trọng, *Thi Nhân*, vol. 3, 766.

³¹⁷ Minh Đức, "Thơ Tình," 303.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

The lips of the woman in Hùng's poem are compared with wild flowers in spring spreading all over the fragrance of the sweet pistils that are so good to taste that the man is drunk. In the Song, the lovers also taste the sweetness of kisses as honey and milk (4:11), honeycomb and honey (5:1), the best wine (7:10; cf. 5:16), and spiced wine (8:2). The love lyrics in the new poetry movement are close to the real life of the people and reflect the desire for love and life of men and women in the new age with fresh thoughts. Even though the poets of the movement mentioned have passed away, their love poems stand firm in the society of the people. The desire and expression of love of the lovers in the Song are also unchanged and they are an everlasting principle of human love.

Similar to the Song, poem lyrics in the folk sayings and classical poetry portray the sexual pleasure of lovers with more subtle language through holding hands; leaning on the back of the other, and caressing manners, but the signs of love certainly exist in the ancient Vietnamese literature. The new movement also describes clearly the signs of love through passionate kisses of lovers, the scent of a love partner, and the lips as the fragrance of forest flowers in the spring time in which the man drinks the fragrant pistil full of sweetness, as found in the Song. Both Hebrew and Vietnamese cultures lay extreme emphasis on virginity before marriage. But a difference is that in the Song, the woman sometimes shows her strong desire for the kisses of the mouth of her lover (1:2; 8:1) and the embraces of her lover (2:6; 8:3). In Vietnamese literature, the man always shows his desire to kiss, embrace, to smell his beloved and to taste the sweetness of kisses rather than the woman desiring to do so.³¹⁹ The reason is the consequence of the old tradition which shapes the mind of the Vietnamese people even in modern times.³²⁰ Finally, both the ancient Vietnamese literature and the modern poetry express the same language of sexual pleasure as found in the Song, such as kisses (1:2, 7:10; 8:1), embraces (2:6; 8:3), their mutual admiration through fragrances such as the fragrance of the man (1:13; 14) or the fragrance of the woman (4:10; 4:11, 14), and the symbolism of

³¹⁹ Huỳnh Văn Phú, *Cõi Người Ta Trong Văn Chương Bình Dân* (Life of the people in the popular literature) (Los Angeles: NXB Văn Mới, 2002), 21.

³²⁰ Ta Van Tai, *The Vietnamese Tradition of Humans Rights* (US: University of California, 1988), 110-141.

sexual satisfaction by the tasting of food and drink (4:11, 12, 15; 5:16; 7:9) as found in other Biblical contexts (Prov 5:15; Jer 2:13).

3.2.6 Summary

To sum up, the comparison of language of love in the Song and the Vietnamese literature provides similarities and gives a significant understanding about the language of “love” in the Song that is close to the language of the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. Even though the language of love has its own form and culture, and differs in detail from others, the Song shares the same expression of the human joy of love in an idyllic atmosphere as do the love lyrics of the Vietnamese literature. The similarities in themes underlined such as nature imagery, lovesickness, dialogue between the lovers, the heart and passion of love, and the signs of love in the Song and the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature denote that the language of love in the Song participates generally in the expression of human love and sexuality; and the language of love in the Song shares the common milieu of love expression with the people of Vietnam.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to study the language of love in the Song and love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. ‘Love’ or ‘tình yêu’ between a man and woman, is an interesting subject in love lyrics in Vietnamese literature, especially in the folk sayings and songs, classical poetry, and the new movement poetry. In the old tradition, a young man and woman were prevented from seeing one another, and a woman had a lower status than a man and was controlled by her husband, father or mother-in-law. The marriage of a man and woman is often decided by their parents. In the present time, a man and woman have more freedom to express their love and decide for their future. However, the old tradition has shaped the mind of the people, even though there are a lot of changes in society today. Love expresses not only desires to see or to wait for a love partner but also encompasses the meanings of faithfulness, a power of captivation, and happiness.

The comparison of the Song with the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature through various themes underlined reveals that the setting of the Song and love lyrics in Vietnamese literature is the idyllic atmosphere through similes and metaphors of nature imagery such as garden, flowers, fruits, trees, and shows that the language of love in the Song is familiar to the people in Vietnam.

The themes of lovesickness, the dialogue of lovers, the heart and passion of love, and the signs of love in the Song are similar to that in the folk sayings and songs, the classical poetry and the new movement poetry. However, Hebrew poetry conveys its erotic meaning by using many images rooted in the ancient Near East which are part of the unique art of Hebrew poetry: vineyards and gardens are part of the people of Israel. Love lyrics in Vietnamese literature convey their meaning by using images which can be found in the normal life of its people. In lovesickness, the lovers in the Song carry on their love in hope but the lovers in Vietnamese love lyrics sometimes carry on their love without hope because of their own difficult situations. The man and the woman in the Song share their joy and desire through dialogues using many similes and metaphors in the deep thoughts and emotions, but the dialogues of the lovers in Vietnamese folk songs are portrayed in common language. The heart and passion of love in the Song are described more powerful than in the Vietnamese love lyrics, even though the desire for union in the love lyrics is also for the whole life. In the Song, the lovers show their desires mutually through kisses, embraces, tastes of the sweetness of kisses, and fragrances of lovers, which are also found in Vietnamese literature, even though they are expressed more subtly in the folk sayings and classical poetry. The difference from the lovers in Vietnamese literature to that of the Song is that the man is more active in showing desire than the woman.

The differences between the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics depict the richness of each culture. However, the similarities in the themes show that lovers in both cultures share the same joys of human love, and sexuality in various images which is a bridge to bring the language of love in the Song close to the cultural milieu in Vietnam both in the past and present. Therefore, the Song can belong to the people and of the

people. It can shed its beautiful light on Vietnamese society and in the church context, which is why we turn to the next chapter to discover cultural and theological implications and applications of the language of love in the Song in the Vietnamese church.

CHAPTER FOUR

**CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
AND APPLICATIONS OF THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE IN THE SONG
WITHIN A VIETNAMESE CHURCH CONTEXT**

In Chapter One, I tried to study the meaning of love through the special terms in the Hebrew Bible and especially in the Song. The study helps us to explore the primary meaning of love in the Song - that is, the celebration of love between the lovers. In Chapter Two, I surveyed the history of interpretation of sexual love in the Song that shows various understandings (of the meaning of love), but I understand the love in the Song in a literal sense, and suggest principles of interpretation of the Song in the present Vietnamese church context. In Chapter Three, I examined the language of love in the Song in the Vietnamese context by studying the language of love in the Song and comparing it with the love lyrics in Vietnamese literature. I show that the literal meaning of love in the Song is close to the language of love in Vietnamese literature and to the experience of the people in past and present society. It is expressed through similarities discovered in both poetries such as connecting to the imagination of an idyllic atmosphere, various expressions of love in similes, metaphors, thoughts, and emotions. The similarities found in Chapter Three provide a frame for the work of Chapter Four.

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the shift from an allegorical to a literal interpretation is supported by most modern scholars who recognize the sexual nature of the Song, but the use of the Song in sermons and academic writing is sparse. Many believe that the Song is relevant to present society and the church, but they have not brought the full meaning of the Song's implication and application to the reality of life,

especially in a Vietnamese context where many church leaders tend to understand the Song spiritually.

My attempts in Chapter Four are to demonstrate the cultural and theological implications and applications of the language of love in the Song primarily understood as human love, concentrating on experiencing, and desiring sexual love. For the methodology in this chapter, I adopt the first of the three approaches used by Asian scholars, which are (1) through cross-textual studies drawing out hermeneutic implications; (2) through the perspective of other religious traditions; (3) through discerning biblical and theological insights in people's stories, myths, and legends.¹ In this approach, I interpret the language of love in the Song in the context of the Vietnamese cultural heritage; as Samartha suggests, because the hermeneutical task is important to the life of the churches in Asia, we need not depend on sources of authority outside Asia, but need to build methods of interpreting the Bible from within the cultural context of Asia.² Lee also mentions, "Cross-textual is a proper approach to solving the dilemma of Asian Biblical interpretation and it is an essential one for the improvement of both the Gospel and culture."³ He insists that it does not mean dismissing the enormous contribution of Western Christian scholars in the growing life of the churches in Asia, but their contribution has hindered the Bible from integrating into the new environment in Asia, and the Christian Bible is considered as a foreign import.⁴ The reason is that the Eastern values focus on "human heartedness, noninterference, selflessness, enlightenment, compassion, and moderation" and the Western values of the enlightenment focus on "science, reason, organization, wealth, and technology."⁵

¹ Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 62.

² Stanley J. Samartha, "The Asian Context: Source and Trends," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: SPCK, 1991), 36-37.

³ Archie C. C. Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspective," *AJT* 7 (1993): 38; idem, "Cross Textual Hermeneutics on Gospel and Culture," *AJT* 10 (1996): 89.

⁴ Archie C. C. Lee, "Critical Biblical Hermeneutics of Li Rongfang: In the Socio-intellectual Context of China," in *Border Crossings: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. D. N. Premnath (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 70-71.

⁵ Cited in Marcel Doan Minh, "Christian Faith and Culture in Vietnam," *EAPR* 43 (2006): 63.

Therefore, ‘in terms of ethnocentrism’ the Vietnamese reading of the Song is different from a Western reading.⁶

Furthermore, the study in this chapter is also based on the studies of the previous chapters and especially Chapter Three to explore cultural and theological implications and applications. According to Song, if the interpretation of the Bible is made without concern for the traditional doctrinal premises, it is not an option for doing theology in Asia.⁷ Therefore, it is necessary to read the Bible with “New Eyes,” and the Bible and culture must interact with each other in order that the biblical message may reach more effectively the people of Asia, and the interpretation of the Bible must relate closely to the reader’s life situation.⁸ By doing so, I hope to provide a way of relevantly using the message of the Song in teaching within the church and homiletic practice, acknowledging the “cultural impact” of the Song in the Vietnamese context to show that the Song is vibrant, worthy and holy in God’s Word, and can play an important role in Vietnamese society and the present church context.⁹

In this chapter, in order to demonstrate ‘cultural relevance of the Song in Vietnamese society and relationships’ between a man and a woman,¹⁰ I will study topics such as exclusive commitment, the erotic nature of the love relationship, intimacy and warning, full realization of love, and the beauties of love. The topics are chosen from the

⁶ Pieter F. Craffert, “On New Testament Interpretation and Ethnocentrism,” in *Ethnicity & the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 449-451. See also note 7 of Chapter One.

⁷ Choan-Seng Song, “Asia,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (USA: Blackwell, 2006), 161.

⁸ Song, “Asia,” 162. I also agree with Hoành Sơn that to live by the past does not mean to live in the past. To live for the past is conservative, but to live for the future by the past is an advance. Such advance can stand firmly on the foundation of itself (Hoành Sơn, “Hội Nhập Văn Hóa và Tầng Nền của Tâm Hệ Việt Nam [Cultural Integration and the Foundation of Vietnamese Psychism]” in *Hợp Tuyển Thần Học* [Anthology of Theology], no. 16, VI [1996]: 50).

⁹ Clines gives an important lecture on “The Bible and Culture” that the role the Bible plays in our culture (David J. A Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World* [England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 31-54). According to Rev. Chinh, culture is a property of the human person that one can gain true and full humanity only by means of culture and positive aspects of culture help the human person to discover the meaning of life, to affirm human dignity and enable them to enter into the transcendent (Rev. Joseph Vũ Kim Chinh, “The Idea of ‘Ex Corde Ecclesiae’ and Research of Vietnamese Folk Culture,” *Taiwan* [1997]: 2-3).

¹⁰ Vietnamese culture is similar to Chinese culture. As Yiek mentions, the Gospel of Christ transforms the Chinese culture and also complements it in strengthening the moral fabric of Chinese society (J. Y. H Yieh, “Cultural Reading of the Bible-Some Chinese Christian Cases” in *Text and Experience Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible*, eds. Daniel Smith-Christopher [England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 140).

comparative study of the themes of love between the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics in the previous chapter. The terms of the topics are not found in the Song. However, to Vietnamese eyes the Song could be understood and interpreted in the light of the terms. The reason for the chosen topics is also that, as mentioned above, if we want to bring the light of the Song into the present Vietnamese church context, it is good to pay attention to the cultural heritage,¹¹ and in this way the people can play an active role in relation to God and his Word, instead of being a passive audience.¹² Therefore, in reading the Song with new Vietnamese eyes, it is necessary to be aware that without a cultural base the church will lose its freedom, rights, dignity and identity.¹³

4.1 Exclusive commitment

In Chapter Two, we studied the allegorical interpretations which read a spiritual meaning into the Song.¹⁴ The problems in the allegorical interpretations are that allegorists hold back the human love factor of the Song and express details in unreasonable ways in order to bring out a specific spiritual meaning from the text.¹⁵ We do not deny that the Song may have other levels of meaning, but our focus is that the primary meaning of the Song refers to nothing other than a human love relationship between the man and the woman in an exclusive and absolute commitment and loyalty.

¹¹ According to Jung, when we want to bring a light to a people, we need to concern their cultural heritage and spiritual values (C. G. Jung, *Introduction à l'essence de la Méthologie* [Paris: P. B. Payot, 1968], 170; and also Hoành Sơn, "Hội Nhập," 50).

¹² Song mentions that theology is the dialogue and practice which are not a comparison of the doctrines and claims to truth, but will allow churches in Asia to break out of isolation from their cultural environment to become part of the people in Asia in their exploration for the meaning of life and to perceive at a deeper level how God has been present and active in Asia in the past, present, and future (Song, "Asia," 162, 171, 173).

¹³ John Mansford Prior, "Faith and Culture in Dialogue," in *EAPR*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2007): 263.

¹⁴ The Song is a love-song of human love and desire. It does not contain religious teaching and is a book where God is not mentioned explicitly, except for an oblique allusion to God in 8:6 which is of doubtful and unclear character (cf. see the note on 8:6 discussed in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One).

¹⁵ See "the assessment of the allegorical interpretations" in point 2.1.3 of Chapter Two.

4.1.1 Absolute commitment

In the theme “dialogue of the lovers” of the previous chapter, the lovers in both sets of poetry fully commit to live together for the whole of life as one flesh with endless love.¹⁶ In Vietnamese culture, the husband and wife are called the life partners or life-mates meaning that their love is based on the affection and gratitude deep in their heart, and not on the material world or property.¹⁷

In the dialogue, the lovers in both poetries speak, hear, and respond to each other in tender language. They willingly share what they think and express earnestly their love from their heart, addressing each other by various sweet names. In the Song, the woman calls her lover: “you whom my soul loves” (1:7; cf. 3:1-4),¹⁸ and also affirms that the man belongs to the woman as much as she belongs to him (2:16; cf. 6:3; 7:11).¹⁹ The affirmation is a dream of the lovers for their future marriage in which they can possess each other totally.²⁰ The affirmation is a commitment including mutual love and loyalty, in the honesty of the determination to treat each other as a whole person.²¹ The commitment of love in the Song is a permanent commitment that binds the lovers together and never changes, even though the situations around them change. There is no love if it does not begin with commitment.²² Therefore, the eroticism in the Song goes beyond physical beauty, and the imagery is insufficient as physical depiction, because the lovers are not seeing physical facets as much as looking through them to their own emotion.²³ They love together in absolute commitment for their whole life.

¹⁶ See the dialogue of the lovers in point 3.2.3 of Chapter Three.

¹⁷ Lê Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa Việt Nam* (Vietnamese culture) (Gardena, California: NXB Kim Án Quán, 2003), 188, 253.

¹⁸ See note 190 of point 3.2.3 in Chapter Three.

¹⁹ The mutual belonging in Song 2:16 is similar to the covenant formula in Jer 7:23; 11:4; Ezek 34:30, 31; Hos 2:23 (see also notes 205 and 206 in point 3.2.3 of Chapter Three and the study of 2:16 in point 1.2.2.2 of Chapter One).

²⁰ As in Paul’s teaching “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Cor 7:4; cf. 1 Cor 6:16).

²¹ Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs* (BST; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 140.

²² Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 158.

²³ Tremper Longman, *The Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 59.

However, in present Vietnamese society, young people have different views from that of the older generations and their marriage is not a vital choice for the long term.²⁴ Therefore, young men and women decide to marry, but they do not intend to live the whole of life together, and even choose to live together without marriage.²⁵ The Song gives a message to young people to show that the relationship of lovers is not just empty words, but an absolute commitment that their love grows stronger and stronger during their whole life without fear of the loss of the love partner.²⁶ The absolute commitment in love helps the lovers in the Song to move ahead and overcome all the challenges to find a new joy and happiness. It is an indispensable power to the lovers to venture into their world with full involvement. The lovers in the Song always speak to each other sharing love, joy, desire, difficulties, and all else. The dialogues bring the lovers closer and promote a strong attachment to each other. From absolute commitment, the sexual desire of the lovers in the Song is not an act to satisfy the mean or physical desire, but it shows mutual affirmation and reassurance in their passionate love.

Moreover, the study of the theme “the heart and passion of love” of the previous chapter on both poetries also describes the lovers’ absolute commitment in which their love relationship is possessed by themselves, not for any outside party. Particularly the statement of the power of love in the Song is a permanent possession to bind the lovers tightly as one flesh (8:6).²⁷ In addition, the commitment of the lovers is also expressed by the man when he describes his beloved as “an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed” (4:12) to express his admiration for her; this includes her fidelity to him and that she remains his

²⁴ Nguyễn Xuyên, “Hôn Nhân Gia Đình trong Công Giáo” (Marriage and family in Catholics)” in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (France: Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Nguyễn Trường Tộ, 2002), 43.

²⁵ Hoàng Thịnh, “Tình Dục vị Thành Niên và Giải Pháp (Sexuality of minors and the solution),” in *Phụ Nữ Diễn Đàn* (*Forum of Women*), 271 (10/2006), 71-74; and also Đào Việt Anh, “Tình Dục Vị Thành Niên và Giải Pháp (Teenage sexuality and solution),” *Phụ Nữ Diễn Đàn* (*Forum of women*), 271 (10/2006), 73.

²⁶ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 250.

²⁷ See the discussion of 8:6 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One.

exclusive possession (4:9-5:1).²⁸ Such love is the exclusivity of their love relationship intended to witness against “free love.”²⁹

In ancient Israel, there was a common practice of polygamy³⁰ for many reasons—such as an increase of the labour force of a household, opportunity to beget a living male heir to inherit the property,³¹ love and lust, the desire for children, and diplomacy of the part of nation’s rulers.³² However, the Hebrew Bible presents monogamy as the most common form of marriage in the ancient Israel and early Judaism,³³ and the wisdom books never mention polygamy, but monogamy as the proper marriage relationship between a man and a woman.³⁴ Monogamy is the divine ideal in which God made marriage as a union between one man and one woman (Gen 2:18-24).³⁵

In Vietnam, polygamy was practiced in the feudal regime for reasons such as having children to maintain the continuity of a family line, worshipping ancestors, or serving wealthy men, but not for love.³⁶ In reality, beside the legal wife there are still

²⁸ John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 130-131.

²⁹ Nicolas J. Tromp, “Wisdom and the Canticle: Ct., 8, 6c-7b: Text, Character, Message and Import,” in *La Sagesse de L’ancien Testament*, ed. M. Gilbert (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1900), 94.

³⁰ For example, Lamech had two wives (Gen 4:19); Esau had three (Gen 36:2); Jacob, two (Gen 29:15-30-30:13); Gideon, many wives (Judg 8:30-31); Elkanah, two (1 Sam 1:2); David, many wives (2 Sam 5:13); Solomon, seven hundred wives (1 Kgs 11:3). See in O. J. Baab, “Marriage,” in *IDB: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1962), 280; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 25; and also C. Caverno, “Polygamy,” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 6962. Electronic Database Copyright 1996 by BibleSoft.

³¹ Leo G. Perdue, “The Israel and Early Jewish Family” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, eds. L. G. Perdue, J. Blenkinsopp, J. J. Collins, C. Meyers (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 185.

³² Baab, “Marriage,” 280. The practice of polygamy of kings of Israel was criticized as “And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself” in Deut 17:17 (NRSV). The practice seems to have been limited to the very wealthy, especially the patriarchs (Gen 29:15-30; 30:1-9; 36:1-5; Judg 8:30-31; 2 Sam 3:2-5; 5:13; 15:16; 16:21-22; 1 Kgs 11:3; 1 Sam 1:5-6) and it had been prohibited toward the end of the period before the common era and the Dead Sea community (Perdue, “Early Jewish Family,” 185).

³³ The Hebrew laws strongly refer to the practice of monogamy of marriage (Exod 20:17; 21:5; Lev 18:8, 16, 20; 20:10; 21:13; Num 5:12; Deut 5:21), though there are notable exceptions. See in Baab, “Marriage,” 281; and also Perdue, “Early Jewish Family,” 185.

³⁴ The wisdom books also refer to this form of marriage as in Prov 12:4; 18:22; 19:13; Eccl 9:9; Ps 128; and the Song (see in Vaux, *Families in Ancient Israel*, 25).

³⁵ In Vietnam, polygamy was prohibited in Ngô Đình Nhiệm’s time (1954-1963) (Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 323); cf. Baab, “Marriage,” 281.

³⁶ Ngọc Phan, Vũ. *Tục Ngữ, Ca Dao, Dân Ca Việt Nam* (Vietnamese proverbs, folk sayings, folk songs) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Khoa Học và Xã Hội, 1998), 406-410; Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 323.

men who have a second or a third wife without a marriage certificate.³⁷ The practice of polygamy has caused problems in many Vietnamese families such as repression, injustice, quarrels, disharmony, jealousy in love, cruelty, and suffering.³⁸ However, the Vietnamese traditional value is reflected in the life of the people through the folk sayings which speak definitively against this practice, and which always give prominence to monogamy in the life of the people.³⁹

The lovers in the Song possess each other as their own to imply that disloyalty and polygamy are to be avoided.⁴⁰ Therefore, their positive role could play a role in building modern Vietnamese culture and society according to the Vietnamese traditional and biblical love values, and also highlights weaknesses neglected in the culture. In the light of the Song interpreted in the Vietnamese context, the Song could understand that polygamy is unnatural, wrong towards women in denying their rights and privileges of monogamous marriage.⁴¹

4.1.2 Loyalty

The loyalty in love is shown in the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics as noted in the theme “the heart and passion of love.” The loyalty of the lovers in both the poetries describes a power of love that urges them to keep their commitment and remain unchangeable even if every thing around them has been changed. It is an important characteristic seen in both cultures in the past and also at the present time. Especially in

³⁷ Phan Kế Bính, *Việt Nam Phong Tục* (Vietnamese Custom) (California: NXB Xuân Thu, 1996), 62-65.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Vietnamese folk sayings honestly express the thoughts and emotions of the people in their love relationship as:

“Đói lòng ăn nắm lá sung,
 Chồng một thì lấy, chồng chung thì đừng” (see in Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 407).
 (Feeling an empty stomach is to eat a bunch of fig leaves,
 Your own husband is to marry, but to share a husband is “not on”).

The folk sayings also condemn the greed of men who have many wives as:

“Sông bao nhiêu nước cũng vừa,
 Trai bao nhiêu vợ cũng chưa bằng lòng.” (Ngọc Phan, *Tục Ngữ*, 411).
 (River never rejects water,
 Man taking many wives always feels not enough).

⁴⁰ Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 256.

⁴¹ Caverno, “Polygamy,” in *ISBE Bible Dictionary*, 6962.

the Song, the description of a permanent seal is the inseparable love of the two lovers compared to Death, Sheol, and fire.⁴² The woman requires her lover to place her as a seal on his heart and arm because she wants to be his most personal and precious possession in which her love relationship will carry on in an unshakable commitment of loyalty and faithfulness.⁴³ She describes her strong emotion as “Love is strong as death” (8:6) to show her desire for no rivalry in her love and the holding on to her lover even having to surpass the power of Sheol.⁴⁴ She also expresses the power and energy of love in the image of a flash of fire which cannot be put out. The loyalty and faithful commitment in the Song is based on the absolute commitment to look forward in the same direction and way of life without change or exception.

In Vietnamese tradition, the loyalty of a husband and wife is taken as a matter of course. However, loyalty wavers because many young people in Vietnam today follow the new culture which they see as a civilization in progress and they regard the old tradition as a backward culture.⁴⁵ The new culture attacks the stronghold of loyalty in the love relationship in the old Vietnamese tradition in three ways: the tendency to appreciate the material world, rather than affection and gratitude; the tendency of selfishness, not caring for family of husband or wife; and the conception of marriage by contract, not by loyalty.⁴⁶ Therefore, many temptations break the commitment in marriage and push many couples into painful situations in Vietnam as mentioned above.

The loyalty in the Song encourages all couples to be faithful in marriage and to avoid temptations. The woman in the Song also compares her strong love to an abundance of water which is inadequate to extinguish the flame of love, even rivers

⁴² See the discussion of 8:6 in point 1.2.1.5 of Chapter One; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2005), 250; see also in 1 Kgs 21:8; Gen 38:18; Hag 2:23; Jer 22:24. The seal is also seen in 2 Tim 2:19 and by this seal the Lord knows those who are his.

⁴³ See “The Heart and Passion of Love” in point 3.2.4 of Chapter Three; and also Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 225-227.

⁴⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 251-253. Paul also describes in 2 Cor 5:14 that the love of Christ compels him to serve God wholeheartedly. The woman in the Song compares jealousy to Sheol in 8:6; this is similar to passages in Nah 1:2; Zech 1:14-17; Ezek 36:5-6; 38:19; Isa 42:13 which describe God as a jealous God (Longman, *Song of Songs*, 211).

⁴⁵ Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 334.

⁴⁶ According to Vietnamese tradition, a wife has responsibility to care for the family of her husband (Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 254, 257, 334-338).

cannot drown it (8:7), even though there may be bad circumstances such as the pain of separation, the uncertainty of the present and future, and the loss of health or means of livelihood.⁴⁷ Indeed, human love is beyond the strength and control of cosmic forces of chaos.⁴⁸ The woman in the Song also speaks from her experience of love that it is not for sale and it cannot be exchanged for things or money,⁴⁹ but it must be given to the one whom she loves without any condition.⁵⁰ The love lyrics in Vietnamese literature always focus on faithfulness in the love between lovers as the way of life of the people.⁵¹ For loyalty, couples in past Vietnamese generations lived together in poor or prosperous situations, in weak or strong health,⁵² and they willingly shared life together as the proverb “của chồng công vợ (*property of husband, wage of wife*)” to mean that both husband and wife combine their forces to build up their family.⁵³ Therefore, the broken family was rarely seen in past Vietnamese generations.⁵⁴

In terms of loyalty, it cannot accept the third person, but only the two lovers, as God has designed for human beings “For this reason the man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame” (Gen 2:24, 25).⁵⁵ A triangle of love, unilateral love, homosexuality, and sexual promiscuity are not biblically acceptable ways for the love relationship, and are not found in the Song. Therefore, the loyalty described in the

⁴⁷ Gledhill, *Message of the Song*, 234.

⁴⁸ Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 99.

⁴⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 257.

⁵⁰ In the same way, the love of God also cannot be bought by any money, as described in Isa 55:1.

⁵¹ The way is expressed through material things, behaviours, feelings, thinking, beliefs, values, and symbols (Francisco Claver, “The Encounter between the Gospel and the Values of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: Challenges of the Future,” *EAPR*, vol. 39, no. 4 [2002]: 354; and see also “The Heart and Passion of Love” in point 3.2.4 of Chapter Three).

⁵² Xuyên, “Hôn Nhân,” 47.

⁵³ Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 253-254.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁵⁵ W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 39-40; The love relationship between a man and a woman is no shame before the fall (Gen 2:25), but when sin entered with the fall, the result is that they were banished from Eden (Gen 3:24) and shame came out of that, which is why clothing was necessary to cover the nakedness of the man and the woman (Gen 3:7), and God said to the woman that her desire would be to her husband and he would rule over her (Gen 3:16); cf. Williams, “Sexuality, Human,” 729.

Song is a natural part of love in the Bible, extended in the ancient Vietnamese poetry and Vietnamese culture which also hold the ideal of monogamy, but Vietnamese young people today neglect this. In addition, the interaction between both poetries through the loyalty of the lovers provides an important source for doing theology in Asia in which one can see how God's action is valid in their own social reality.⁵⁶

4.2 Erotic nature of love relationship

The language of love found in the Vietnamese literature in Chapter Three just reflects some aspects about love in the social context and some common external evidences of the respective culture of the Vietnamese. But, the Song gives an entire picture of the love relationship of the two lovers in the reality of life, the equality between men and women and personal experiences.⁵⁷ The picture will shed a light on the present Vietnamese society and church, at least through the expression of the erotic nature of the love relationship in two aspects, enjoyment of love relationship and fulfillment of sexual desire.

4.2.1 Enjoyment of love relationship

In Chapter Three, the lovers in the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics express their joy freely in the manner of physical pleasure in many ways, as shown in words of affection, kissing deeply, smelling each other's fragrance, and embracing each other.⁵⁸ On the foundation of exclusive and absolute commitment, and loyalty in love, the lovers rejoice to eat, drink, and to fill them with love which are all natural experiences between a man and a woman in love.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ CCA News, "People's Theology: Indigenous People Call for a Paradigm Shift in Doing Asian Theology," in *Indigenous People: Partnership for Action and Dignity*, vol. 42. no. 3 (Sep, 2007), 4-7.

⁵⁷ Hendrik Viviers, "Eco-Delight in the Song of Songs," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Tradition*, ed. Norman C. Habel & Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 154.

⁵⁸ See in point 3.2.5 of Chapter Three.

⁵⁹ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 83; R. A. J. Gagnon, "Sexuality," in *DTIB*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 32; and also Hendrik Viviers, "The Rhetoricity of the 'Body' in the Song of Songs," in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps, (JSNTSup 195; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 241.

The enjoyment of a sexual relationship in the Song is relevant to the Vietnamese culture.⁶⁰ The enjoyment seen in both poetries is often expressed by a man and woman and binds them to become husband and wife in a family in the future. Beside the effect of the strict prohibition in the old tradition, the lovers in the Vietnamese love lyrics freely express their love in their working fields, and enjoy their sexual pleasure.⁶¹ Thus, the enjoyment discussed is based on the natural relationship of one man and one woman to show that its foundation is heterosexual monogamy, rooted in the Bible and extended to the life of the people in Vietnamese culture. Such understanding will provide a new way to interpret the Bible within the cultural context in Vietnam which does not depend on countries alien to the life of the people.⁶²

Furthermore, the lovers in the Song enjoy each other in the fullness of divine blessing given without shame and guilt.⁶³ Their love is developed naturally from their heart in an idyllic atmosphere with nature imageries such as the blossom flowers in the spring time, birds, gardens, hill, mountains, etc. On the contrary, the present Vietnamese society in a broken world reveals many people who are sexually abused, who are married because of the results of adultery, and who are in bondage to lustful pornography and to people who have stepped over the proper boundaries in courtship.⁶⁴ All those problems bring pain, hopelessness and sin before God because love is not developed in natural ways.⁶⁵ In the Song, sexuality and the love relationship are necessary to human

⁶⁰ The Vietnamese cultural tradition has been built over nearly five thousand years (4888 years), and the influence of Western culture began in the twentieth century (Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 147-148, 199); also see note 7 of point 3.1.1 in Chapter Three.

⁶¹ Under the control of the old Vietnamese tradition, lovers could not express their love freely and openly to each other (see more on point 3.1.1 of Chapter Three).

⁶² Stanley J. Samartha, "The Asian Context: Source and Trends," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: SPCK, 1991), 36-37.

⁶³ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 158.

⁶⁴ Lê Tường Vy, "Bạo Hành Trong Gia Đình (Violence on the family)," in *Phụ Nữ Diễn Đàn* (Forum of women), 281 (8/2007), 24-25.

⁶⁵ According to Hoàng Sơn, many young people in Vietnam today do not understand the values of their culture. Therefore, they easily absorb new cultural movements instead of keeping their own culture (Hoàng Sơn, "Hội Nhập," 51, 55).

experience and fit with the rest of the Bible to teach how to live a happy and good life.⁶⁶ As we mentioned in the previous chapters, the meaning of love in the Song is the love of two wise lovers with earnestness and lack of shame. It does not show a greater or deeper knowledge of love or sexual practices,⁶⁷ but it is the personal joyful experience of love.

Moreover, compared to the Song, enjoyment in the love relationship is faded in Vietnamese culture because the old tradition has shaped negatively the mind of the people, such as the inequality in the love relationship between a man and woman as “trọng nam khinh nữ” (*to value men above women*),⁶⁸ the control of parents in marriage, and heavily influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism which teaches “điệt dục” (*to repress all desires*).⁶⁹ The Song can also aid in critiquing the less healthy aspects in Vietnamese context, such as the inequality is seen throughout the Vietnamese love lyrics in which the man takes a positive role in showing his love and desire, rather than the woman.

In the Song, even though of different genders, the lovers do not use power to possess each other. Each expresses the desires, delights, and praises of the other, and each invites the other to come to the garden of love. The lovers know a moment of hesitation but desire sexual fulfillment.⁷⁰ Contrary to the woman of Vietnamese culture, the woman in the Song even holds the active role in her love relationship and speaks more than her lover.⁷¹ She is present in every scene of the Song,⁷² and her voice is heard

⁶⁶ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 401; G. Lloyd. Carr, “The Love Poetry Genre in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East: Another Look at Inspiration,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 496-498.

⁶⁷ I do not totally agree with those who seek specific reference to genitalia and coitus in the text of the Song as seen in J. C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977); and Adrian Chua, *Romantic in God's Will* (Sowers-wheat, 2000), because it is necessary to consider that there are many uncertain, ambiguous and various meanings of words and phrases in the text of the Song.

⁶⁸ Kế Bình, *Việt Nam Phong Tục*, 60.

⁶⁹ Vietnamese culture originated from three traditional religions: Buddhism (623-544 B.C.), Taoism (604-524 B.C.), and Confucianism (551-479 B.C.), cf. Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 101, 148. Buddhism entered Vietnam more than 1000 years ago and integrated with the spiritual life of the majority of the people, cf. Mai Thanh Hải, *Từ Điển Tôn Giáo* (Religious dictionary) (Ba Đình, Thanh Hóa: NXB Từ Điển Bách Khoa, 2002), 491, 503.

⁷⁰ Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 307.

⁷¹ For example, in a social statement, she goes out to find her lover, does not wait at home; she seeks to satisfy her desire and does not demur in telling her lover about her feelings.

in most of the events, whereas the man's voice is heard less.⁷³ She is not ashamed to show her desire for love and is ready to give freely to her lover, but she is careful to keep herself completely for him, and remains steadfast in love even in the face of death.⁷⁴ Throughout the Song, the woman breaks through family restrictions, and societal expectations and shrugs off companions' teasing. The limitations in her society make her pursue her purpose more wisely.⁷⁵ Therefore, the lovers seen in the Song are equal and one has no authority over the other; this brings harmony into their love relationship and they belong exclusively to one another.⁷⁶ The equality is a model for Vietnamese culture and highlights the weakness in the culture.⁷⁷

Furthermore, in the biblical story man's dominion over woman is a consequence of the Fall (Gen 3:16), not from a theology of the created order.⁷⁸ The inequality between a man and a woman is the result of human sin after the Fall and this result is exemplified in many cultures including the Vietnamese culture.⁷⁹ The equality in the Song turns Vietnamese culture to the original point of human history in which love is harmony and the man's desire becomes the woman's delight.⁸⁰

The sexual love relationship in the Song is redeemed from the Fall and spoken openly and freely in the equality of the lovers.⁸¹ The equality will bring joy to the lovers by listening to each other's opinion, supporting each other to find solutions to problems, and protecting each other. Therefore, the enjoyment in love does not cover each other unilaterally, nor overpower by wealth or property, but it is the respect, joy, protection,

⁷² For example, in the first poems (1:2-8) the woman expresses her desire for the kisses of her lover's mouth and her apology.

⁷³ The man first speaks at 1:9-11 as encouragement to his beloved.

⁷⁴ G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 54.

⁷⁵ Fox, *Song of Songs*, 310.

⁷⁶ Ogden, and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 82.

⁷⁷ See "Love in Vietnamese Culture" in point 3.1.1 of Chapter Three; and also Tường Vy, "Bạo Hành," 79-80.

⁷⁸ William C. Williams, "Sexuality, Human," in *EDBT* (1996), 729.

⁷⁹ The NT teaches that the responsibility of husband and wife is that they are a witness of love in which the husband must love his wife as Christ loves his church and the wife has to respect her husband (Matt 20:25-28; Gal 3:28; Eph 5: 22-33) and they are both equal in every aspect of life. See also the study of "Mutual belonging" in point 1.2.2.2 in Chapter One.

⁸⁰ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 159-160.

⁸¹ Hendrik Viviers, "The Rhetoricity of the 'Body' in the Song of Songs," 252.

and the care of each other that are important characteristics to bring enjoyment and happiness in their love relationship.⁸² If the love relationship of human beings is a gift given, and the pleasure of sexual desire is a part of God's intention,⁸³ it needs to be respected, protected, and kept carefully as a gift in order to experience the mystery and joy of a love relationship in married life.⁸⁴ And behind, above, and through the expression of human love, the Song is a paean of praise to God, the Creator, who demonstrated his love by sustaining our love.⁸⁵

The love relationship of the lovers is enjoyment and happiness as discovered, not only in the beginnings of love when the love is blossoming in its springtime, but also continued during the whole of marriage as God's purpose to bind two opposite sexes together.⁸⁶ However, marriage and family are a major problem in Vietnamese society today because of an increase in the numbers of broken families and divorce, and the result is that many children live on the streets and become victims of drug addiction or other evils such as plunder, killing for robbery and sex crime with children.⁸⁷ In addition, among married couples a majority of lovers have fallen into painful situations or they have to put an end to their life.⁸⁸ It is not because they are poor, but because they cannot find any satisfaction for their love or because they are betrayed by their love partner.⁸⁹ The Song gives a clear picture of the lovers showing that the end of love is not the inability of a lover to pursue love but that it needs both the lovers and other people to

⁸² James R. Halstead, "Sexuality," in *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. in Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 902.

⁸³ Gagnon, "Sexuality," 739.

⁸⁴ Halstead, "Sexuality," 902.

⁸⁵ David George Moor and Daniel L. Akin, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Publishers, 2003), 342.

⁸⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 53-54.

⁸⁷ Nguyễn Khải Hòa, "Bí Mật Phòng The (The pillow talk)," *Văn Nghệ Tiên Phong* (Pioneer arts), 767 (2007), 53. According to 'news in brief' in Vietnam, sex offending with children has become a big problem and has spread all over Vietnam. The authorities in the country have not found any effective solution to the problem (Vietnamese News in Brief "Nạn Trẻ Em Bán Dâm Phát Triển Mạnh (The development of the problem of child prostitution)," in *Văn Nghệ Tiên Phong* (Pioneer arts), 756 (2007), 30, 78-79; and Lê Tường Vy, "Xâm Hại Tinh Dục Trẻ Em (Sex offender with children)," *Phụ Nữ Diễn Đàn* (Forum of women), 286 [9/2007], 79-80).

⁸⁸ Nguyễn Tử Quang, *Ái Tình và Hôn Nhân* (Eros and marriage) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Cà Mau, 2003), 82-83.

⁸⁹ Tử Quang, *Ái Tình*, 82-83.

participate in the race of their love to achieve its target. Therefore, the first premise of enjoyment in a (love) relationship is based on love. In such love, no one stretches out the hand to beg for love from the other, for if love is “successful” in this way, that love is a painful love. Love in the Song is not to compel the other who has to agree to the love, but it is a cooperation, choice, and agreement voluntarily between the lovers.⁹⁰

In addition, the lovers in the Song experience more of enjoyment and happiness in their love each day of their life. That is the reason why at the end of the Song they still desire kisses from each other (8:1), to eat and drink love (8:2),⁹¹ to embrace each other (8:3) or hear each other’s voice (8:13), and invite each other to come to enjoy their love (8:14). The Song shows that a love relationship is not a tomb of love, for if it is not buried in the tomb, it is not sexual love. The second premise in enjoyment in love is the build-up of love day by day as a rose which needs care and water day by day. Sexuality in the Song expresses the commitment of the lovers with joy, union, relationship, and celebration of God-given human love,⁹² and it is not all about sin, disobedience, or having children.⁹³ However, in most Asian cultures including Vietnamese, the primary purpose of marriage is not for love but to raise children in order to maintain the continuity of a family line.⁹⁴ On the contrary, the primary concern in the Song is the expression of enjoyment in sexual love and also a seeking of intimacy rather than procreation, as seen in Proverbs, such as “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. A lovely deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love” (Prov 5:18-19; “the way of a man with a girl” (Prov 30:19); and the wisdom of women (Prov 31:1-31). These are linked with Ecclesiastes such as “Enjoy life with your wife whom you love . . .” (Eccl 9:9). The pleasure of sexual

⁹⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁹¹ The verb **בָּרַח** does not appear in the verse 8:2, but it continues the woman’s desire for love intimately and compassionately.

⁹² John G. Snaith, *Song of Songs*, (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 134.

⁹³ Even though the use of sexual relations for procreation is obvious in the Bible as “be fruitful and multiply” (e.g., Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 35:11). See also Carrey Ellen Walsh, “A Startling Voice: Woman’s Desire in the Song of Songs,” *BTB* 28 (1998): 130.

⁹⁴ Andrew Hwang and Samuel Goh, *The Song of Songs: Asia Bible Commentary Series*. (Singapore: Asia Theological Association Publisher, 2002), 31.

desire in the Song is part of God's good creation.⁹⁵ Through the Song, one can see that problems of sexual relationship in Vietnamese society today show that many people, who live in a depraved culture with social evils, do not keep the good habits and customs in their culture, and have wandered far away from the ideal of a covenantal, intimate relationship taught in the Bible.

4.2.2 The fulfillment of sexual desire

As we studied in the second chapter, the meaning of love in the Song is not symbolic. It does not present historical or religious experiences about love between God and Israel, Christ and the church or the union of divine male and female, but primarily it is human love in which the lovers' desire is fulfilled through expressions of love. The fulfillment of desire in love is the nature of erotic relationship. It is the reason the lovers in both poetries enjoy each other's presence and satisfaction in their love as mentioned in such themes as "lovesickness" and "the heart and passion of love."⁹⁶

In lovesickness, the lovers in both poetries seek the presence of the love partner in order that they can satisfy their desire, as described in the Song "for your love is better than wine."⁹⁷ Their desire is based on true intimacy and its value rather than feeling or sex. The lovers' feeling is strong at the beginnings of love. It is an excited and ebullient love. However, the feeling gradually disappears when the lovers step into marriage, when they are familiar with each other, take over the many responsibilities of a husband/wife and family, and face problems in their life. Today many young people in Vietnam are influenced by pop culture which leads them to think that they can do anything as long as they feel good.⁹⁸ They base their love on feelings, rather than serious and committed love, that lead to many problems in marriage such as pain in the love relationship, broken and violent family, conflict, and divorce.⁹⁹ The desire of the lovers

⁹⁵ Gagnon, "Sexuality," 739.

⁹⁶ See points 3.2.2 and 3.2.4 in Chapter Three.

⁹⁷ Love and wine are often used in the Song (1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:10; 8:2) and the man also expresses the same comparison in 4:10.

⁹⁸ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 57.

⁹⁹ Hoàng Thịnh, "Tình Dục," 71-74.

in the Song is fulfilled properly only in love which must go with responsibility, sacrifice, respect, understanding, faithfulness, and commitment.¹⁰⁰ It also shows that sexual love based on physical feelings of young people in Vietnam is a wrong motive and far from the love as reflected in the Vietnamese love lyrics.

One cannot deny that love is a way of displaying sexual desire which exists in human beings. Even though the Song is explicitly erotic and may describe coitus it is not about prurient, pornographic, or unemotional acts of love-making. What is depicted throughout the Song and in the Vietnamese love lyrics as studied are the emotions and enjoyments of the true intimacy that bring about a happy and lasting marriage, rather than only sex. However, the information from the results of surveys and daily newspapers in Vietnamese society today shows that young people commence a sexual life early, while they do not know how to protect themselves from dangers of sexual temptations.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the big problem today is that many young women are pregnant unwillingly and that leads to an abortion situation, and unwanted babies.¹⁰² In addition, the early sexual life of young people affects their health and mentality, as they are unable to protect themselves from the disease of the age, HIV.¹⁰³

The problems above exist because many young people base their love and fulfill their desire only on satisfaction of sensual desire and nothing else. They are contrary to

¹⁰⁰ Xuyên, "Hôn Nhân," 43-53.

¹⁰¹ The unhealthy depictions of the sexuality of teenagers and young people are a warning for all parents, educators and church leaders in Vietnam, and also the world. See Đào Xuân Dũng, *Giáo Dục giới Tính Về sự Phát Triển Vị Thành Niên* (Sexual education about the development of minors) (Hà Nội: NXB Đại Học Quốc Gia, 2003), 11.

¹⁰² Việt Anh, "Tình Dục," 71. The maternity hospitals in Vietnam today show that there are many young girls around 13-22 years old who ask to have an abortion every day. It is a thorny problem in Vietnam (see Tin Vắn Trong Nước [Vietnamese news in brief] in *Văn Nghệ Tiền Phong* [Pioneer arts], 744 [2006], 32, 80; and Việt Anh, "Tình Dục," 72).

¹⁰³ Khải Hòa, "Bí Mật," 52. In Vietnam, the number of HIV patients has doubled in 2007 to 130.000 patients, and AIDS has tripled to 25.000 patients; incidence of death has more than doubled to 14.000 (Nhị Nguyên, "Dịch AIDS Lan Nhanh ở Việt Nam [Increasing AIDS in Vietnam]," in *Văn Nghệ Tiền Phong* [Pioneer arts], 770 [2008], 6). According to Vietnamese News, each year from 2006-2010, has added 30 or 40 thousands of HIV patients and the number of HIV patients will be 300-500 thousands in the year 2010 (see Vietnamese News "Sida Tại Việt Nam [Aids in Vietnam]," in *Văn Nghệ Tiền Phong* [Pioneer arts], 770 [2008], 79); the fire of destruction of HIV and AIDS is sweeping not only Vietnamese Society, but also the continent of Africa and throughout the world (see more on B. L. Gill-Austern, "Practices of Exclusion Fuel the Global Aids Crisis: The Fire that Keeps Burning," *JPT* 17, no. 1 [2007]: 36-51).

the beauties and the values of the sexual relationship which concerns purity in marriage and honouring of the marriage partner, as shown in the study of the Song and Vietnamese tradition in the previous chapter.¹⁰⁴ The love relationship of the lovers in the Song is not expressed (merely) through ἔρωσ which is traditionally identified with sexual passion,¹⁰⁵ but through אַהֲבָה (ἀγάπη in LXX) which refers to all “the concepts of passion, sexual attraction, friendship, obedience, loyalty, duty, and commitment to the other person.”¹⁰⁶ One does not deny that the love relationship includes sensual desire but as the lovers in the Song, their desire is fulfilled in love relating to the wonderful nature imagery around them, praising the beauty of each other in both internal and external appearance. The nature of sexual desire in the Song is understood as producing physical pleasure, relational bonding, and the gift of children and as an outpouring of human energy, enjoyment of life, as against pornography, some types of sexual violence, seduction or sexual harassment.¹⁰⁷ The Vietnamese church, as light and salt in the world, cannot ignore the problem.

Therefore, the Song provides a deep understanding of the role of sexuality in human nature which is necessary in preaching and teaching in the church.¹⁰⁸ It does not mean that young people are obliged to hinder a love relationship, but rather helped to heighten their awareness of sexual desire rightly. It also reminds the young people to avoid the tragedies in their love relationship, to enjoy happiness and put their sexuality in the wider context of an intimate committed relationship.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Hà Hoàng Tâm, *Nói Với Bạn Trẻ Về Tình Yêu* (Talking to young people about the love relationship) (CA, Garden Grove: NXB Thời Điểm, 1993), 48-49; and Tử Quang, *Ái Tình*, 26-27; and also point 3.2.5 of Chapter Three.

¹⁰⁵ C. Brown, “Love: φιλέω,” in *NTDT*, vol. 2 (1976), 538-551; and see also point 1.1.1.3 of Chapter One.

¹⁰⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 63; and see also the study of אַהֲבָה in point 1.1.1 and its expressions in point 1.2.1 of Chapter One.

¹⁰⁷ Christine E. Gudorf, “Body, Self and Sexual Desire: Reflections on the Current Evidence,” in *Body and Sexuality: Theological-Pastoral Perspectives of Woman in Asia*, eds. Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si (Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, “Anthropology, Sexuality and Sexual Ethics,” in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, eds. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006), 119-121.

¹⁰⁹ Tử Quang, *Ái Tình*, 14.

The fulfillment of desire based on love drives the lovers together as seen in the Song as also in the Vietnamese love lyrics. They experience joy in their heart which refers to both their emotions and thoughts.¹¹⁰ It is not a moment of sexual pleasure or just the satisfaction of sexual desire, or a fragile happiness, but it is a power of love stirring up in the lovers' hearts. The power of love also urges them to overcome all difficulties and remain faithfully together. However, in present Vietnamese society, there are too many young couples who do not have any permanent love in their marriage, because they live together temporarily as a husband and wife rather than bound together for the whole of life.¹¹¹ In the Song, love means a permanent seal to bind the lovers for the whole of life. In this seal they are faithful, keeping marital commitments and are patient to endure all kind of troubles, hardships, difficult circumstances, and distresses. They willingly give themselves to each other and receive the other with gratefulness because their love is the most priceless gift given by God. That is why "the Song of Songs" is the greatest poem about love and the two lovers praise each other: "for your love is better than wine" (1:2, 4) and "how much more pleasing is your love than wine" (4:10).

The study of the fulfillment of sexual desire in both poetries shows that they interrelate with each other and shed light on each other. Such interrelationship allows the church to recognize how effective the message of the Song might be, when interpreted into the Vietnamese context. As Song mentions, "the Bible and Asian resources such as historical, social, political, cultural and religious," will relate to, and illuminate each other, which will help Christians to identify at a deeper level how God has been present and active in Asia.¹¹²

4.3 Intimacy and warning

The Song is the greatest poem in the Bible about a sexual relationship in which the two lovers represent all men and women and their love relationship is a model for human

¹¹⁰ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 40-58; and see also point 3.2.4 of Chapter Three.

¹¹¹ Hoàng Thịnh, "Tình Dục," 71-74.

¹¹² Song, "Asia," 173; and also note 7 of this chapter.

love in every age and in any culture.¹¹³ It invites the readers to celebrate with them the joys of intimate relationship, and also to learn from their warnings in love.

4.3.1 Intimacy of the love relationship

In the dialogue between the Bible and the Vietnamese cultural context,¹¹⁴ both the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics express the celebration of love of the intimate relationship of the lovers in various scenes as seen through themes in the previous chapter. In the intimate relationship, the lovers enjoy expressing naturally their deep love towards each other in their own world. They celebrate the joys of kisses, embraces, fragrances, sweet voices and words, and praise of each other's beauty, even though the intimacy in the love relationship described in the ancient Vietnamese poetry is more subtle. The intimacy of a love relationship is a magnetic force to draw the lovers together in joy and happiness.

In the Vietnamese context, there are many young people who want to have intimate relationships in order to satisfy their physical desires and sex.¹¹⁵ The result is to bring more problems in marriage and the family in Vietnamese society.¹¹⁶ In addition, there are deleterious effects on health: the rate of transmission of HIV and other transmissible diseases through sexual intercourse, and abortions and illicit pregnancies are situations which have increased alarmingly.¹¹⁷ Such context is far from the sexual relationship of the lovers described in the Song. The lovers' love relationship does not describe sex as a final goal or the temporary fulfillment of desires and feelings, but it is

¹¹³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 8-10.

¹¹⁴ In a cross-cultural hermeneutical model, there are two identities (Asian and Christian) which seem parallel with the two texts (Asian text: cultural heritage, historical traditions, religious beliefs, folks and folk tales from all ages, and the biblical text). Such identities and texts are held "in a creative, dynamic, inter-related, interacting, interpenetrating and integration way so that dignity and integrity are safe guarded" (S. S. M. Kwan, "Asian Critical Hermeneutics amidst the Economic Development of Asia," *AJT*, vol. 13, no. 2 [1999]: 359; see also Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspective," 37-38; idem, "Cross Textual Hermeneutic," 88).

¹¹⁵ Hoàng Thịnh, "Tình Dục," 71-74.

¹¹⁶ Tường Vy, "Bạo Lực," 24-25.

¹¹⁷ Lê Nam, *Tình Yêu và Sức Khỏe* (Love and health) (Hà Chí Minh City: NXB Thanh Niên, 2001), 6-7; Tường Vy, "Bạo Lực," 24-25; and also "Tin Vắn Trong Nước (Vietnamese news in brief)," in *Văn Nghệ Tiền Phong* (Pioneer arts), 744 (2006): 32, 80.

an experience of joy in the heart based on the absolute commitment and loyalty as mentioned in the previous points.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the intimacy of the sexual love relationship in the Song is God's purpose spoken openly and freely in sexuality and the equality of the lovers.¹¹⁹

With Vietnamese's eyes, the Song might indicate that God understands human love and creates us as loving, sexual, passionate, tender, and fragile beings. Sexual relationship shows God's intention to bring lovers a lifetime of pleasure and commitment, enjoyment and holiness,¹²⁰ in which they discover divine blessing as seen in the Song.¹²¹ Indeed, sexual education is a concern not only in Vietnam, but also all over the world.¹²² Therefore, at the present time, possibly more urgently than at any previous time, it is important to see and learn from the complete picture of the love relationship as presented in the Song.¹²³

4.3.2 Warnings in love

In the celebration of the joy of the love relationship in the Song and in the Vietnamese love lyrics, the lovers know how to control themselves from dangers of sexual desires which destroy their love relationship.¹²⁴ The control is a good decision to show that the two lovers are serious in their love and future in God's purpose and design.¹²⁵

As mentioned, both Hebrew and Vietnamese cultures have a serious commandment about restraint that sex is fulfilled only in marriage and the loss of

¹¹⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 11-13.

¹¹⁹ Viviers, "The Rhetoricity," 252.

¹²⁰ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 83; Gagnon, "Sexuality," 739.

¹²¹ If a sexual relationship in God's sight is good and holy, it does not mean that celibacy is holier, but according to Garrett, the gift of celibacy allows many to have more time to serve God and the church (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 118). Celibacy rarely occurs in ancient Israel and early Judaism (Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 189).

¹²² Because the problem of sexual immorality is not from the East or the West, but from the fall of man (Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 29).

¹²³ *Ibid.*; and see also Fox, *Song of Songs*, 305.

¹²⁴ See point 3.2.5 of Chapter Three.

¹²⁵ Moore and Akin, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 154-155.

virginity before marriage brings shame in both cultures.¹²⁶ In Vietnamese culture and the church context especially, keeping virginity until the marriage day is a very important virtue of a woman and sex is only fulfilled within a life-long marriage.¹²⁷ She will be respected not only by her husband but also be supported by the parents and relatives of herself and her husband.¹²⁸ However, in present Vietnamese society, many people understand and treat sex as central to their life and they live for sex and without a sex life, their life is nothing.¹²⁹ Many young people feel uncomfortable when their family instructs them in what they should and should not do in their love relationship.¹³⁰ So, they have gone far away from the boundaries of what they should do. If the young people are not concerned about their family's instruction in their love relationship, and break all the rules of their culture, their future will be uprooted and become meaningless, a source of pain and hopelessness.¹³¹ The Song mentions a warning about the danger of love and not just illicit sex, such as the powerful love in 8:6-7 which leads to joy but also to heartbreak and even sickness (2:5; 5:8), and reminds the "daughters of Jerusalem" not to arouse love before its time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Therefore, in the love relationship the Song gives both celebration and warning concerning all human emotions, romantic love, and its physical expression and sexuality.

As in the Song, parents in the Vietnamese culture often teach their daughters to keep their virginity, and do not have any sexual relations before marriage, and show complete fidelity to their husband during marriage.¹³² Keeping purity in marriage is not only to cultivate a perfect marriage but also to obey God's commandment (Exod 20:14; cf. 1 Cor 6: 18-20). The lovers in the Song listen to the wise instructions of their family

¹²⁶ Hendrik Viviers "Clothed and Unclothed in the Song of Songs" in *OTE* 12/3 (1999): 619-620; and also Việt Chương, *Từ Điển Thành Ngữ, Tục Ngữ, Ca Dao Việt Nam*, vol. 1 (Đồng Nai: NXB Đồng Nai, 1994), 324; Phan Thuận Thảo, *Tìm Hiểu Phong Tục Việt Nam Xưa và Nay* (An understanding of Vietnamese custom in the old time and at present) (Hồ Chí Minh City: NXB Tổng Hợp, 2005), 33.

¹²⁷ See point 3.2.5 of Chapter Three.

¹²⁸ Khải Hòa, "Bí Mật," 52-55.

¹²⁹ Nhị Nguyên, "Dịch AIDS," 6.

¹³⁰ Hoàng Thịnh, "Tình Dục," 71-74.

¹³¹ Hoành Sơn, "Hội Nhập," 55; Jung, *Introduction à l'essence de la Methodologie*, 108-109.

¹³² Việt Chương, *Từ Điển Thành Ngữ, Tục Ngữ, Ca Dao Việt Nam* (Vietnamese idioms, proverbs, folk sayings dictionary), vol. 2 (Đồng Nai: NXB Đồng Nai, 1994), 324.

and others (8:9-10) to keep themselves pure in love from sexual misbehaviour and foolishness before marriage. Warnings in love do not prohibit both young people and adults having relationships with the opposite sex, but provide them with necessary knowledge about love, relationship and sexuality in marriage, teaching how to protect them, respect each other, and preventing young people from temptations, especially in sexual relationships in premarital affairs.¹³³ Therefore, in the Vietnamese context the Song could show the idea that a sexual relationship is a paradox between freedom and restriction.¹³⁴

Sex is like a fire which must be kept carefully within boundaries, not allowing the fire of sexual temptation to burn and to spoil the purity of a relationship before marriage.¹³⁵ This is the reason why the woman in the Song gives a serious warning to the daughters of Jerusalem (2:7; cf. 3:5; 8:4).¹³⁶ In the warning, she tells the daughters that they should not hurry but wait until love blossoms naturally in due time.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, the woman also warns herself that the time is not yet ripe for the fulfillment of her desire. Therefore, to build up the love relationship, sexual desire must keep within boundaries and has to wait for the appropriate time for the fulfillment of sex, which is reserved for marriage and practised within the two marriage partners as shown in the Song (6:3; 7:10; 8:12; cf. Gen 2:24).¹³⁸ The premature experimentation will ruin the natural joy of a sexual relationship.¹³⁹ It is clear that passionate physical love is God's great gift and part of his designed intention for human beings, but it must be fulfilled according to God's timing and will, and after the vows of marriage.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Jones and Yarhouse, "Anthropology," 119.

¹³⁴ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 181.

¹³⁵ Jones and Hostler, "Sexuality," 127.

¹³⁶ See the discussion of 2:7 in point 1.2.1.3 of Chapter One.

¹³⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 155.

¹³⁸ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on the Song of Solomon* (Copyright 2006 by Thomas L. Constable, Published by Sonic Light: <http://www.soniclight.com>), 29; cf. Matt 5:28, 29.

¹³⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 392-393.

¹⁴⁰ According to Jones and Hostler, the affirmation that both Adam and Eve "become one flesh" (Gen 2:24), which clearly alludes to sexual union in intercourse in other parts of the Christian scriptures, is the foundational teaching of the Christian practice anchoring its view of marriage (See in Stanton L. Jones and Heather R. Hostler, "The Role of Sexuality in Personhood: An Integrative Exploration," in *Judeo-Christian*

The Song highlights for Vietnamese society the danger and power of sexuality, and shows that sexual fulfillment is meaningful when it is placed in the proper place of marital love, as reflected in Vietnamese culture. The crucial intention of the Song seems to present a guide for the problems of human love in premarital, marital, and post-marital relationships of a man and a woman, and also for single women who are identified as the daughters of Jerusalem (a group of unmarried women).¹⁴¹ It is clear that sex within marriage is a blessing, but sex before marriage is called “fornication” in the Song, and outside marriage is called “adultery” and brings shame.¹⁴² Sex is not just a matter of the union of the two bodies, but it is designed by God: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).¹⁴³ Therefore, the theology of the Song seen here is integrated with the daily life of the Vietnamese people, through Vietnamese literature, culture and society, and leads to the correlation between the word of God and human life,¹⁴⁴ since the language of love in the Song is not limited to the immediate cultural context but extended to all peoples in various cultural contexts.

Only in love and at the proper time, the lovers in the Song receive the real delights in their marriage. After the wedding day (3:6-11), both lovers are free to enter the sacred time of the fulfillment of what they have desired, restrained until now and for which they kept themselves from temptations of sex relations before marriage. This is the time when they are able to open up and appreciate the special gift given by God to them in marriage and in the private place reserved only for them. The significance of the private place is that both the lovers discover the special gift given at the proper time with happiness and respect for each other. This is a sacred moment and also a special memory to sustain the happiness in their future.¹⁴⁵ In these days, “the sexual revolution” pushes

Perspective on Psychology: Human Nature, Motivation, and Change, eds. William R. Miller and Harold D. Delaney [Washington: American Psychological Association, 2004], 125-126; and Hess, *Song of Songs*, 83).

¹⁴¹ Constable, *Song of Songs*, 29.

¹⁴² Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs* (BCTP; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 37.

¹⁴³ Towner, *Genesis*, 39; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Amaladoss, “Contextual Theology and Integration,” *EAPR* 40 (2003): 266-269.

¹⁴⁵ As Hebrews teaches, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure. For God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb 13:4).

multitudes of people to run away from God's revelation concerning the way love between a man and a woman should be.¹⁴⁶ The Song warns about the uncertainties of intimacy, which is sometimes hard to find when sought; it warns about not forcing love to come to fulfillment too quickly - allowing it to grow carefully. The warning is a revelation for the present Vietnamese society, and the Church community should pay attention to the fact that love must lead to a pure marital status that is the foundation of a happy and lasting marriage.¹⁴⁷

4.4 Full realization of love

As mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, there are many church leaders and preachers in the Vietnamese Church who feel uncomfortable mentioning the topic of human love in the Song. Therefore, it is rarely spoken of or taught in the church openly. However, Hwang and Goh write that "The openness of the Song in speaking about human love and sex may pose a cultural problem to Asian Christians who are bound by their conservative traditions."¹⁴⁸ Sexuality is a crucially important aspect of human beings and is irreplaceable and irreducible.¹⁴⁹ It is dangerous to hold the old traditional views and conservative thoughts because they are perceived as preventing damage to young people, rather than help them promote a healthy love life between men and women and improve the social situation through which the church is presented. Therefore, in the aspect of realization of love it could be meaningful to examine the recognition of realities in love and the conflict of love.

4.4.1 The recognition of realities in love

The study in Chapter Two shows that the relationship of the lovers in the Song moves on in the progression from the beginnings of love, to binding in love, to difficulties in love,

¹⁴⁶ Robert B. Laurin, "The Life of True Love: The Song of Songs and Its Modern Message," *Christianity Today*, August 3 (1962), 11-12; Constable, *Song of Songs*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ Steven Emery-Wright, *Understanding Teenage Sexuality: A Foundation for Christian Relationships* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2009), 158-162.

¹⁴⁸ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Jones and Yarhouse, "Anthropology," 119.

and to growing up in love.¹⁵⁰ In the progression, the lovers in the Song recognize realities in love such as joy and pain, physical exhaustion, spending time and giving unconditionally, and the moral norms and culture in love. Such realities in love are also seen in the real life of the Vietnamese people reflected in the ordinary language through the Vietnamese love lyrics.¹⁵¹

First, the theme of “lovesickness” in Chapter Three shows that the greater the enjoyment when the two lovers are present, the deeper the pain when a love partner is absent.¹⁵² Joy and pain are normal experiences in the love relationship because the reality of love never runs smoothly in life. However, many young women in Vietnamese society today display fear of loss, envy, and uncertainty in love, which is why they willingly give themselves to their lovers.¹⁵³ They think that by so doing they can stop their lovers leaving them.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately, such willingness never helps them to keep their love growing in a good way, but bases it on a bad foundation, and they sin before God. In the Song, the pain gives the lovers an opportunity to grow in love and share each other’s burdens, and also teaches them to accept limitations and unsatisfied desires. The woman does not feel disappointed or hopeless when her lover is absent as found in the love lyrics of Vietnamese literature,¹⁵⁵ but the absence shows how great her love is toward him because both the lovers base their love relationship on absolute commitment, loyalty, and honesty, and also know the warnings.

Second, in the reality of married life one cannot deny that physical beauty will wear out when a husband and wife are getting older, but it is necessary to recognize that physical attraction is not the main element to keep permanent love in a marriage. The

¹⁵⁰ See the division of the Song in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two.

¹⁵¹ I agree with Lee’s argument that Western theology, such as in academia, and characterized by a mere exchange of ideas among scholars, is irrelevant to Asian people, because the Third World theology emphasizes people-men, women and children who love and hate, laugh and weep, dream and despair (Moonjang Lee, “Identifying an Asian Theology: A Methodological Quest,” *AJT*, vol. 13, no. 2 [1999]: 266).

¹⁵² See point 3.2.2 of Chapter Three; S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 53.

¹⁵³ Hoàng Thịnh, “Tình Dục,” 71-74.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ See point 3.2.2 of Chapter Three.

study of the theme “the heart and passion of love” in Chapter Three shows that the lovers in both poetries, love each other until death.¹⁵⁶ The lovers carry on their love in freshness. In reality, there are many burdens in a marriage such as sickness, stressful work, and conflicts with relatives, parents, children, friends, colleague, and financial problems, etc. The burdens facing young people today who love each other often make them want to avoid getting into marriage with responsibilities.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the present Vietnamese society begins to appear as families with a mother and children or a father and children, and many children in the streets without parents or houses, living in dirty places.¹⁵⁸ Such a situation is eroding the beauty of the Vietnamese traditional family as seen in the ancient Vietnamese love lyrics. To maintain a beautiful family, it is important to help lovers to recognize realities in fresh ways such as learning how to become better persons, showing a youthful and peaceful spirit towards each other. In this way, the lovers in the Song maintain their desires for sexual intimacy and delight in each other. They continue to experience their sexual relationship and desire with freshness (8:14).

In addition, it is necessary to communicate with each other in creative ways to maintain freshness in the love relationship and reduce the tensions and depressions of life. A Vietnamese proverb: “Tiếng cười bằng mười thang thuốc bổ” (*A smile is as ten packages of tonic medicine*),¹⁵⁹ which implies those with a pessimistic view of life do not know how to enjoy life. They are dry persons, poor and empty spirits.¹⁶⁰ The contrary of pessimistic people is optimistic people who always have hope in their life and know that the physical condition wears out in time but the passion and force of love must be renewed to become deeper and stronger. Therefore, freshness in marriage is also built up over time optimistically by the learned experiences of the past relearned in the present, and carried on into the future.

¹⁵⁶ See point 3.2.4 of Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁷ Hà Huy Tú, *Tìm Hiểu Nét Đẹp Thiên Chúa Giáo* (An understanding of the beauty of Catholics) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa và Thông Tin, 2002), 88-89.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵⁹ Lê Ngọc Tú, *Tự Điển Thành Ngữ, Tục Ngữ, Danh Ngôn* (Idiom, proverb, sayings dictionary) (Hà Nội: NXB Khoa Học Xã Hội, 2004), 288.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Third, it is evident that there are many responsibilities in marriage. Through the dialogues in the Song,¹⁶¹ the lovers spend time building up their relationship by inviting each other to view together the beauty of nature in the springtime (7:1-14). They share together all things in their life (4:8-5:1; 8:13-14) and talk to each other intimately (1:7-2:7; 2:14-17). In the busy life of Vietnamese society today, many couples pursue their own works and take on many responsibilities. They do not have much time for each other.¹⁶² Therefore, there are gaps in their relationship that will cool down love. In the dialogues, the lovers in the Song willingly give every thing they have saved and treasured from the old and the new, to provide for each other.¹⁶³ They also find a way to meet the needs of each other. Therefore, spending time and giving without any condition to each other are important elements in building up a healthy love relationship.

Fourth, the study of Chapter Three shows that the lovers in both the poetries live according to the norm of their culture. In Vietnamese culture, it is not proper for a husband to hold or kiss his wife in public places or in the church. Displaying affection in public is sometime acceptable between best friends, parents and their children or siblings and even though many do not continue to hold the old tradition, a man and a woman are not allowed to sit and go together intimately, except as a husband and wife.¹⁶⁴ However, in pop culture Vietnamese young men and women today express their affection such as kissing, and embracing each other in public without considering the norms or traditions. The public affection shows a lack of ethical and moral behavior, and is a sign of an unhealthy society.¹⁶⁵ Such conduct is influenced by Western culture, and does not fit in with Vietnamese culture.¹⁶⁶ It is not surprising that a Western couple can hold or kiss each other freely in public because their culture is more direct and open, while

¹⁶¹ See the discussion of “dialogue of the lovers” in point 3.2.3 of Chapter Three.

¹⁶² Tử Quang, *Ái Tình*, 132-135.

¹⁶³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 202.

¹⁶⁴ According to the old tradition, “Nam nữ thụ thụ bất thân” means young men and women who are not allowed to be close together. In a party, wedding, or a celebration, men sit on the left side and women seat on the right side, cf. Việt Chương, *Từ Điển*, vol. 2, 153.

¹⁶⁵ Phạm Hồng Lam, “Gia Đình Ta, Gia Đình Tây và Vấn Đề Hội Nhập (Eastern family, Western family, and integration,” in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (France: Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Nguyễn Trường Tộ, 2002), 55-68.

¹⁶⁶ Hồng Lam, “Gia Đình Ta,” 64.

Vietnamese culture is subtler.¹⁶⁷ In the Song, the woman sees her lover as a brother (8:1) which could reflect some kind of norm for public display of intimacy in the culture at that time, that the norm allows one to touch, hold, and kiss close relatives, such as parents and child, or brother and sister, but not a lover or husband.¹⁶⁸ The lovers in the Song live according to the norms of their culture that remind the Vietnamese young people to respect and preserve the uniqueness of their culture and the national character as a Vietnamese proverb states: “Nhập gia tùy tục” (*Coming to a family must do according to the custom of the family*) which corresponds with an English proverb: “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.”¹⁶⁹ The proverb reminds us that we have to follow the manners and customs of the place where we live.¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, the warnings in the Song (2:7, 3:5; 8:4) are commands to the daughters of Jerusalem who want to be free from the restraints of the culture in their society and are impatient in their love relationship. The warnings remind them to wait for the right time and right place to express their love. Today, many young people in Vietnam are influenced by new life-styles from Western countries.¹⁷¹ They want to break all the boundaries of religion and ethical/moral norms in their society. They feel uncomfortable with the instructions of their parents, norms in the culture, and even regulations of the church.¹⁷² Such feeling proves that the young Vietnamese people today have left the basis of morality of their culture and have lost the spirit of the people.¹⁷³ A Vietnamese proverb says “cây có cội, nước có nguồn” (*a tree has its root and water has its source*) to mean that Vietnamese people have their own culture in which they need to protect good habits and customs as originally given.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the lovers in the Song

¹⁶⁷ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 29-30.

¹⁶⁸ Stoop assumes ‘the king’ in 1:4 as ‘King Solomon who is identified in more detail in 3:11 (P. W. T. Stoop-Van Paridon, *The Song of Songs: A Philological Analysis of the Hebrew Book שיר השירים* (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 416; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 204.

¹⁶⁹ Việt Chương, *Từ Điển*, vol. 2, 153.

¹⁷⁰ Ngọc Tú, *Từ Điển*, 148.

¹⁷¹ Quách Huỳnh Hà, “Gia Đình (Family),” in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (France: Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Nguyễn Trường Tộ, 2002), 87-96.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 88; and also Hồng Lam, “Gia Đình Ta,” 64.

¹⁷³ Hoành Sơn, “Hội Nhập,” 50.

¹⁷⁴ Thuận Thảo, *Phong Tục*, 7.

understand the culture of their society, and live according to the culture. The lovers encourage the young people in Vietnam today to return to the original point in which God has given them in the Vietnamese culture. It does not mean to ask the young people to hold the old principles which are out dated, or behind the times, but when they learn new and good things from other cultures, they also need to keep good habits and customs, and the quintessence of their culture.¹⁷⁵

Fifth, the study of the language of love in both cultures shows that a happy marriage is built up not only by a husband and wife, but also by many contributions and support from others around when they are accepted in the community.¹⁷⁶ In Vietnamese culture, the family is a secure place where lovers can share their problems, trials or distresses in the love relationship.¹⁷⁷ There, the lovers can be helped to solve and overcome their problems, and also be encouraged to carry on their love in the right path. Therefore, it is important for young men and women to listen to parents, siblings, or even their friends. The listening shows their respect and obedience according to the Vietnamese folk sayings “Cá không ăn muối, cá ươn; con cãi cha mẹ, trăm đường con hư” (*a fish without salt is spoiled; children without obedience to their parents are spoiled in every way*).¹⁷⁸ The lovers in the Song are not isolated from their community - in which they find more conviction to love, and by listening to advice from the people around who help the lovers to keep a balance, they have a healthy relationship. The woman in the Song also submits to authorities and works hard under the sun (1:5-6). These are characteristics of a woman found in Vietnamese culture such as willingly submitting and respecting her husband, parents and other authorities.¹⁷⁹ The love relationship of the

¹⁷⁵ Tử Quang, *Ái Tình*, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 57.

¹⁷⁷ Hồng Lam, “Gia Đình Ta,” 59.

¹⁷⁸ Việt Chương, *Từ Điển*, 189.

¹⁷⁹ Thuận Thảo, *Phong Tục*, 27-29. According to Vietnamese tradition, a woman must have “tam tòng” (three submissions) and “tứ đức” (four important virtues) (cf. note 9 in point 3.1.1 of Chapter Three). Therefore, after marriage a woman belongs to the family of her husband and her future relies on her husband and children (Kế Bình, *Phong Tục*, 56-59); and also see notes 213-215 in point 4.5.2 of this chapter.

lovers in the Song involves not only the exclusive but also the inclusive.¹⁸⁰ It is clear that the love relationship is part of human life and a personal matter, not the whole of human life and above all things. Beside that, lovers as citizens of their country, have responsibilities to contribute their life, energy and knowledge to build up the society, bring happiness to everybody, and improve values of life.¹⁸¹ Such responsibilities will place their love on the firm ground of their community, society and culture, and gain more that is meaningful in their married life.

In the process of the wedding in the Song (3:6-11),¹⁸² there are many participators to support the lovers, such as the warriors in protection, the daughters of Jerusalem in decorating the palanquin,¹⁸³ and the mother with the crown of blessing.¹⁸⁴ Their wedding day is a day filled with laughing, praises, joy, happiness of friends, relatives, and the people around. This is the important day in which the lovers show themselves to their relatives, friends and everybody in their society with many blessings and official acceptance that they are united as one sexually.¹⁸⁵ It is the day God unites the lovers together to begin a new life as one, not only bodily, but also spiritually and souls. The two lovers in the Song live together within marriage according to God's design that is entirely consistent with the Vietnamese culture, society, and church context.¹⁸⁶ The process of the wedding begins with a cloud of smoke rising from the wilderness, the sweet smell of finest perfume (3:6), the palanquin with its posts of silver and its back of

¹⁸⁰ Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 159, 162.

¹⁸¹ Tử Quang, *Ái Tinh*, 31-36.

¹⁸² See note 347 in point 1.2.3.2 of Chapter One.

¹⁸³ The palanquin in 3:10 is made by the man, for the sake of his beloved, with the costly materials-silver, gold, purple-but its center is "paved with the love of the daughter of Jerusalem" (KJV). White assumes that אֶהְבֶּהּ in the verse is derived from Ugaritic root אהבת meaning "leather," which fits to the context and supported by the evidence of the noun in Northwest Semitic lexicography (White, *Language of Love*, 45). In contrast to White, Fox mentions that "leather" is not applied to floors, and therefore prefers "with valuable stones," so he translates the clause הוֹכֹוּ רִצְוֹנֶיהָ אֶהְבֶּהּ as "Its interior inlaid with stones," (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 126). With many possible translations of the noun אֶהְבֶּהּ, it seems natural to translate it as "love" which fits the context well and also relates to the Arabic cognates (Longman's note no. 33, in *Song of Songs*, 134). And finally, "love" is the theme of the Song. Cf. Daniel Lys, *Le plus beau chant de la création* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 160-161.

¹⁸⁴ The crown is not a royal crown, but it is probably a wedding wreath as a special custom in weddings at that time. Cf. Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 41; and also Snaith, *Song of Songs*, 57.

¹⁸⁵ Jones and Yarhouse, "Anthropology," 125-129.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

gold, sixty warriors (3:7-10). The process shows not only the great joyous, luxurious wedding, but also the powerful protection.¹⁸⁷ The better the attitude they had before marriage, the more support and joy will come from participators on the day. Therefore, many queens and concubines also praise the woman's beauty, and the maidens call her a blessed one (6: 8-9).

4.4.2 Communication in love

Even though the dialogue discussed in both poetries mentions only the sharing of desires, joy and praising of each other of the lovers, it does not mean their love always goes smoothly, without difficulties or conflicts. In reality, conflict is part of every marriage and a main problem in each family, but a successful marriage overcomes it by applying basic solutions through communications. In Vietnamese society, men have good communication with others in the society, or focus much on their career, but they sometimes are less communicative with their wives and children.¹⁸⁸ This problem causes complaints, misunderstandings, and gaps in their relationships with their wives.¹⁸⁹

The first solution in the Song, when lovers open totally to communicate with each other, nothing is hidden and each one must trust, admire and is a crown of the other as in Prov 31:11-12.¹⁹⁰ In this way, the lovers solve their conflict seen in Song 5:1-8 when the woman was indifferent and refused her lover.¹⁹¹ She recognizes her mistake and that urges her to determine to find her lover and to solve the problem, even when there are many dangers and obstacles (5:6-8).¹⁹² The man does not show his anger or react against his beloved. He is patient and silent to wait while the woman turns back

¹⁸⁷ Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 97-108.

¹⁸⁸ Bùi Thị Lý, "Mười Điều Bảo Vệ Hạnh Phúc Gia Đình (Ten principles to protect the happy family)," in *Tình Yêu, Gia Đình và Hội Nhập* (Love, family, and integration) (France: Trung Tâm Văn Hóa Nguyễn Trường Tộ, 2002), 101-102.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 520-521.

¹⁹¹ The poem (Indifference and Withdrawal) in 5:2-8 describes the difficulties in marriage in another experience of the woman (see the discussion of 5:2-8 in point 1.2.1.2 of Chapter One; cf. The division of the Song in point 2.3.3 of Chapter Two). The poem in 5:2-8 is similar to the poem in 3:1-5 (Moore and Akin, *Ecclesiastics, Song of Songs*, 101-102).

¹⁹² Ogden and Zogbo, *Song of Songs*, 153.

to him and there is nothing able to separate them and no other options.¹⁹³ By openly communicating the lovers in the Song show that it is impossible to solve their conflicts unless both lovers willingly turn back to each other in communication and acceptance with humble hearts, in recognition of mistakes, in forgiveness, and helping each other to walk in a new way. Such characteristics seen in the Song are a basic solution which is suitable for Vietnamese society to heal the wounds of conflicts and keep harmony in marriage. A Vietnamese proverb says “Thuận vợ thuận chồng tát biển Đông cũng cạn” (*Agreement between a husband and wife can dry the ocean*)¹⁹⁴ to mean that both husband and wife, living together in harmony, will bring happiness to their family and good results.¹⁹⁵

The second basic principle is a positive attitude in communication. The lovers in the Song insist that each of them is the “only” and the most special one and belongs to each other (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). No one else can replace him or her because both become one flesh which cannot be separated without hurt or pain (Gen 2:23).¹⁹⁶ Their insistence also reminds us that selfishness and self-centeredness are death to the love relationship. A Vietnamese proverb “Một điều nhịn chín điều lành” (*enduring a thing will get nine good things*),¹⁹⁷ means that patience and forgiveness are the only medicine to heal mistakes which are corrupting many people on earth.¹⁹⁸

Therefore, a positive attitude provides another solution towards reconciliation. Negative attitudes will destroy our harmony and never lead us to any good solution. Having this positive attitude, the lovers in the Song always praise the strengths of each other seen throughout the Song; for example, the woman praises her lover’s reputation as

¹⁹³ Patience and silence are important characteristics in conflict resolution and also are the fruit of the Holy Spirit such as “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control” Gal 5:22-23.

¹⁹⁴ Việt Chương, *Tự Điển*, vol. 2, 592.

¹⁹⁵ The Vietnamese folk culture remained in proverbs, riddles, folk poetry, folk tales, folk art . . . This culture expresses the struggle of the people, aspiration and resilient will of folk against superstition, bad custom, or in order to promote virtue (Chinh, “The Idea,” 9).

¹⁹⁶ It is read within the context of the garden of Eden where sexuality is introduced for the first time (Tremper Longman, “Song of Solomon, Theology of,” in *EDBT* [1996], 742).

¹⁹⁷ Ngọc Tú, *Tự Điển*, 130.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the special one (1:3; 5:10), and his character, and he also praises her beauty and attractiveness as “There is no flaw in you” in 4:7. To understand each other more, the lovers in the Song need communication which helps them to discover the weaknesses and strengths of each other and find a way to adjust in the future. In this way, they can share their future hopes and dreams, their expectations in honesty and transparency and also helps them to reaffirm their love and refresh their commitment.¹⁹⁹ The second basic solution will encourage them to overcome weaknesses and mistakes, to move ahead with new hope, keeping their marriage life from conflicts and continuing on the right track.

In the communication of reconciliation, the Vietnamese proverb above reminds lovers to honor their marriage partner as the lovers in the Song do who move from a rocky to a solid relationship in which they experience how to deal with conflicts, as part of their love relationship, and how to carry on the joy in their life and accept the weaknesses and differences of each other. Therefore, the disharmonies or conflicts which happen in the love relationship, train lovers how to sacrifice themselves, how to be humble with genuine love and respect for each other as seen in both the Song and Vietnamese culture. The interrelation of both shows that the Song shares the meanings of life for the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese context also sheds light on the interpretation of the Song.²⁰⁰

4.5 Beauties of love

Whatever is the status of the lovers in the Song,²⁰¹ the study of the previous chapter depicts them as do the Vietnamese love lyrics, as people who freely enjoy their love relationship in the idyllic atmosphere with serious, subtly articulated scenes and each of them is beautiful to each other’s eyes.

¹⁹⁹ Hwang and Goh, *Song of Songs*, 93.

²⁰⁰ Lee, “Biblical Interpretation,” 38.

²⁰¹ But it is unlikely we can accept sex between the lovers without a marriage license or ceremony, and after their wedding day, the reference of “my bride” in 4:9, 10, 11, 12 and 5:1 places the poems 4:1-5:1 in the context of marriage (Longman, *Song of Songs*, 150).

4.5.1 *The beauty of nature imagery in love*

The theme of “the nature imagery” is the setting of the Song and of the Vietnamese love lyrics to show the simplicity in life’s expectations. In the early spring when rains of the winter season have just passed, the lovers in both poetries share their love intimately in the new season with the new hope in the idealized scenery of richness and abundance.

In the expression of love in nature imagery²⁰² the lovers in both poetries explore enjoyment and fulfillment in harmony with nature through similes and metaphors. Especially, the joy in springtime of the lovers in the Song begins a new stage with invitations to go for an outing in the countryside that reflect their youth and the pure freshness of their delight.²⁰³ The lovers in the Vietnamese folk sayings and songs also live in the harmony and beauty of nature, and in the freshness and purity of love.²⁰⁴ Vietnamese people believe strongly in the natural world, family, and community life, and their culture is mostly based on agriculture in relating organically to nature.²⁰⁵

However, many Vietnamese young people who live in the countryside today seem to forget to appreciate the beautiful nature around them, and those who live in cities usually enjoy their love in places such as casinos, bars, drinking places, clubs, shopping centers, cinemas, and television under the influence of debased films and magazines which arouse youth sexually.²⁰⁶ The worldly expressions bring young people to temptations through discoveries of physical sexual pleasure with artificial feelings rather than true love.²⁰⁷ On the contrary, the lovers in the ancient Vietnamese poems are similar to the lovers in the Song, who always invite each other to share their love in the idyllic atmosphere where they enjoy nature through the images of the vines in blossom, the fresh air, lively scenery with fragrances, and the songs of birds. They find it meaningful to carry on their journey of love in connecting to the nature imagery in God’s

²⁰² See point 3.2.1 of Chapter Three.

²⁰³ Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

²⁰⁴ See point 3.2.1 of Chapter Three.

²⁰⁵ Doan Minh, “Christian Faith,” 61.

²⁰⁶ Hồng Lam, “Gia Đình,” 59-61.

²⁰⁷ Nhị Nguyễn, “Dịch AIDS,” 6.

abundant creation,²⁰⁸ and keep purity and sanctity in their love relationship and marriage. Therefore, in the dialogue between the Song and the Vietnamese context, the Song shows that harmony with nature is an essential discipline for the health of a love relationship between a man and a woman that enriches the knowledge of Vietnamese people today in appreciating the inheritance within their culture.²⁰⁹

4.5.2 External and internal beauty

The lovers in the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics are filled with joy in harmony with the beautiful landscape as a mirror of their love in which they praise each other's beauty. The beauty of the lovers mentioned in both poetries is not only the external but also the internal "appearance."²¹⁰

In the Song, the attraction of the woman's beauty is not achieved by covering her with expensive things, but by enhancing her natural advantages in suitable ways. Proverbs 31:30 shows that the real adornment of a woman's beauty is a godly life, not about fashion. There are many women in present Vietnamese society who try to become more beautiful and attractive by making up with expensive cosmetics, following fashion clothes, hair styles, and even cosmetic surgery to cover their physical defects.²¹¹ They think that such beauty will seduce and keep their lovers from other women. However, the best attraction to the man in the Song is a quality of beauty which includes both the external and internal attractiveness of his beloved, since external appearance alone is a façade. In Vietnamese culture, one with good behavior is also considered to be better than one who has external beauty only; as a proverb says "Cái nết đánh chết cái đẹp" (*Good behavior defeats beauty*)!²¹²

²⁰⁸ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 94; M. Timothea Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 262-264.

²⁰⁹ Doan Minh, "Christian Faith," 60.

²¹⁰ See point 1.2.3.1 of Chapter One and also point 3.2.1 of Chapter Three.

²¹¹ Hoàng Thịnh, "Tình Dục" 71.

²¹² Việt Chương, *Từ Điển*, vol. 1, 497.

According to tradition and Confucianism, a woman must have “Tam tông” (*three submissions*) and “tứ đức” (*four important virtues*),²¹³ which are timeless moral principle of a woman in Vietnamese culture. In the tradition, the woman depends on her husband and her children and when she cares for her husband and children heartily – it means she cares for herself.²¹⁴ The Vietnamese proverbs say “Thuyền theo lái gái theo chồng” (*the boat follows the boatman is as a woman who follows her husband*) or “lấy chồng gánh vác giang sơn nhà chồng” (*getting married, a woman has responsibilities to support the family of her husband*).²¹⁵ Even though the main role of Vietnamese women, as with other women in an Asian context, is to help their husband as a helper by taking care of the children and tending the family responsibilities,²¹⁶ the proverbs show the beauty of Vietnamese women who willingly submit and sacrifice their life to their husband and children that is the vocation of the wife.²¹⁷ This is the unique beauty of women in Vietnamese culture.

In the Song, the modest character of the woman draws her lover to pay more attention to her by sweet words that she is unique in his eyes as a lotus among thorns in comparison with other maidens (2:2).²¹⁸ Therefore, the woman is more attractive to the man than other maidens in Jerusalem who may be more beautiful, yet insignificant to him.²¹⁹ Her physical beauty goes together with her godly characteristics as humility, gentleness, sexual purity, and healthy body in which she bases her love in a solid relationship. All these characteristics make her more beautiful than others in her lover’s eyes and to others.

To the woman in the Song, the man’s attraction is not just outward appearance, but the true handsomeness of the beautiful personality which will shine out and become

²¹³ The three submissions and four important virtues are mentioned in note 9 in point 3.1.1 of Chapter Three; and also Kế Bình, *Phong Tục*, 57.

²¹⁴ Đức Nam, *Tình Bạn*, 193-195; Kế Bình, *Phong Tục*, 58; and point 3.1.1 of Chapter Three.

²¹⁵ Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 254, 257.

²¹⁶ Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Colorado: Paternoster, 2007), 91-92.

²¹⁷ Thái Ất, *Văn Hóa*, 255-257.

²¹⁸ Elsewhere in the Song, lotuses or lilies in general are associated with the woman (2:1, 2; 2:16; 4:5; 6:2-3; 7:3; cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 206.

²¹⁹ Carr, *Song of Songs*, 88.

more attractive and delightful to the woman. Outside appearance will show self-esteem and respect to the other, but a beautiful spirit is more important than what is on the outside. Therefore, she does not praise her lover with words of ingratitude but with esteem based on his dignity. As in Vietnamese culture, to evaluate a person one often looks for that person's good characteristics which are better than only noticing outside attraction,²²⁰ as expressed in the following folk sayings.

Tốt gỗ hơn tốt nước sơn,
 Xấu người đẹp nết còn hơn đẹp người.²²¹
 (*Good wood is better than good paint,
 A good character is better than just a beautiful external appearance*).

The description of physical beauty in the Song is one of the characteristics of the Arabic love-poetry called *wasf*.²²² It shows that the body is not evil but it is good and worthy of praise, and reflects the fundamental value of God's creation (Gen 1:26-28).²²³ The real beauty of a person must be evaluated not on the beauty outside, but on inner personality as in Prov 31:10-11, 28-30.²²⁴ Therefore, a love relationship needs good personalities in which lovers will love and serve others in appreciation and humility.²²⁵ The good personalities also complement the lovers' weaknesses and maintain the long-term nature of their married life. In the Song, the lovers praise each other for various things: name, character, and physical appearance. The result is that they will receive praises, encouragements, and blessings from each other and other people which add more beautiful colour to their relationship. This encourages the Vietnamese people to go back to their own culture to discover its values as a foundation in their life. Therefore,

²²⁰ Vũ Dung, Vũ Thúy Anh, and Vũ Quang Hào, *Từ Điển Thành Ngữ và Tục Ngữ Việt Nam* (Idiom dictionary and Vietnamese custom) (Hà Nội: NXB Văn Hóa, 1995), 720.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² According to Soulen, there are four *wasfs* in the Song: the first in 4:1-7; the three others in 5:10-16; 6:4-7; and 7:1-7[E] (Richard N. Soulen, "The *wasfs* of the Song of Songs and Hermeneutic, *JBL* 86 [1967]: 183).

²²³ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 127.

²²⁴ Waltke, *Proverbs*, 520-536.

²²⁵ Glickman, *Song for Lovers*, 73.

the cross-textual study is a crucial one for enrichment of the Song and Vietnamese culture.²²⁶

4.6 Summary

The main and primary focus of the Song in this thesis is on the literal interpretation of the context of human love. The study of the cultural and theological implications and applications through the topics based on Chapter Three reflects the expressions of the love relationship of the lovers in the Song and Vietnamese love lyrics. It also shows that the Song has power to transform present society in Vietnam, and provides a good love-relationship paradigm for all lovers, both adults and teenagers about how to love, enjoy love and understand its value in order to build up a happy family and a healthy society, and appreciate the wonders of love given by God in Vietnamese culture. Moreover, the study in this chapter also shows the cultural relevance of the Song in Vietnamese society and relationships in which the Song is integrated with the daily life and experiences of the people in their culture and society (reality) to share its meaning for them and enlivens their understanding about their priceless cultural heritage.

In the interpretation of the Song through Vietnamese eyes, one can understand that in God's design for human beings, the two lovers express an exclusive commitment, by enjoying the garden of love and filling themselves with passionate love in absolute commitment and loyalty. Sexual relationship is holy and good in God's sight, in which the man and the woman express the erotic nature of a sexual love relationship through enjoyment of love and fulfillment of sexual desire. Even though the two lovers are different, they are equal and use no power to lord it over each other. In intimate relationship the lovers show their love through words of affection, kissing deeply, smelling each other's fragrance, and embracing each other. The lovers also mention warnings about the danger of ruining the relationship. Besides, the Song displays a full realization of love and its beauties.

²²⁶ Lee, "Cross Textual Hermeneutics," 89.

Therefore, the Song displays both celebration of the joys of physical and intimate love within marriage and a warning concerning all human emotions, romantic love, physical expressions and sexuality, not only for the important attitudes of the Church but also for Vietnamese society today. One cannot refute that many people understand and treat sex as a central part of their life and there are many problems in sexual relationships in Vietnam at the present time. However, the Song shows the danger and the power of sexuality, and that love and sex play an important role in human life. Humans are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26), therefore sexual life is more meaningful when one places it in the proper place within marital love, between spouses and God. The crucial intention of the Song seems to present a guide to the problems of human love in relationships in every society.

Finally, context of the Vietnamese church strongly keeps to the ideals of monogamy, purity and sanctity of marriage, simplicity in life expectations, honouring of the marriage partner, and sex within a life-long marriage as found in the Song. These are the dignity and integrity carefully protected in thousands of cultural heritages of both Israel and the Vietnamese people. Therefore, the cultural and theological implications and applications of the language of love as found in the Song are relevant to the present Vietnamese society and Church context and also affirm the significant and valid Vietnamese traditional culture. Indeed, the Song is not only a love poem but also a didactic poem because “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16 RSV).

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have tried to explore the language of love as found in the Song and bring the message of love in the Song to Vietnamese society and the church context through the study of the four chapters. It is interesting to explore the meaning of love in the Hebrew Bible and in the Song in its biblical, literary and cultural context in Chapter One. The study of the terms אָהַב, הִסָּדַר, רָחַם, דָּוָד, רָע, נִדְוָד, and חָשַׁק in the Hebrew Bible shows that there are three of these terms - אָהַב, דָּוָד, and רָע - found in the Song. As in other places in the Hebrew Bible, the three terms are used to express sexual love and physical desire such as אָהַב to express an erotic sense; דָּוָד chiefly to refer to a sexual love relationship between a man and woman; and רָע in a form as רָעִיָּהּ to imply a sexual meaning, especially in the Song.

The term אָהַב is spoken from the mouth of the woman frequently to show her passionate love for and intimacy with her lover. She is overwhelmed by feelings of love and convinced of the man's passionate love through the intimacy and passion displayed by him (1:3; 2:4). Her strong desires for her lover are expressed through insatiable desire (2:5; 5:8). Therefore, the woman gives warnings to the daughters of Jerusalem not to hurry into love but to wait for the right time, and also to herself and her lover to be alert to guard their love (2:7 [3:5; 8:4]; 2:15). The passionate love causes the woman to experience the moment of crisis in her love relationship when her lover is absent - through the seeking of, and not finding, him (3:1, 4). This leads her to claim to be inseparably united with her lover through the power of love (8:6, 7). The term דָּוָד describes a strong desire for physical union of the lovers through the kisses (1:2; 4; 7:10)

and the mutual possession and exclusiveness of them through mutual belonging (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). The terms: רַעֲיָתִי, פֶּלֶה, and אֶחָתִי are spoken by the man to describe the erotic and sensuous experience through the attraction of his beloved's beauty (1:9, 15; 6:4), the strong desire for oneness in the love relationship of the lovers through the marriage (4:8, 9), and the physical sexual relationship (5:1). Therefore, the study in Chapter One claims that the primary meaning of love in the Song is the delights of physical relationship of the lovers.

In Chapter Two, I have studied the historical survey of the Song in which many have imbedded the allegorical interpretation. In comparing the prominent Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations over many centuries with my findings in Chapter One, I show that the interpretations are unlikely and problematic. They consider the deep spiritual truth such as a dialogue between God and Israel in Aqiba's interpretation, Israel's deliverance and the re-establishment of the Solomonic polity under the King Messiah in Targum, the Law and redemption of Israel from Egypt in Midrash Rabbah, the celebration of Solomon's own government or the chronological "church" from David's time to Christ and the second coming, in Luther and Brightman, or God and the bride in Origen, Gregory, and Bernard. In such interpretations the grammatical and historical settings of the text are ignored, supposing a narrative structure and some plot developments, being unwilling to appreciate the proper poetic characteristic of the Song, and reject the primary meaning of the Song i.e., the joys of a human sexual love relationship and sexuality.

In addition, I have reviewed the precursors and contemporary literal interpretations of the Song which understand the meaning of the Song naturally as found in the text. However, there are the different interpretations such as: the Song is a poem of praise of Solomon to his favorite wife in Ibn Ezra' interpretation, the first love of Adam and Eve in J. G. Von Herder's interpretation, a marriage-song of Solomon in the form of a drama with two or three characters in Dramatic theory, a collection of Judean wedding songs derived from myths and rites of sacred marriage of a fertility god and goddess from pagan fertility worship, or from cultic mortuary feasts in the Ancient Near

Eastern festival. These interpretations are not preferable because there are different opinions of the kind of love in the Song, interpretations with imagination. However, among the literal interpretations, the Song read as love poetry is the better way to convey the message of the Song to Vietnamese society and the church context because the various expressions of the sexual relationship of the lovers in the Song are similar to Vietnamese love lyrics as studied in Chapter Three. Hence, principles to interpret the Song have been recommended, such as the meaning of love understood in the literal sense, as a poetic unity with two main characters, and finally the Song is interpreted according to the logical progression of love between the two lovers.

In Chapter Three, I have given a general review of Vietnamese culture and literature and compared some themes about love in the Song to Vietnamese literature, especially focusing on folklore, classical poetry and the new poetic movement. There are similarities found in both, such as the love relationship of the man and the woman which is connected to the idyllic atmosphere through various similes and metaphors, the themes of lovesickness, the dialogues, the heart and passion of love, and the signs which are used frequently in expressions of love.

Both contain love poems about delights, joys, desires, warnings, separations, pain, hope, and the power of a sexual relationship to express the naturalness of love between a man and a woman. The similarities provide a bridge between the two love poetries and bring the Song close to Vietnamese tradition and church context as seen through expressions of the love relationship and sexual desire of lovers in the Song and the Vietnamese love lyrics. The study has also shown that there are differences such as the Song is a beautiful lyric poem in the Hebrew Bible to express deeply the language of love through various imageries rooted in the Ancient Near East, but love lyrics in Vietnamese literature are secular poems collected from different sources and ages to express simply the love language through common imageries in the life of the Vietnamese people. Moreover in the wider cultural context between the two, the man and the woman in the Song are equal in their relationship, but in the Vietnamese love

lyrics they are not. However, the differences have also shown that each culture has its own beauty and value.

Subsequently, in Chapter Four I have studied the topics which are based on Chapter Three. In the exclusive commitment, absolute loyalty is the foundation in a permanent love relationship. In the erotic nature of a sexual love relationship, enjoyment and fulfillment of sexual desire are based on the natural relationship between one man and one woman in equal relationship and the love built up for the whole of life, not on mere feelings or sex. In the intimacy and warning, both the Song and Vietnamese culture hold that sex is not the objective of a love relationship, but rather on commitment and boundaries and within marriage. In the full realization of love, there are realities in the relationship, such as joy and pain, physical exhaustion, spending time together, living according to norms of the culture, community and society, and communication is an important element in solving problems and conflicts in the love relationship. Finally in the beauties of love, a healthy relationship is based on harmony with nature and on both external and internal appearance.

Through the study of these topics, I have shown that the Song not only shares the common milieu of love expression with the people of Vietnam, but also contributes to a guide to the present Vietnamese society and church context in aspects of the sexual love relationship. In the study of cultural and theological implications and applications, the Song is shown as a great anthem about sexual love in which God grants to human being a life of happiness, satisfaction and holiness. As the Creator, He blesses a man and woman and brings them into oneness. Therefore, sexuality and marriage are good in God's sight, in which a man and woman fulfill God's purpose and enjoy God's gift. The study based on these topics has provided the Vietnamese church with certain understandings of the meaning of love in the Song, and how to interact with the Song more effectively, especially in teaching and preaching. Furthermore, in reading the Song with Vietnamese eyes one can appreciate the "cultural impact" of the Song into the Vietnamese culture in which the Song continues to shed its wonderful light for the people. Moreover, the study in this chapter leads to an important validation of Vietnamese traditional culture,

including a critique of its place in the Vietnamese church, which was introduced in a Western cultural form.

As far as I know, this thesis is the first study of the Song in the Vietnamese context to break from the Western interpretative mold and it should be a Vietnamese reading of the Song. The study of the language of love in the Song through the explorations, analyses, comparisons, and discoveries has shown the legitimate worth and beauty of human love relationships between men and women. Indeed, “For love is as strong as death, passion as relentless as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, and most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. Should a man offer all his wealth for love, it would be utterly disdained” (8:6, 7). Therefore, the Song needs to be studied, spoken, and applied as other books in the Bible. It is an important message in which God is giving guidelines about sexuality and the love relationship between a man and a woman, to both young and old people in the Vietnamese society and in the church today. However, in the limit of this thesis I do not deal with all expressions and themes of love and theological topics in the Song, and the various views and levels of meaning of their interpretation. Hopefully, other further investigations of the Song in future will be added to bring more meaningful understanding of the Song into the Vietnamese church such as “the expressions of love in the Song compared with the particular texts: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-3:24, Psalm 45, and Proverbs 31:10-31 from Asian viewpoints,” “sexual relationship in the Song and the New Testament’s teaching in Vietnamese society,” and “the love relationship in the Song reflected in the four Gospels through Asian Christian eyes.”

Finally, I also claim clearly that the value of this Vietnamese reading gives more significance for people to appreciate the rich and colourful lyrical language of love in the Song and its powerful message to their own traditional culture and church. The result of the study is that the mutual reaction between the Song and Vietnamese literature and culture can enlighten effectively the interpretation of other biblical texts and translations of the Bible in the Vietnamese context, as well as for Asian theology.

APPENDIX

SUGGESTED SERMON OUTLINES FOR THE SONG

1. The Love Relationship in Vietnamese context

Text: Song 1:1-4; Memory verse: Song 1:2

I. Introduction

1. The language in the Song seems not suitable for a Vietnamese church context.
2. The Song is the book in the Bible with a special message given by God to every age about love relationships between men and women.
3. The difficulties in understanding the Song: The text of the Song: many rare words, ambiguous meanings, imageries in poetry.

II. The body

1. The value of love v.1
 - a. Song of Songs is the greatest song (1 Cor 13:13)
 - b. Love is from God (I John 4:16)
2. The love relationship v.2
 - a. Expression of love subtly v.2a (Rom 12:9)
 - b. Love is respected with loyalty and faithfulness vv.2b, 4b
3. Good personality of lovers v.3
 - a. Good personality as fragrance of good perfumes (Gal 5:22)
 - b. Good personality attracts others (John 13:35)

III. Conclusion

1. Praising God because of the love relationship.
2. Love brings joy and happiness to each other.

3. Love builds up a strong family and healthy society.

2. The Realities in a Life and Love Relationship

Text: Song 1:5-11; Memory verse: Song 1:5

I. Introduction

1. Verses 1:5-11 include two poems “Black but beautiful” and “A dialogue of the lovers.”
2. The ideal person in love is a person keeping commitment of loyalty and faithfulness.
3. Every couple must face difficult situations in life, especially those who live in countryside.

II. Body

1. Recognize the reality in life vv.5-6
 - a. Accepting weaknesses and looking forward in positive ways v.5
 - b. Accepting the reality of the filial piety to the parents of husband and wife, obedience to authority, hard work and willingness to learn and endure all situations v.6 (Rom 12:11; Eph 6:1, 2)
2. Recognize the reality of a love relationship vv.7-8
 - a. Waiting patiently for the right time as engagement and wedding day v.7 (Rom 12:12)
 - b. Respecting others and finding the right person v.8 (Luke 14:11)
3. The value of the recognition of reality vv.9-11
 - a. The attractiveness of external and internal beauty vv.9-10
 - b. The qualities of beauty according to Vietnamese culture v.11

III. Conclusion

1. Moving forward with a positive attitude.
2. Willing to endure in any situation.
3. To the Vietnamese people, respecting for others and patient timing are important aspects in keeping a love relationship.

3. Overcome the Obstacles

Text: Song 2:8-13; Memory verse: Song 2:10

I. Introduction

1. There are difficulties in any love relationship when there many families are living in poor situations.
2. Each partner comes from a different background and tradition.
3. Love requires lovers to overcome all obstacles.

II. Body

1. Facing the obstacles 2:8-9
 - a. Jumping over the hill of difficulties v.8 (Gen 29:18-20)
 - b. Standing behind the wall of old tradition and culture between rich and poor v.9
2. Positive attitude v.10
 - a. Invitation with patience vv.10, 13
 - b. Never losing hope (Gen 29:30)
3. Arise and come to the spring of love
 - a. The winter is past v.11
 - b. The spring time has come vv.12-13

III. Conclusion

1. Perseverance in love is a characteristic of the Vietnamese people in developing the relationship.
2. The perseverance brings hope for the future and builds up a strong family.
3. The value of love is not on a rich people, properties, money, and high position but on humble hearts willingly accept each other with respecting.

4. The Protection of the Love Relationship

Text: Song 2:14-17; Memory verse: Song 2:15

I. Introduction

1. The two lovers understand each other more day by day.
2. There are temptations around, especially the influence of new life-styles from Western countries.
3. Boundaries are necessary to keep the relationship on the right track.

II. Body

1. Desire to communicate v.14
 - a. Shows the lovers beyond the immediate physical appearance v.14a
 - b. Sharing concerns, future hopes and expectations to each other are important aspects in a Vietnamese family v.14b (Eph 5:10-18)
2. Protecting the relationship v.15
 - a. There are many things which can ruin the relationship such as lacking communication, respecting man more than woman v.15 (2 Sam 13:1-22)
 - b. The lovers need to protect the relationship from “little foxes” of sexual temptations when the society is change and young men and women have more freedom than the past v.15 (1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Peter 5:8)
3. Commitment in the relationship vv.16-17
 - a. The permanent commitment as the old generations v.16 (6:13) (Eph 5:22-23)
 - b. The lovers are overwhelmed with happiness in love v.17

III. Conclusion

1. Communication helps each other to grow both physically and spiritually.
2. Protecting each other from the harm of temptations and ruin of love.
3. Reminder of the permanent commitment for the whole life.

5. The Great Wedding

Text: Song 3:6-11; Memory verse: Song 3:6

I. Introduction

1. There are problems in couples living outside of marriage in big cities.
2. The wedding day presents a covenant agreement of the lovers in the marriage.
3. A new family is greeted with joy and approved by the parents of the couple, relatives, neighbours, friends, others, and the church.

II. Body

1. The special day vv.6-8
 - a. The great joy of the special day presented v.6
 - b. The solemn day supported and protected by participators vv.7-8 (Heb 3:4)
2. The best abilities of the two lovers are presented vv.9-10

- a. Willingly present the best on the day vv. 9-10
- b. All done in a day by love in a permanent commitment to marriage v.10b
(1 Cor 10:31)
- 3. The great day accepted v.11
 - a. The new family is accepted by relatives, friends,
 - b. The new family is accepted in the society (Matt 19:6)

III. Conclusion

- 1. The wedding day is the great day of the couples to present themselves before families of both sides, relatives, friends, God and the church.
- 2. The day is full of joy in a permanent commitment.
- 3. The new family is a new journey to carry on God's purpose.

6. Indifference and Repentance

Text: 5:2-8; Memory verse: Song 5:2b

I. Introduction

- 1. It is not easy to avoid angry, upset, disappointed complaints towards each other in the love relationship.
- 2. A willingness to accept and forgive mistakes will build up the relationship.
- 3. Always have a positive attitude to overcome problems.

II. Body

- 1. Indifference vv.2-3
 - a. No enthusiasm, a cooling heart, forcing other down, misunderstanding, selfishness and self-centeredness vv.2-3
 - b. The problems of love without action (Eph 4:31)
- 2. Lost opportunity vv.4-6
 - a. Missing the opportunity v.4 (Col 3:18-19)
 - b. Regret vv.5-6
- 3. Repentant heart vv.7-8
 - a. Overcome all trials v.7 (Phil 2:1-4)
 - b. Express repentance with genuine love v.8 (Eph 4:22-24)

III. Conclusion

1. To adjust to being husband and wife takes time.
2. Good marriage means husband and wife need to recognize their mistakes and overcome them.
3. The need to live like Christ every day.

7. My Lover

Text: Song 5:9-16; Memory verse: Song 5:11

I. Introduction

1. There are conflicts in marriage but true love always finds a way to solve the conflicts in the communication.
2. True love always sacrifices for each other.
3. True love always praises the dignities of each other.

II. Body

1. Finding the lover v.9
 - a. Determination to find the lover (Matt 5:9, 21-23)
 - b. Willingness to share the problems with others
2. My lover is the best one v.10
 - a. My lover is radiant and ruddy: the beautiful one
 - b. The outstanding among a thousand: the only one
3. The beauties of my lover vv.11-16
 - a. Good both within and without (Gen 1:26-27)
 - b. No one can compare

III. Conclusion

1. Respecting each other is a foundation of good relationship.
2. Recognizing the strength of each other.
3. Asking God to change our life every day and live in his presence.

8. Reconciliation in Love

Text: Song 6:1-10; Memory verse: Song 6:3

I. Introduction

1. Verses 6:1-10 have two poems “Toward reconciliation” and “Incomparable one.”

2. There are many couples who complain about their spouse.
3. True love covers big gaps between husband and wife in respectability.

II. Body

1. The good Vietnamese wife vv.1-3
 - a. Holding holds the three Vietnamese submissions and four virtues v.1 (Song 1:4c; 2:7; 3:11; 5:9)
 - b. A wife is the one who understand the husband best v.2 (Eph 5:31)
 - c. Keeping the permanent commitment v.3 (Eph 5:33; 1 Peter 3:1-6)
2. The good husband vv.4-10
 - a. Always praises the dignity of his wife rather than pointing out her mistakes vv.4-5b (Eph 5:25, 28; Prov 31:28-31)
 - b. The wife is the only one in the husband eyes vv.5b-8 (1 Peter 3:7)
 - c. The wife is the incomparable, the perfect and unique one vv.9-10 (Prov 31:10)

III. Conclusion

1. Forgiving and forgetting mistakes of each other will bring reconciliation in marriage.
2. Respecting each other will encourage the lovers to carry on their journey.
3. Always hold firm the permanent commitment in marriage.

9. The Maturing in Love

Text: Song 7:1-11 (6:13-7:10[E]); Memory verse: Song 7:7 (6[E])

I. Introduction

1. Marriage needs to grow and bear flowers and fruits as a tree or plant does.
2. Maturing in love leads to a deeper love relationship.
3. Sexual relationship is designed by God for our marriage.

II. Body

1. Impression to others v.1
 - a. The daughters of Jerusalem want to gaze at the beauty of the woman v.1a
 - b. The lovers' joy is also the daughters' joy v.1b (Ps 100)
2. Continuing and going deeper in love 7:2-10
 - a. God oversees all things v.2 (Isa 40:31)

- b. The compassion and romance through admiration of the man toward the woman in strong images vv.3-10
- 3. The renewed covenantal commitment v.11
 - a. Belonging to each other v.11a
 - b. Willingness to give to each other with delight and trust v.11b (Eph 5:15-21)

III. Conclusion

- 1. The happy couple brings joy to others and praises God for his wonderful design.
- 2. The more mature in love, the happier we are in our marriage that will bring a good example to the young generation in Vietnamese society.

10. Expression of Love within the Culture and Society

Text: Song 8:1-4; Memory verse: Song 8:2

I. Introduction

- 1. There are norms and boundaries in every culture.
- 2. The limits keep lovers on the right track within the culture and society
- 3. The limits do not prevent lovers from expressing their love.

II. Body

- 1. Norms and boundaries within the society vv.1-2
 - a. The lovers need to understand Vietnamese culture and live accordingly v.1 (Titus 3:1-2)
 - b. There is a safe place for love within the society v.2a
 - c. The source of instruction for love v.2b (Prov 1:8, 9; 6:20-22)
- 2. Expression of love in the right place and time vv.3-4
 - a. Expressing love in the right place is essential for the relationship to grow v.3
 - b. The right time for expression shows respect for each other v.4 (1 Peter 3:1-7)
 - c. The warning to the daughters of Jerusalem to not rush into a love relationship v.4 (1 Cor 6:12, 19-20; 2 Cor 6:14-18)

III. Conclusion

- 1. The wise couple always fits well in the society and is humble to learn from others.
- 2. They also do the right thing at the right time.

3. Their marriage is a good example for others.

11. The Power of Love

Text: Song 8:5-7; Memory verse: Song 8:6

I. Introduction

1. The love stories are old but are always new to every one.
2. The lovers can overcome all difficulties to be together.
3. True love binds two lovers for the whole of life and many couples in the old generations.

II. Body

1. The lovers in passionate love v.5
 - a. The lovers are completely side by side in peace and security v.5 (Matt 19:5-6)
 - b. God united them to become one according to his design and purpose v.5 (Gen 2:23; 1 Cor 7:10-16)
2. The power of love v.6
 - a. The permanent seal of love v.6a (Gen 23:2; 35:19; Ezek 24:15-18)
 - b. Carrying on the unshakable commitment of loyalty and faithfulness v.6b (Mal 2:14-16)
3. The fury of the fire of love v.7
 - a. Unquenchable love v.7a (Prov 5:15-23; Rom 8:35-39)
 - b. Love is most priceless gift given freely by God v.7b (Song 1:2, 4; 4:10)

III. Conclusion

1. Praise God for giving the wonderful love relationship which binds lovers together as one.
2. True love is a priceless gift.
3. Carry on the unshakable commitment of loyalty and faithfulness.

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