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Series wai is not just a Thai version of Japanese Boys' Love

Maas, Natascha

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Series wai is not just a
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Japanese Boys' Love

Thesis submitted for Masters' degree in Humanities

Natascha Maas

University of Leiden

Asian Studies: History, Arts, and Culture of Asia

Dr M.E. Crandol

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Series wai is not just a Thai version of Japanese Boys' Love

Natascha Maas

Abstract: An average thought is that Thai Boy's Love (BL) is just like any other BL in other countries. BL stories are love stories with a male same-sex romance. This thesis shows that Thai BL, called in this thesis *series wai*, is an innovative and hybrid subgenre within the BL genre. The transmedia popularity and the focus on masculinity and gender roles cause the subgenre to be different from the Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese BL subgenres. The transmedia popularity shows that it is not only about the series, but mainly about the imaginary couples. The research found that *series wai* reflects the ideals of *siwilai*, namely, "romantic monogamous heterosexuality." This makes *series wai* innovative and hybrid, as it is not about the series only and it combines society ideals with series which do not follow the ideal society at the first glance.

Keywords: *Series wai*, Thailand, Boys' Love (BL), tv-series

Foreword

In the beginning, I was hesitant to do this research. I was the one who came up with the idea, but because of the bad connotations BL has and the fear it would be reflected on me, I was not sure in the beginning. However, I was too interested in the dynamics of this genre and there was so much to explain. So, I could just not not do it. Along the way, I found so many interesting things, that I did not know could go together with *series wai*, so I enjoyed it a lot. Especially telling people about it, who were confused and amazed at the same time due to my findings.

Save to say, I learnt a lot from writing the thesis, again just like from my bachelor's thesis. Of course, I would have had a way harder time if I did not have my thesis supervisor, Dr Crandol, who helped me back up the tracks when I could not see the forest for the trees. So, my gratitude goes to him. It was also fun to speak about typical research problems with him, like wanting to tell more, but the word count that is in the way, or the stress of having not enough words and then having to erase a page of words. (I had to erase a couple of chapters in this thesis to give space to explain other subjects more.) Although it was a lot of work and I assume I gained some more grey hairs, I enjoyed it and will miss doing this kind of research.

I cannot forget to thank my sister-dear and friend-dear, who helped me again like with my bachelor's thesis. But unfortunately, their work could be found in the chapters I had to erase. I also thank my parents who had to deal with a stressed child again this year, while not understanding what I was doing, but sometimes listened patiently to my rambling. I also said I would thank my colleague for staying at work so I could go home to work on my thesis. Unfortunately, I met him once, forgot his name, and resigned. Although he would not read my thesis, I keep promises and thank him for staying at work so I could leave two hours early. I also thank all the people who commented (and sometimes spoiling) on the series, which helped me with my study. Unfortunately, I do not have pets to thank for the mental support, but the neighbourhood cat was a good replacement. So, thank you Mini Teddy (nickname for Doerak)

for visiting my home and asking for pets. Last but not least, I thank my boyfriend-dear, who only experienced me rewriting this thesis, but found the time to proofread my thesis, although it not being his field of interest. Also, the other kind proof-reader, who fell ill and could not finish my thesis, I still thank him for reading halfway and being interested in my thesis.

When you have questions, ask them and I will answer them as well as possible.

Thank you for reading this far and I wish you a lot of fun and insightful moments while reading my thesis.

Happy (next) Pride month!

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Introduction

The Thai Boys' Love (BL) genre or same-sex romance genre, attracts growing popularity and became a soft power of Thailand. The government aims for the series to have rising popularity like K-pop (South Korean popular music) and started promoting it actively in 2021 to other Asian countries. Streaming services like Rakuten Viki also see this growing popularity, as eightfold more BL series are bought online in comparison to the previous year.¹ Although Japanese BL is the predecessor of all BL, Thailand is the biggest producer and made its own unique version, the so-called “series wai.” Just like how Nanon Korapat Kirdpan, a rookie to the BL series, but an experienced actor, said: “It’s often said [Thai] BL originates in Japanese manga [and cartoon]. But it’s actually a mixture of anime, traditional Thai theater and comedy.”² Therefore, Thai BL is not just a Thai version of Japanese BL, but a hybrid subgenre within the BL genre.

This research uses the term *series wai* to refer to the BL subgenre of Thailand. The word “series [ซีรีส์]” is an English loanword in Thai and refers to tv-series. “Wai/Y [วาย]” is the abbreviation of the Japanese word “yaoi.” Yaoi is a Japanese subgenre within Japanese BL, but in the present day used to refer to Japanese BL. This will be explained deeper in Chapter 1. Bunyavejchewin gave the only explanation of the “wai genre.” He describes it as “a Thai genre of fictional media that focuses on loving relationships and intimacy between masculine-identified boys and young men whose appearances are usually in line with pan-East Asian pretty boy images.”³ However, this is too superficial and too broad, as this applies to most BL genres of other countries, too. The absence of an explicit name for the Thai BL genre is also found in

¹ ‘Thailand’s “boys Love” Dramas Stealing Hearts around the World’, Nikkei Asia, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Media-Entertainment/Thailand-s-boys-love-dramas-stealing-hearts-around-the-world>; Top Koaysomboon, ‘Everything You Need to Know about Thailand’s Thriving Boys Love Culture’, *Time Out Bangkok*, 11 June 2020, <https://www.timeout.com/bangkok/lgbtq/thai-boys-love-culture>.

² ‘Thailand’s “boys Love” Dramas Stealing Hearts around the World’.

³ Poowin Bunyavejchewin, ‘The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand’ (Mechademia Kyoto conference, Kyoto, 27 May 2018).

other research. Researchers, in general, do not use the term “*series wai/Y*” but call it by the broad name “BL” without being clear if they talk about the whole genre or a specific subgenre. However, this is also the case in a daily conversation where *series wai* and BL are interchangeably used. This research shows that Thai BL is not a Thai version of BL like any other country has, but is an innovative, hybrid subgenre which is distinguishably different from other BL subgenres. Therefore, the name *series wai* is used to refer to that subgenre.

The main question that is answered is “Why is *series wai* an innovative, hybrid subgenre within the Boys’ love genre?” Chapter 1 gives a concise overview of the history of *series wai* and its position in Thailand. Chapter 2 includes a literature review about genre and the generic conventions of *series wai*. Chapters 3 and 4 look into transmedia popularity and masculinity together with gender roles. The transmedia popularity shows that it is not only about the series, but mainly about the imaginary couples. The gender roles support the ideal of *siwilai*, civilization, indeed, having a committed heteronormative family. This makes *series wai* innovative and hybrid, as it is not about the series only and it combines society ideals with series which do not follow the ideal society at the first glance.

This study made use of the research of Baudinette, Bunyavejchewin, Prasannam, Saejang, and Zhang and Dedman.⁴ Their findings are described in Chapter 2: Literature review. The research also has a database of 64 Thai series, 16 Chinese series, 9 Japanese series, 11 South

⁴ Thomas Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series: Adapting Japanese “Boys Love” to Thailand and the Creation of a New Genre of Queer Media’, *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 115–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2019.1627762>; Bunyavejchewin, ‘The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand’; Mark J. McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (Richmond: Routledge, 2000); Mark J. McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); James Welker, ‘Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: “Boys’ Love” as Girls’ Love in Shōjo Manga’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (1 March 2006): 841–70, <https://doi.org/10.1086/498987>; Edited by Peter A. Jackson, *Queer Bangkok*, Queer Asia (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); Atit Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’ (Ph.D., England, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom), 2011); Jooyin Saejang, ‘Behind Online Y Counterculture: The Role Fansubbing Groups and Social Actors Play in Driving Online Y Counterculture’, *Journal of Language and Culture* 40, no. 1 (30 June 2021): 148–66.

Korean, and 16 Taiwanese series between 2014 and 2021 to look into for reference. The series is used to make a comparison to show how *series wai* differs from them. The reason for using 2014 as starting year is the first *series wai* is broadcast in 2014. As the research is conducted in 2022, the most recent series this research used started to broadcast in 2021. Not all series are looked into in-depth, but mainly the posters and trailers are used to have an overall understanding of the series' storyline and characters.

This study investigates how *series wai* is different from BL subgenres of other neighbouring countries with a significant and well-known number of BL series, which are China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. The study does not take Western BL into account, since the scope of the research would be too big. But also, the growing popularity of BL and production of same-sex romance films and series in the West began later than in Asia, so there is less to compare and analyse. Furthermore, the study does not conduct interviews with the creators of BL, which could have given a deeper understanding of how and why *series wai* is an innovative, hybrid subgenre. However, because of the scope of the research and the difficulty to reach the creators, this is left for future research.

Chapter 1: History and context of Boys' Love

This chapter gives a concise overview of the origins of Boys' Love in Japan and its presence in Thailand. On the front, it may seem like a superficial genre, but there is more behind it. The genre is used towards Thai and international viewers to make them believe that the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand is treated right and promote social norms.

1.1. BL, *yaoi*, and *series wai*

BL series have emerged as a strong cultural force that attracts fans in recent years. Especially in Thailand and China where it did become popular.⁵ Thai authorities regarded BL manga as “obscene” in the 2000s and disrupted the selling of these mangas by labelling them as *sue lamok* [obscene media]. With the expansion of digitalization at the end of the 2000s, fans moved to digital platforms where the authorities could not monitor them as well as before. Therefore, BL or *yaoi* culture's popularity grew and expanded in a brief time to mainstream media, especially through television shows and blockbuster films.⁶ The increase in popularity is also understood as the Y[aoi]/*wai* boom.⁷

The roots of the genre trace back to the 1970s in Japan, when *shōnen-ai* was a type of male-male romance manga written by women. *Yaoi* was born out of *shōnen-ai* in the mid-1980s. *Yaoi* is an acronym for *yama nashi*, *ochi nashi*, *imi nashi* (usually translated as “no climax, no point, no meaning”) and is used to refer to male same-sex romance works that have not been published commercially. Though, in some cases, it is also used to refer to non-commercial works. The acronym shows that *yaoi* is not about the romantical development of the main characters and therefore focuses on “hardcore male-male sexual intercourse.” In contrary to *shōnen-ai* which focuses on “tender, romantic involvement between two male protagonists.”

⁵ Saejang, ‘Behind Online Y Counterculture’, 151.

⁶ Natthanai Prasannam, ‘The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction’, *Plaridel* 16, no. 2 (2019): 65, 66, <https://doi.org/10.52518/2020.16.2-03prsnam>.

⁷ Bunyavejchewin, ‘The wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand’.

Bōizu rabu, also abbreviated to BL but not in this paper to make it less confusing, appeared in Japan around 1992 as a distinct genre of male-centred homoerotic comics and novels. *Bōizu rabu* refers to commercially published manga and light novels, although it can also refer to non-commercial works.⁸

All these terms co-existed eventually at the same time and referred to male same-sex romance stories. Although the term *shōnen-ai* was not used anymore to refer to male same-sex romance stories due to its association with paedophilia. However, *yaoi* and *bōizu Rabu* are still both used. The difference between the terms regarding if it is a commercial or non-commercial production faded. Hence, *yaoi* and *bōizu rabu* are both used to refer to male same-sex romance stories and the distinction in the meaning of the terms is unknown. Consequently, lots of artists, fans, critics, and academics use the terms synonymously.⁹ Nevertheless, *yaoi* is usually used to refer to Japanese BL as in this thesis. Furthermore, this paper regards BL as the umbrella term for all male same-sex stories, which can be divided into subgenres like *yaoi* and *series wai*.

However, before *yaoi* arrived in Thailand, there was already the appearance of sexual minorities, especially *kathoey* and *tut* in Thai cinema. *Kathoey* is someone who wants to look like a woman and wants to be regarded as such. However, her mannerism is not overly effeminate. Furthermore, transgender people may also be called *kathoey*.¹⁰ *Tut* is a man by appearance, but a woman by heart. However, (s)he does not want to transform into a woman but acts overly feminine.¹¹ The term can also be used as a derogatory term for *kathoey*.¹² As the

⁸ Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 151; Fran Martin, 'Girls Who Love Boys' Love', in *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, by Maud Lavin (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 198; Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction'; McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 8.

⁹ McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 5, 66.

¹⁰ Kritsada Techanilobon, *Drag, I Love You* (GMMTV, 2022), ep. 4; Pongpanit, 'The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining "non-Normative" Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010'.

¹¹ *Drag, I Love You*.

¹² Pongpanit, 'The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining "non-Normative" Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010', 22; De Lind van Wijngaarden, 'Being Both and Acting "Man"', 1135.

Figure 1: FLTR: Pompam Niti Chaichitathorn, Pingpong Thongchai Thongkanthom, and Jenny Panhan



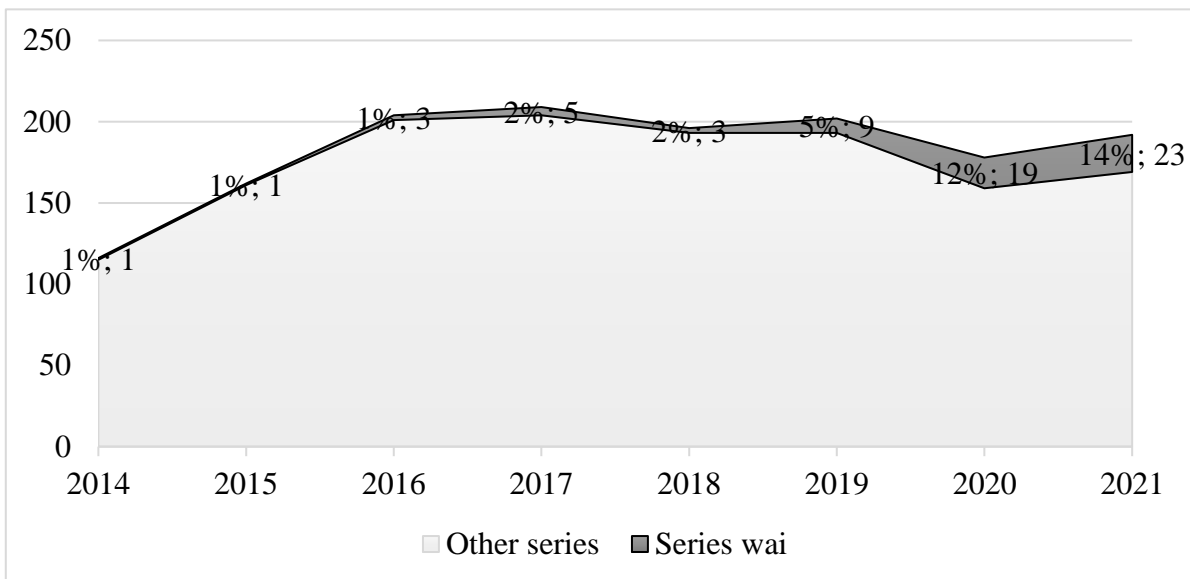
terms can be interchangeably used sometimes, someone could fit both terms, like Pingpong Thongchai, seen in the middle in Figure 1. Pompam Niti fits the description of *tut* as he is an effeminate man. Jenny Panhan is a *kathoey* as she is a trans-woman.

In series and films, it was usual to always have a “feminine” person in a relationship, so in the case of a male same-sex relationship, one needed to be a *kathoey* or *tut*.¹³ So, sexual minorities already appeared on screen, however, with the production of *series wai* one of the main characters was not *kathoey* anymore, but both main characters are young men who do not necessarily have to identify with LGBTQ+.

The first *series wai* series is from 2014, namely *Love Sick*. The number of *series wai* increased throughout the years with only a dip in 2018 as seen in Figure 2, but at that time there was a shrink in the overall production of series. Nevertheless, when the overall production of Thai television stagnated in 2019 and decreased in 2020, the number of *wai* series kept

¹³ Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 119; Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 99.

Figure 2: Number of "series wai" vs other series



increasing.¹⁴ This shows that *series wai* becomes increasingly a significant part of the production of series.

1.2. *Series wai* as support of social norms

Series wai can be perceived as sending a false message to national, as well as international fans. *Series wai* makes people believe that the LGBTQ+ community is well-received in Thailand, but that is not the case. Furthermore, the relationships in the series are an example of romantic monogamy, which is exemplary for improving society. Also, the narratives' settings which are most of the time high school and university and in engineering and economy faculty are to promote the country's development and motivate teens to study.

The Thai government tried to promote "romantic monogamous heterosexuality" as part of Chulalongkorn's (King Rama V, r. 1868-1910) main task *siwilai*. *Siwilai* originates from the English word "civilized." This task was to make Siam, the predecessor of Thailand, modernized and to prevent the country from colonization in the late nineteenth century. It embraces the

¹⁴ The total number of series is based on the total of series found MyDramalist.com.

“new triple supremacy: romantic monogamous heterosexuality.”¹⁵ However, his successor Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r. 1910-1925) failed to proceed with Chulalongkorn’s task of *siwilai*, because of, inter alia, his fondness for having a “male company.”¹⁶

Regardless of the measures against the LGBTQ+, the Thai government still used for example Pattaya, a city, to attract tourists. Pattaya is one of the most famous tourist attractions of Thailand for sex tourists since the 1980s.¹⁷ The city is known for the big number of sexual minorities and the many queer shows, such as Tiffany Show and Alcazar.¹⁸ Consequently, sexual minorities are welcomed or at least tolerated, because of the economical benefits, although the activities are not legal.¹⁹ However, the acceptance in Pattaya does not mean that they are accepted all over the country.²⁰

In 2001 newly elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006) tried again to “clear” Thailand’s image and restrict the public presence of sexual cultures through “the government’s indirect association of homosexuality with lewdness and sex work.”²¹ Although it did not work out, the hetero-patriarchal social structure strengthened again through BL narratives, which Chan calls “moderated heteropatriarchy.” As he argues that these narratives create an opening for the acceptance of same-sex relationships to maintain filial piety.²²

He takes the series *Love By Chance* (2018) as an example of how the mother’s acceptance and the fathers’ absence contribute to the heteropatriarchy. As Chan mentions, a father, who is the head of a heteronormative family, cannot approve of a homosexual son.

¹⁵ Charlie Yi Zhang and Adam K. Dedman, ‘Hyperreal Homoerotic Love in a Monarchized Military Conjunction: A Situated View of the Thai Boys’ Love Industry’, *Feminist Media Studies* 21, no. 6 (18 August 2021): 1040, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1959370>.

¹⁶ Zhang and Dedman, 1040.

¹⁷ Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 85.

¹⁸ Pongpanit, 73.

¹⁹ Pongpanit, 215.

²⁰ Pongpanit, 97.

²¹ Zhang and Dedman, ‘Hyperreal Homoerotic Love in a Monarchized Military Conjunction’, 1040.

²² Zhang and Dedman, 1040.

Therefore, the father's absence prevents an irresolvable dilemma. The mother's approval and acceptance is a personal decision, which does not threaten the heteronormative gendered order of Thai society. Furthermore, the series portrays the main characters as good, filial sons of the family according to heteronormative standards.

When General Prayuth Chan-ocha (May 2014-present) came to power as representative for the junta, he began with measures that targeted sex workers and non-conforming gender groups to retrieve moral ground and solidify its power base. However, at the same time production of *wai* content (novels, cartoons, series, films etcetera) increased. Although *wai* content did not fit his measures, it was not banned. This can be regarded as "pinkwashing" of his authoritarian governance. In other words, *wai* content is used to cover the measures undermining LGBTQ+ to act like the LGBTQ+ are in an advantageous position.²³

As mentioned before, *wai* narratives can be regarded as an example of moderated heteropatriarchy. This is because the *wai* industry generates hyper-romanticized love. The actors who play a couple in the series seem to have a spontaneous dating relationship in real life, too. This is visible through their "couple's" behaviour and interactions. These interactions motivate fans to keep regarding them as an imagined couple, follow them and make posts and videos about their "hyperreal love." This "committed" love is an example of romantic monogamy according to the terms of *siwilai* and it is poised to help Thailand's perplexing conjunctural situation. Although it regards a male same-sex relationship, the focus lies on the "commitment" the actors have to each other, which functions as a good example for all romantic relationships to be committed and true to one partner.²⁴

Besides that, the series itself also has a promotional aspect in the case of education. Homosexuality in Thailand is perceived as "a figure of creative talent, potential economic

²³ Zhang and Dedman, 1040.

²⁴ Zhang and Dedman, 1041.

productivity, and affective abundance” that must be nurtured.²⁵ Also, most BL series takes place in high school or university. A theory for that is to create a “safe zone” where adolescents can have same-sex relationships. But they will grow out of it when entering the “adult world” that makes them participate in the patriarchal sex-gender system by finding a woman to start a family with. On top of that, the characters usually study engineering or economics since these faculties uplift the country’s developing line and economic ability.²⁶

Hence, *series wai* can be regarded as a way to misinform Thai people, but also international viewers. *Series wai* makes people believe that LGBTQ+ are in a beneficial place for them, while that is not the case, looking at Prayut’s measures. Furthermore, the relationships in the series are an example of romantic monogamy, which is a pillar for *siwilai*. Also, the narratives’ settings which are most of the time high school and university and in engineering and economy faculty, are uplifting for the country’s development and make same-sex relationships as something for adolescents will grow out of.

²⁵ Zhang and Dedman, 1041.

²⁶ Zhang and Dedman, 1041.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The first part of this chapter investigates the notion of genre and finds connections with what researchers of *series wai* see occurring in the *wai* genre. The understanding of the notion of genre helps to explain why and how *series wai* is changing and what influences the change. The second part gives an overview of the existing literature about *series wai* regarding the generic conventions and tropes.²⁷

2.1. Genre

As *series wai* is a subgenre of Boys' Love, there needs to be an understanding of what is meant by "genre," its importance, and its behaviour. This is to have a context of why *series wai* is changing as it does and it gives a reason for the importance of labelling. Researchers of *series wai* also observed the factors of the subgenre within *series wai*, like how *series wai* is used as a label for marketing, but also how references to other series within the same subgenre are used to engage the audience.

"Genre is a descriptive term used to group film and media texts that share narrative, sensory, stylistic, thematic or other characteristics."²⁸ Besides being descriptive it is also a concept that makes promises about what will be on-screen by categorizing something "off-screen" like the way of production, histories of reception, and locations and platforms of consumption.²⁹ However, genre and its corpus are not predefined.³⁰ On contrary, it is created by the collective response of the mass audience and the film-producing industry established and labelled them. Therefore, genres are "the product of audience and studio interaction" as Thomas

²⁷ Although recently (May 2022) "Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media In Asia" edited by James Welker is published. This is the first detailed examination of the BL media explosion across Asia. Unfortunately, I could not interrogate in my research as it came out too late. However, this book would also give interesting and important insights into *series wai*.

²⁸ Kartik Nair, 'Genre', *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (1 June 2021): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749276211026056>.

²⁹ Nair, 95.

³⁰ R. Altman, *Film/Genre*, Reprint. (London: British Film Institute, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 24.

Schatz stresses. Furthermore, genres are “the result of the material conditions of commercial filmmaking itself.” Additionally, if the industry does not define or the audience does not recognize the genre, it cannot be a genre, since genre is not scientifically or theoretically created, but it is industrially approved and widespread.³¹

Films in a genre have a common topic and a common structure, so a usual method of constructing the topic. Even though a film may have a common topic as another film, it has a different structure, and it will not be perceived as part of the genre of the other film.³² Furthermore, films in a certain genre need to share specific essential attributes.³³ When there is a seeming conflict between different genre practices, causing generic miscommunication, it makes the genre’s discursive investment clear.³⁴

Because films in a certain genre need to follow a particular structure, the pleasure of watching comes more from confirmation than from uniqueness. Additionally, the film’s ending alongside the cause-and-effect structure that leads to the ending is less important due to the repetitiveness within the genre. As a result, the cumulative effect of the film’s frequently repeated scenarios, motifs, and symbols determines the films within a genre.³⁵

It is an advantage for producers to categorize their films. The categorization guarantees financial income since generic films are already pre-sold to the audience of the genre. As Austin stresses: “Research has consistently demonstrated that people cite a film’s plot or story and its genre as both their most important reason for moviegoing in general and as their reason for attending a specific film.”³⁶ This is also what Prasannam sees taking place in the *wai* genre, since producing a series or film under that label, will attract a stable audience. Therefore,

³¹ Altman, 16.

³² Altman, 23.

³³ Altman, 24.

³⁴ Altman, 111.

³⁵ Altman, 25.

³⁶ Altman, 111–12.

GMMTV Company Limited, a Thai television production company (hereafter GMMTV), removed most of the heterosexual couples from the novel *Dark Blue Kiss* from Hideko_Sunshine when adapting it into a series as it would attract enough audiences with just same-sex couples.³⁷ However, nowadays, the genre is not the key to a successful film. Although a film's generic connection can help it earn a usual or slightly higher-than-average income, the genre itself is not enough to ensure success. It also has to do with advertising.³⁸

The genre also influences the way of marketing. Distributors and exhibitors devise promotional techniques to capitalize on generic attractions, frequently through explicit visual or aural citations in trailers, posters, reviews, and other venues that establish a “contract” between image and viewer.³⁹ Yet, only brand-name owners benefit from the brand name and its loyal audience, though everyone can create generic products.⁴⁰ But, individual studios have the private right to use contract actors, house directors, proprietary characters and patented processes. Nevertheless, a single studio can never fully manage a genre. Still, these private rights help to develop a pre-sold audience for the next film with the in-house star, character, or look. This helps with publicity since only the continuity with the previous film needs to be emphasized to guarantee a strong audience.⁴¹ GMMTV also employs this tactic to attract an audience as the company makes use of the audience’s memory and therefore it reuses imaginary couples and puts references in series to other series.⁴²

Films in a genre also need to be different from each other as people do not want to keep watching the same film, but only the same format.⁴³ Thus, minor changes are made every time, causing the genre changes from how it was initially. Hence, one can see a cycle where genre

³⁷ Prasannam, ‘The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction’, 68, 75.

³⁸ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 112.

³⁹ Nair, ‘Genre’, 95.

⁴⁰ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 115.

⁴¹ Altman, 115.

⁴² Prasannam, ‘The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction’.

⁴³ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 120.

develops, reacts, becomes self-conscious, and self-destructs.⁴⁴ However, the change cannot be too radical. As Altman puts it “[l]ike a train, genre is free to move, but only along already laid tracks.” This track’s stations are experimentation and reflexivity between which the genre shifts. Though it can grow, it can never “mate or select.”⁴⁵

Besides the change within a genre, it can also be different in multiple countries. This change in genre is needed to make the genre which originates from a different culture appealing and comprehensible for the new local markets. This is also visible in how Japanese popular culture texts are adapted to other local markets. Robertson called the process of adaptation “glocalization.”⁴⁶ This process intends to make the differences between foreign and local countries irrelevant.⁴⁷ This process is also visible in the first Thai BL series where there was no “homosocial focus” and clear *seme-uke* distinction like Japanese BLs have. This was to make the series follow the heteronormative conventions of *lakhon*. *Lakhon* is “a genre of popular media that focuses on heterosexual romances between wealthy urbanite.”⁴⁸

In conclusion, the description of genre is related to *series wai*. As it explains that genre needs to change to keep engaging the audience. This is also what is happening to *series wai*. In addition, aspects, like the influence of GMMTV on the genre and how GMMTV makes use of it, which Prasannam observed, are also explained by Altman as part of the genre dynamics.

2.2. Generic conventions and tropes within *series wai*

Five researchers mention generic conventions and tropes attributed to *series wai*. Although some of these conventions and tropes originate from Japan. In total, they provide nine generic conventions and tropes. All researchers agree on the convention of the use of young boys and

⁴⁴ Altman, 21.

⁴⁵ Altman, 22.

⁴⁶ Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 121.

⁴⁷ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC [etc.]: Duke University Press, 2002), 90.

⁴⁸ Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 115, 121.

that the companies motivate fans to keep imagining the couples' romantic relationships outside the series. However, every researcher adds something that is not always shared, or they call it differently. Nevertheless, this part of the literature demonstrates the multiple conventions and tropes that can be found in *series wai*.

As mentioned before, Bunyavejchewin's description of the *wai* genre implies that it must feature young men's appearances following the pan-East Asian pretty boy look.⁴⁹ Prasannam, Saejang, Baudinette, Zhang and Dedman share this thought. Although, Prasannam calls it "cute boy," which is the Thai term for this notion, that merged with the Korean "Kkonminam (Flower Boy)"; Saejang only mentions university students and young adults; Baudinette calls them by the Japanese name "bishōnen."⁵⁰ Prasannam and Kwon define this look as having a soft, androgynous appearance and being young or at least appearing to be young.⁵¹ So, what they all agree on is the use of young boys. Furthermore, the *cute boy*, Flower boy, and *bishōnen* all contain soft masculinity. Therefore, most researchers also mention that it is a must for characters to conform to soft masculinity.

Another convention that researchers agree on is the targeted audience. Although Zhang and Dedman are less clear about it. However, they indirectly agree because they mention that the couples' hyperreal love outside the series is to motivate viewers to regard them as an imaginary couple, which only fans of the genre do.⁵² The targeted audience is young heterosexual women, especially *fujoshi* or, in Thai, *sao-wai/y* [Y(aoi) girls]. *Fujoshi* means literally "rotten girls" and in contrast to *sao-wai/y*, has a bad connotation. *Fujoshi* and *sao-wai/y* appreciate same-sex male couples and may even lose themselves in the fantasy of male-male

⁴⁹ Bunyavejchewin, 'The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand', 31.

⁵⁰ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 63–64; Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 154; Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 120.

⁵¹ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction'; Jungmin Kwon, 'Co-Mmodifying the Gay Body: Globalization, the Film Industry and Female Prosumers in the Contemporary Korean Mediascape', *International Journal of Communication* 10, no. 0 (14 March 2016): 18.

⁵² Zhang and Dedman, 'Hyperreal Homoerotic Love in a Monarchized Military Conjuncture', 1041.

romance.⁵³ However, Bunyavejchewin argues that the *wai* genre is also targeted at *hnum-wai* [Y(aoi boys), homosexual people and *kathoey*, though not primarily, because of the graphic depictions of sexually explicit or sexually suggestive scenes.⁵⁴

Related to the type of audience is the behaviour of the fans that the genre's industry promotes. This behaviour of coupling or, as fans call it, "shipping" of two men as if they are in a relationship, although being it an imaginary one, is called in Japanese *moe-banashi*.⁵⁵ The term "ship" and the conjugation "shipping" is a shortening of "relationship." The Thai term Thai fans use is *khu'gine*, which is a combination of the word "couple (*khu*)" and the shortening of the English word "imagine." The Thai words *long ruea* [boarding the boat], *phai ruea*, and *jaew ruea* [rowing the boat] are the Thai words for "shipping." *Ruea* comes from the English term "ship/shipping." Thai fans used the literal meaning of "ship" or "boat" and therefore used the Thai word for a boat when referring to a couple as if the couple is in the same boat.⁵⁶

Jaew ruea activities in the media are making fan art, fan videos, fanfictions, and OPVs (official promotional videos/other person's videos). Fanfictions are stories about *wai* couples or other celebrities who do not have to be related to the *wai* business, but who are shipped nevertheless. The term is usually abbreviated to fanfic. OPVs are videos that companies did not make in the first instance until GMMTV made them too, but fans make them to create a story about their ship. They use clips from the series, fan meeting activities, events, stories and live videos through social network websites like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Weibo.⁵⁷ Other *jaew ruea* behaviour is chatting about their ship with other *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai*, attending fan meetings, following the actors' social media accounts, and supporting the actors' activities.

⁵³ Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 120; Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 66–67; Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 154.

⁵⁴ Bunyavejchewin, 'The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand', 28.

⁵⁵ Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 120.

⁵⁶ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 69.

⁵⁷ Prasannam, 76.

Jaew ruea activities are not only about characters but also about the characters' actors. Zhang and Dedman found how the series and the actors' interactions outside the series motivate this behaviour. These interactions are for example publicly making merit together, going on trips, and meeting each others' parents to give fans something to fuel their imagination that they are in a real relationship.⁵⁸ The producing companies also energise the fans' shipping activities by organizing events like "Y I Love You Fan Party" in 2017 and 2019, where the most popular couples of GMMTV appeared. Also, they produce series where couples appear again like the spin-off series *Our Skyy* which features five already existing imaginary couples.⁵⁹ This motivates fans to keep supporting the actors, but also to buy merchandise, promoted products, watch series, and attend events. *Khu'gine* ensures financial income.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Bunyavejchewin and Saejang see an increasing presence of sexually suggestive or explicit scenes displaying young male bodies.⁶¹ Homoeroticism has been a major part of *yaoi* which is also exported to Thai *wai* stories.⁶² Because of this increase and growing focus on it, it also receives more criticism. Since it causes the novels and series to have absurd plots and homophobic/transphobic/sexist/misogynistic elements, hypersexualize male characters, and standardize sexual harassment and abusive relationships.⁶³ This causes increasing attention to Chinese BL instead of Thai BL since Chinese BL does not have the problematic characterization of the characters.⁶⁴ At the same time, because women are not the victim of problematic behaviour like in *lakhon*, it attracts women.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Zhang and Dedman, 'Hyperreal Homoerotic Love in a Monarchized Military Conjuncture', 1041.

⁵⁹ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 81–82.

⁶⁰ Poramate Parnpiamkiat, 'Expectation of Fans towards Thai Boys' Love Celebrity Couples', 2019, 186.

⁶¹ Bunyavejchewin, 'The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand', 32; Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 153.

⁶² Agnes Zsila et al., 'Loving the Love of Boys: Motives for Consuming Yaoi Media', *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 6 (14 June 2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0198895>.

⁶³ Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 155.

⁶⁴ Saejang, 152.

⁶⁵ McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 8; *BL: Broken Fantasy*, Documentary (Thailand, 2020), <https://www.gagaoolala.com/en/videos/1707/bl-broken-fantasy-2020>.

Building on the growing criticism of the problematic characterization, viewers demand increasingly better representation of the LGBTQ+ community in series. These people also help, although unintentionally, to spread awareness of LGBTQ+ and possibly cause social change.⁶⁶ On the other side, passionate *wai/Y* fans regard the *wai* genre as a provider of emotional pleasure and prefer it to be that way to the representation of the LGBTQ+ members' struggles.⁶⁷ Prasannam also concluded that *wai/Y* novels should be consumed for emotional pleasure rather than for LGBTQ+ representation as its storytelling method is comparable to that of romance novels.⁶⁸ So, two movements are going on, one that demands more LGBTQ+ representation in *wai/Y* products and the other that regards the products as just emotional pleasure and consequently disregards the need to represent the LGBTQ+.

Because of the growing demand for better representation, the viewers request to let go of the characters' denial of their homosexuality. Currently, the characters are not portrayed as gay, but as two men who happen to be attracted to each other, but not to others of the same sex.⁶⁹ Baudinette also found this denial of homosexuality and adds that there is an emphasis on the characters' Thai masculinity, which includes being heterosexual. He found that they emphasize showing the characters in a relationship with a girl, contrasting the characters with *kathoey*, and through interviews with the actors.⁷⁰ Bunyavejchewin also saw this rhetoric as he concludes that the characters are identified as masculine boys or young men.⁷¹

Another aspect of the *wai* genre that receives criticism is the *seme-uke* role division. The *seme* is the penetrating partner and the *uke* is the penetrated partner. All researchers except for Zhang and Dedman touches upon this aspect. Saejang argues that it is a regular thing that

⁶⁶ Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 152.

⁶⁷ Saejang, 161.

⁶⁸ Saejang, 163.

⁶⁹ Saejang, 161.

⁷⁰ Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 124; de Lind van Wijngaarden, 'Being Both and Acting "Man"'.
⁷¹ Bunyavejchewin, 'The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand', 31.

happens in *wai* content and connects it to the heteronormative role division. In this role division, the *seme* is more on the masculine side and the *uke* on the feminine side.⁷² Baudinette does not find this role division in the first *series wai*, *Love Sick*, but the *fujoshi* in the series refers to it, showing viewers how it works. Furthermore, the second season draws upon it more.⁷³ In contrast, Prasannam categorizes *Love Sick*'s characters as *seme* and *uke*.⁷⁴ This shows that the division of *seme* and *uke* is not objective. Furthermore, as Saejang shows, role division is not just about the position in sexual acts, but also about the role in the relationship in general.

Baudinette observes a homosocial world in the first *series wai* series. A homosocial world is a setting where female characters have close to no role or exist to facilitate same-sex relationships. This generic convention originates from Japan and challenges the *lakhon* convention in which women enjoy the leading role. Nevertheless, in comparison to Japanese BL, the first *series wai* did not fully have a homosocial world as women had the leading role. Although this changes in the second season of the series, where the women appeared less. As Baudinette sees it, when the audience is used to this convention, it will appear more often.⁷⁵

Bunyavejchewin argues that the series are inclined to have happy endings.⁷⁶ This trope originates from *bōizu rabu*, the follow-up to *shōnen-ai* and *yaoi*. The stories in this subgenre are expected to have good endings.⁷⁷ This positive outcome for same-sex couples breaks with the previous Thai queer films. These films do not have happy endings because of the Buddhist belief in bad karma caused by the previous life which results in homosexuality.⁷⁸

⁷² Saejang, 'Behind Online Y Counterculture', 157.

⁷³ Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 129–30.

⁷⁴ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 81.

⁷⁵ Baudinette, 'Lovesick, The Series', 122–23.

⁷⁶ Bunyavejchewin, 'The Wai (Y[Aoi]) Genre: Local BL Media in Thailand', 32.

⁷⁷ McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 5, 11.

⁷⁸ Edited by Peter A. Jackson, *Queer Bangkok*; Pongpanit, 'The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining "non-Normative" Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010'.

So, these researchers draw up a total of nine concepts in the *wai* genre, which are the “pan-East Asian soft masculinity,” “the young heterosexual women and *fujoshi*, as the main targeted audience,” “*moe-banashi* or *khu’gine*,” “homoeroticism,” “(non-)representation of LGBTQ+,” “identification of homo-/bisexuality,” “*seme-uke* role division,” “homosocial world,” and “happy endings.” There are differences between the researchers regarding the targeted audience, as one also includes gay males and *kathoey* as a target. Nevertheless, in general, they write about almost the same concepts, which indicates which concepts should be present in a tv-series and which could be less present.

Chapter 3: Transmedia popularity

Although *series wai* is a genre, it is more than just the series itself. This chapter looks into the transmedia popularity of *series wai* and therefore also of the *wai* genre. It shows the importance of novels, the reuse and recycling of imaginary couples and also the effect of transmedia popularity. The analysis shows that *series wai* uses transmedia platforms more than any other BL subgenre, but also that the imaginary couple status of the actors is more promoted than the series itself.

3.1. Novels as the base

The BL genre started with novels and manga. The genre got a foot in Thailand because of the import of translated Japanese novels and manga. Eventually, fans of the genre started to produce stories themselves. These novels became a base for the series with *Love Sick* (2014) being the first. *Love Sick* paved the way for future adaptations of other popular novels like *Make It Right* (2016), *2 Moons* (2017), *Love By Chance* (2018), *TharnType* (2019), and *Bad Buddy* (2021). Until 2021, 38 series of the 64 series examined for this thesis are based on novels. As Figure 3 shows, the beginning of the production of *series wai* was mainly based on novels, only until last year, the prominent part of the series is based on a novel. In comparison to other countries,

Figure 3: Series that are based on a novel

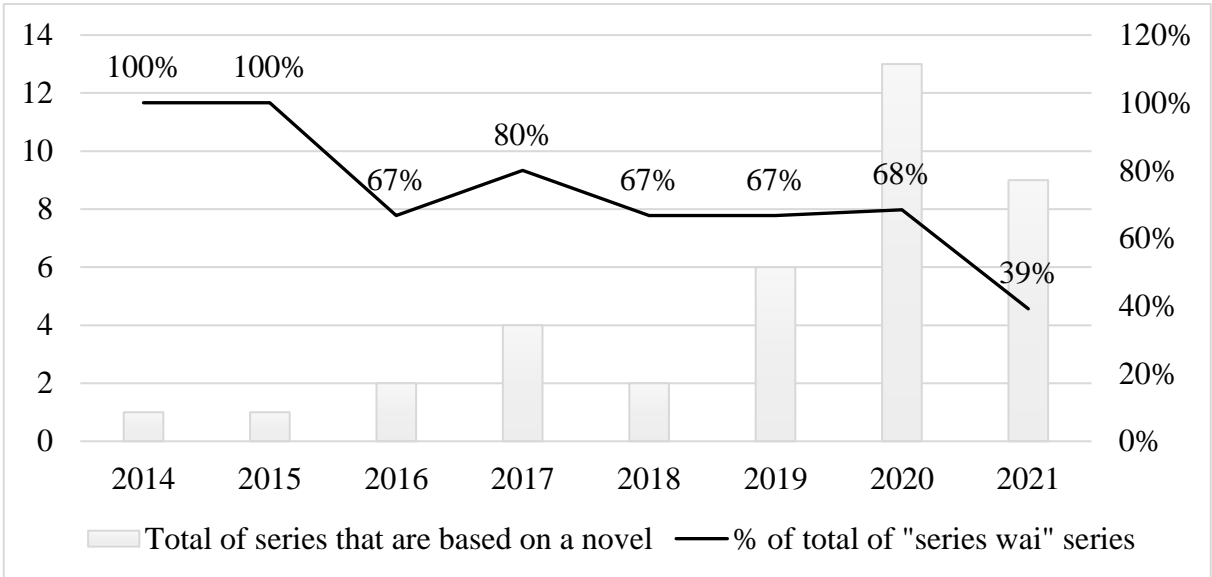


Figure 4: Kao in *Kiss the Series* (left) and in *Dark Blue Kiss* (right)



only Japan and China base many series on novels, manhwa (graphic novels), or manga. Although, China erases homosexual interactions and tries to show a bromance. Though, it is clear to the viewer that the main characters are meant to be a couple.

However, in Thailand, it also occurs that the novel is published after the broadcast of the series. *SOTUS S* (2017) was written and produced after the first season. This was done in collaboration between the broadcaster and the writer of the book.⁷⁹ But it also ensures that a book is written with certain actors in mind as in the case of *Dark Blue Kiss* (2019). The same-sex couple Pete and Kao were so popular in *Kiss* (2016) that they gained a main storyline in the second season, *Kiss Me Again* (2021), and their series *Dark Blue Kiss*. The personalities in *Kiss* differ from the other two series, as the characters in the latter series are based on the actors' personalities.⁸⁰ This is visible in Figure 4 where Kao when he appeared for the first time, looks dorkier than in the seasons following where he looks smarter.

The adaption of novels into series influences the story. As can be seen from the personality change of Kao and Pete in *Kiss* and *Kiss Me Again*, where the characters enjoyed more attention because of their popularity in the series. This resulted in an own love story with

⁷⁹ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 80.

⁸⁰ Prasannam, 75.

characters that are written with more attention. As Tay Tawan and New Thitipoom made the characters lovable, the characters are eventually based on their real interactions and personalities. In addition, the comments of readers can be taken into considering what should happen.

Besides, adaption is a filter over the stories. Toxic happenings can be erased, which ensued with the adaption of the novel *Behind the Scenes* into *Bad Buddy*. The couple did not break up to eventually come together again, but believed in their relationship and stayed together in secret to show that their relationship is durable. Similar to the adaption of *Love By Chance 2: A Chance to Love* (2020) of the novel. Ae, a character played by Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan, does not try to have a relationship with a girl who pursues him when Pete, his (ex-)boyfriend, leaves for Germany, like in the novel. In the series, instead, he stays loyal to Pete and waits for his return. Although adaption can take out toxicity, it does not mean it is not there anymore. Even though some toxic parts have been erased in the adaption of *TharnType* it was still present in the series.

The foundation of novels for the series secures the success of the series more than basing it on a screenplay which was unknown to the audience before the broadcast. Like Prasannam notices, a fan of *wai* novels is also likely to watch the adaption of the novels. Therefore, the novels are just as important as the series as they helped the series to become popular. The successful adaptations paved the way for series that are not adapted from novels and laid the fundamentals for the subgenre. Adaption is also a filter or a way to change some things in the story that is not desirable.

3.2. Transmedia as motivation for *khu'gine*

The industry is not focused on promoting the series necessarily, but primarily on promoting the actors as imaginary couples. Therefore, they appear as a couple in different types of media

albeit carrying their own name or acting as a character. This part of the thesis shows how imaginary couples also appear in types of media which is not directly related to the series in which they played a couple. The imaginary couple can be portrayed in different ways: as a couple, friends, or strangers. Nevertheless, the use of them is mainly to attract viewers and attention. But also to motivate *khu'gine*, imagining people to be in a relationship. Although this is seen on small scale in other countries, such as Taiwan and China where the actors are also invited on variety shows, Thailand is next level for example by organizing their own variety programs.

Although the story in the series ends with the ending of the series, it is not the end for the actors, fans, and the involved companies. During and after the broadcast of the series, the couple comes out of the story and moves to real-life events and other media, such as music videos (MVs), variety programs, and series. Couples are often found in MVs which may not be related to the series. Take for example Saint Suppapong Udomkaewjana and Zee Pruk Panich who appeared in Ton Thanasit's MV for "TRUTH or DARE" (see Figure 5). They played in the MV as a couple becoming-to-be with different character names than the characters in the series *Why R U?* (2020) where they acted as a couple.

Also, companies sponsor couples to make songs and MVs to promote their products. Take for example JOOX music, a music player app, which sponsored Boun Noppanut

Figure 5: Still from *TRUTH or DARE* by Ton Thanasit



Figure 6: Still from ขอลาลืม by Boun and Prem



Guntachai and Prem Warut Chawalitrujiwong’s song “ขอลาลืม [khōwēlālūm (I need some time to forget)]” (see Figure 6.) The MV uses the actors’ real names and implies that they are in a relationship for real. The MV shows the story that Prem forgot the seventh anniversary of their relationship as he is meeting and drinking with his friends. Boun is drinking alone, calls him a few times, and cries. After a few calls, Prem responds and finds him alone in a club. The MV features pictures that are taken on the set of *Until We Meet Again* (2020), but also shots that are especially taken for the MV. As the MV uses the actors’ real names, it verifies the fans’ wishes of them being a real couple instead of just imaginary.

Besides music businesses, other kinds of companies use the singing abilities of the actors. Take, for instance, Candy Thailand, an appliances company, which had Mew Suppasit Jongcheveevat and Gulf Kanawut Traipipattanapong sing a song and act in the MV “ชีวิตดี...เพราะมีเธอ [chīwitdī...phrōmīthōē (life is good... because of having you)]” (see Figure 7). The MV shows the actors as a couple living together and in the meanwhile, they use appliances that can

Figure 7: Still from ชีวิตดี...เพราะมีเธอ by Mew and Gulf



be bought at Candy. The use of trending popular actors, such as Mew Suppasit and Gulf Kanawut were at that time, in an easily accessible type of media as MV, attracting *sao-wai* (female BL fans) and *hnum-wai* (male BL fans) to watch their idol. On the other side, it also appears in the recommendations of people that show a bit of interest in the actors or *series wai* because of the algorithms.

Couples do not only appear in MVs, but they also appear in advertisements and events that promote products, which do not have to particularly relate to the series. Take for instance Lazada, an online shopping mall, which has used every popular couple to promote their products in advertisements, events, and concerts. Other companies, like Cornetto or Baby Bright, a skin care brand, used some couples where they act like one has a crush on the other or as if they are in a relationship in advertisements that have a short story structure. An example is found in Figure 8 which shows Krist Perawat playing Sunny, who looks like the person Pla Thong, played by Singto Prachaya, likes and died. The story between Pla Thong and Sunny's doppelganger is told in the advertisement/mini-film the year prior. Additionally, the story shows the fate between the characters as they will always end up together, which is a soothing thought for the *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai*.

Figure 8: Stills from advertisement/mini-film of Baby Bright with Singto and Krist

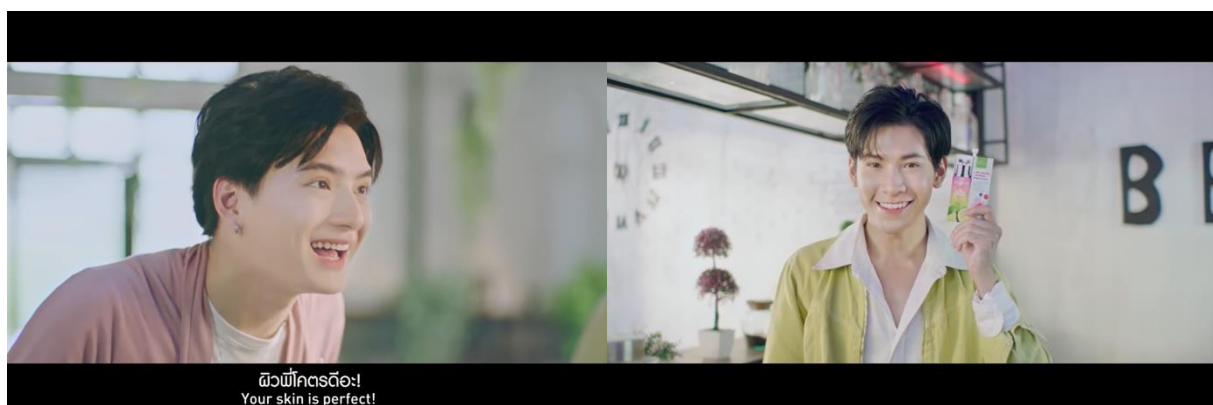


Figure 9: Stills from *WHY R U* ep. 2 featuring Boom and Peak (left) and Mew and Gulf (right)



The characters also make guest appearances in other series. These series could be a *series wai*, like Boom Krittapak Udompanich with Peak Peemapol Panichtamrong and Mew Suppasit with Gulf Kanawut who act like couples in *Why R U?*. Although the series takes place in a different dramaworld, the fictive world where the series takes place, the actors acted as the same characters they played in their series. So, Boom Krittapak acted as Tee and Peak Peemapol as Fuse from the series *Make It Right* (2016) and *Make It Right 2* (2017). Mew Suppasit acted as Tharn and Gulf Kanawut as Type from the series *TharnType* (2019) and later on in *TharnType 2: 7 Years Of Love* (2020). The reason for picking these couples probably has to do with the director who directed *Make It Right* and *Why R U?* as well. But also using the fans' memories of Tee and Fuse, like what is mentioned in Chapter 2, Prasannam mentions how the industry makes use of the fans' memories which causes more engagement from fans. In the case of Mew Suppasit and Gulf Kanawut, they were the trending couple at that time and prepared for a second season. Therefore, appearing in another series is good for their visibility, and also a way to attract fans of Mew Suppasit and Gulf Kanawut to watch *Why R U?*.

Besides featuring a couple from another series, it is also possible that the actors are featured in another series, which does not have to be a *series wai*, as other characters. Take for instance Saint Suppapong and Zee Pruk who make guest appearances in the *lakhon Mae Krua Kon Mai* (2021). Although Max, played by Saint Suppapong, is the boyfriend of the main female character, it is revealed later on that it is a cover to satisfy his family. Max has a same-sex relationship with Win, played by Zee Pruk, but as Max's family wants him to marry, he

chose to be in a relationship with a woman and keeps his same-sex relationship hidden. Although this is not a topic that is regularly addressed in *series wai* as it is mainly about students who do not think of marriage yet, *Mae Krua Kon Mai* used a younger couple to portray them. This could be due to their fanbase. Featuring them might attract *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* to watch the series or at least promote it by sharing the parts where Max and Win are featured. In the end, it will help promote the series, which also clarifies the homoerotic part that *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* love to see, as mentioned in “2.2. Generic conventions and tropes within *series wai*.”

It can also happen that one of the couples makes an appearance in the partner’s series, but they are not involved in a romantic relationship, like Singto Prachaya who made a guest appearance in *Teenage Mom* (2017) in which Krist Perawat has the lead. As can be seen in Figure 10, the two are sitting facing each other without eye contact, which is because they are strangers to each other. They meet in the hospital where Singto Prachaya’s character waits for his wife to start giving birth and Mek, played by Krist Perawat, waits for his child to be delivered through caesarean section. They have a small talk about becoming a father. Singto’s character, who is married and looks forward to it, is put in contrast with Mek, who becomes a father by accident, is young, and not married.

Setting them up like this breaks the *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai*’s ship, which is a reason that some did not watch the series. At the same time, the *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* who watched it and

Figure 10: Still from *Teen Mom* ep. 7



other series that feature Singto Prachaya with someone else as a couple became only more enthusiastic to see them acting together again as a couple in *SOTUS S* (2017) because of seeing them acting with other people. Like addictedtakumi (pseudonym) wrote:

Couldn't agree more, in fact when i watched Singto on one of the U-Prince series (if am not mistaken) with other guy couple, it just don't feel right.. keke..

It's a good thing Sotus 2 is comin really soon. hurray.. :)⁸¹

Thus, showing them together on the same screen can make the fans enthusiastic again, but at the same time, as they are not playing the role *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* want them to play, it can also disappoint them.

It also occurs that the actors do not act as a couple, but as good friends like Ohm Pawat Chittsawangdee and Toey Sittiwat Imerbpathom in *War of High School* (2016). Although Figure 11 might give another idea, they play friends that have their own love story in the series. The series nevertheless take advantage of the fact that they played together as a couple in *Make It Right*, which is broadcasted in the same year. In the series, some girls refer to Ohm Pawat and Toey Sittiwat when asking Pound, Ohm Pawat's character, if he is dating a certain girl. When Pound says that is not the case, the girls answer that Ohm Pawat and Toey Sittiwat said the same about their relationship, clearly showing that they do not believe it. So, the series participates in *khu'gine* of the actors, too.

Figure 11: Still from *War of High School* ep. 3



⁸¹ *Teenage Mom*, accessed 16 November 2022, <https://mydramalist.com/24923-teen-mom-the-series>.

The series also shows some parts of *Make It Right* on television characters are watching. But most of all, the series displays physical contact between Pound and Joey, played by Toey Sittiwat, which is different from the contact with other friends in the series. As *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* love to see these actions, the series make use of their imaginary couple status in real life and their role as boyfriends in *Make It Right*. Therefore, directors use the imaginary couple status of actors and their role in another series to advantage of their own series to gain more attention and viewers.

Lastly, the actors also appear in variety shows to promote the series, but also have their own show if they are popular enough. Especially GMMTV, a broadcast company, does this. Therefore, every popular couple on GMMTV has a variety show to promote the couple and motivate fans to keep shipping them. Besides, they have the program *School Rangers* (2018-present) which includes three couples as hosts. Besides GMMTV, other production companies mimic them too but on a smaller scale, like *Laneige Weekend with YinWar* (2021), *Why R U Going?* (2019) (Saint-Zee), *Vlog ZeeNunew* (2022), and *Vlog MaxNat* (2022). The reason that other companies are less actively making variety programs with their couples is that they have no solid couples like GMMTV, although it is changing when looking at Domundi, which created couples from actors under their wings since 2020 (Tommy-Jimmy, Zee-Nunew, Max-Nat, Tutor-Yim).

Figure 12 shows a still from *Tay-New Meal Date* (2018, 2020). As Tay Tawan and New Thitipoom are both foodies, they host a program trying, assessing, and promoting foods. In addition, as can be seen from the still, the show also provides some scenes and editing to promote *jaew ruea* (the actions that fuel *khu'gine*; shipping). So, the editors also participate in *jaew reua* for the sake of *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai*.

Figure 12: Still from *Tay-New Meal Date* ep. 5



Figure 13 shows stills from a small variety program, *Laneige Weekend with YinWar*, featuring Yin Anan Wong and War Wanarat Ratsameerat. The show is meant to promote products from Laneige, a skincare brand. But as seen in the stills, this is in combination with romantic behaviour. War Wanarat narrates a poem and at the end of reading it, he gives a kiss on Yin's cheek. As this is romantic behaviour, it promotes fans' *khu'gine*. Furthermore, it convinces *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* that Yin Anan and War Wanarat are possible in a relationship. Therefore, this kind of show showcases the imaginary couple doing actions found in romantic relationships and thus motivates the *khu'gine* behaviour of fans. At the same, they promote products, which fans might buy because their idols promote them.

Couples are also 'recycled' by using the couple as leads again in another series. Take for instance Off Jumpol Adulkittiporn and Gun Atthapan Phunsawat who played the main couple in three series and the fourth is on the way. Although the first series they acted in, *Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey 1* and *2* (2016&2017), had another main hetero couple, too. Figure 14 shows the promotional posters of the series. The second poster is from *Theory of Love* (2019),

Figure 13: Stills from *Laneige Weekend with YinWar* ep. 5



Figure 14: Posters of series with Off and Gun as main couple



the third is from *Not Me* (2021), and the fourth is from an upcoming series *Cooking Crush* expected to be aired in 2023. As can be seen from the years the series is broadcast, this imaginary couple runs a long time, from the beginning of the rise of *series wai* until now. This is also due to the variety programs, *Off Gun Fun Night* (2017, 2019, and 2020) and *OffGun Mommy Taste* (2020, 2021) where they are the sole main hosts. They also host another program *School Rangers* alongside two other imaginary couples which sometimes promotes their imaginary couple status.

Figure 15: Posters of series with Earth and Mix as main couple



Another couple that is created more recently has three series (see Figure 15), although one is upcoming. Earth Pirapat Watthanaset Siri and Mix Sahaphap Wongratch acted for the first time together in the series *A Tale of Thousand Stars* (2021). This gained their popularity which caused them to have two series where they act as a couple again in 2022 in two series *Cupid's Last Wish* (2022) and *Moonlight Chicken* (planned for 2022). So, one does not need to be a long-time imaginary couple to be recycled.

Nevertheless, success also does not guarantee recycling as other long-term imaginary couples like Singto Prachaya and Krist Perawat do not have another series together as other characters. However, Altman explains the recycling of actors within a genre, so the recycling of imaginary couples as main couples in different series. He regards it as a way of marketing. As explained in the literature review, the private rights of companies, in this case, the rights over the use of the couples that are part of their company, attract a solid audience for the next series they appear in. Therefore GMMTV reuses couples, but also Wabi Sabi, another production company, reuses imaginary couples like Boun Noppanut and Prem Warut, and Yin Anan and War Wanarat who have acted in three (mini)-series as the main couple.

However, the imaginary couple does not have to be featured as a couple in a *series wai*, although *sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* would prefer it. When considering GMMTV's *I'm Tee, Me*

Too (2020), which features three of their main couples, Off Jumpol and Gun Atthapan, Tay Tawan and New Thitipoom, and Singto Prachaya and Krist Perawat. The series had no references to their imaginary couple status, yet every episode had around one million viewers on YouTube. Put this in contrast with *Love Beyond Frontier* (2019), featuring Krist Perawat and New Thitipoom, where each episode had between 400.000 to 750.000 views on YouTube except for the first episode and the fifth part of episode 12.⁸² The peak in episode 12 has assumably to do with the male main character kissing the other male main character on the cheek. Nevertheless, the series attracted less than *I'm Tee, Me Too*. So, using couples regardless of if they act like a couple or not, is enough to attract viewers. This shows also how couples can transfer in the media and keep attracting an audience.

In summary, not only the plot of the series makes the genre popular, but also the industry around it regarding the use of couples in other programs. The industry is not focused on promoting the series necessarily, but on promoting the actors as imaginary couples. Therefore, they appear as a couple in different types of media albeit carrying their own name or acting as a character. Although this is seen on small scale in other countries, such as Taiwan and China where the actors are also invited on variety shows, Thailand is next level. Furthermore, couples are recycled in other series, which helps to attract the actors' fans. No other country uses the couples to promote products and artists to this extent, in addition to recycling the actors in other series, which makes *series wai* different from other BL subgenres.

3.3. The effects of *khu'gine*

Fans receive enough content to keep shipping the couples as understood from the previous part. This part goes deeper into the effects of fans' *khu'gine*. *Sao-wai* and *hnum-wai* benefit the industry, as they provide financial gain for the *series wai*-producing industry as the sponsors of

⁸² In October 2022

the actors. As Parnpiamkiat argues, the actors' involvement in events and advertisements increases profits.⁸³

Besides the financial aspect, fans influence the series. *Khu'gine* causes couples to maintain being popular and therefore reused. Though, at the same time, reusing also motivates *khu'gine*. It is a viscous circle. Besides, *khu'gine* can motivate directors to pick two actors who are already “ghostshipped” to attract already an audience. A “ghost ship” is an imaginary couple that has not acted in a series. Therefore, they are not a “real ship.” An example of a well-known ghost ship that turned into a real ship is Ohm Pawat and Nanon Korapat who were shipped since they appeared on *Blacklist* (2019) and became friends in real life. However, with *Bad Buddy* (2022), they became a real imaginary couple. Although Aof Noppharnach, *Bad Buddy's* director, motivated his choice of Ohm Pawat and Nanon Korapat by their interactions as friends that would fit the characters in the series.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the lacking promotion of the series, according to the fans, shows that GMMTV expected to have a solid audience, probably because of the ghost ship.⁸⁵

Khu'gine causes also that some *sao-wai/hnum-wai* write fanfiction, abbreviated to fanfic, which are stories about *wai* couples or other celebrities who do not have to be related to the *wai* business, but who are shipped nevertheless. Series that are based on fanfic are for example *Nitiman* (2021) and *Not Me* (2022). Although these are based on the South Korean boyband GOT7's fanfics the case of *Not Me* was written by a Thai.⁸⁶ *Gen Y* (2020) is also thought to be based on fanfic, as the characters are similar to the ones in *2Moons* (2017).⁸⁷ Either way, fans'

⁸³ Parnpiamkiat, 'Expectation of Fans towards Thai Boys' Love Celebrity Couples'.

⁸⁴ ippeoiippo, 'P'Aof Talks about Inviting Ohm & Nanon to Act for Bad Buddy to Defy BL Tropes', Reddit Post, *R/Boyslove*, 3 October 2021, www.reddit.com/r/boyslove/comments/q0o1u0/paof_talks_about_inviting_ohm_nanon_to_act_for/.

⁸⁵ 'Bad Buddy', My DramaList, accessed 20 May 2022, <https://mydramalist.com/682589-bad-buddy>.

⁸⁶ Afreen Khan, "'Nitima" and "Not Me" Thai Dramas Inspired by GOT7's Fanfictions', SK Pop, 2 December 2021, <https://www.sportskeeda.com/pop-culture/news-nitima-not-me-thai-dramas-inspired-got7-s-fanfictions>.

⁸⁷ Alien [pseudonym], '[...]Thats Why Kims Character Has a Different Name for Example. I Think It Was Based on a Fanfic for 2Moons but I'm Not Sure Lol. Read That Somewhere but with No Evidence.', *My Dramalist*, 2021, <https://mydramalist.com/22361-2-moons-the-series>.

khu'gine inspires them to write fanfics and in turn, series producers are inspired to adapt it into a series. Although South Korea has a lot of fanfic about idols in boybands, this has not been an inspiration for the South Korean BL series as South Korean BL is usually not based on a novel.⁸⁸

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter looked into the transmedia popularity which is an important part of the *wai* genre and inextricably linked to *series wai*. This transmedia popularity is built on novels which are made into series. Although other countries like China and Japan also base BL series on novels, manhua, and manga. Basing the series on an already existing story does not make *series wai* unique. However, the intertwining with other media platforms does make *series wai* unique.

The chapter showed how much transmedia there is regarding the use of actors in other series or types of media, such as advertisements and MVs. This use of actors motivates fans to keep showing *khu'gine* behaviour and therefore to support their idols financially, and mentally. In addition, the fans do not only support the actors financially but also the businesses, that use the actors to promote their products.

Although other countries also invite actors to variety programs and the actors behave sometimes flirty with each other. It is to no extend as *series wai* where couples have their own variety program and feature in MVs and series. In addition to the possibility of having multiple series together as the main couple and different characters. These activities show that it is more about the imaginary couple status of the actors than the series.

⁸⁸ Prasannam, 'The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction', 68.

Chapter 4: Masculinity and gender roles

This chapter looks into the display of, and emphasis on masculinity. *Series wai* features mainly masculine men, who are in line with “Thai masculinity.” The featuring of Thai masculinity itself makes it of course unique to other BL subgenres. However, the explicit emphasis on masculinity and the associated characteristics through the characters’ appearance and activities makes *series wai* an innovative and hybrid subgenre.

In addition, the analysis looks into the heteronormative gender roles that are present in the characters’ relationships. The research found that a ‘female’ and ‘male’ is still needed in a relationship concerning the stereotyped gender roles. This is also related to the *seme-uke* division in a same-sex relationship. Although this division is not always present, as some couples are reversible, still, heteronormative gender roles can be present in the relationship. Therefore, promoting the heteronormative family which is in line with *siwilai*, civilization. Other subgenres usually contain the *seme-uke* role division, too, except for South Korea, which is vaguer about who is the *seme* and who is the *uke*. However, in general, subgenres from other countries have less emphasis on masculinity and do not aim to promote a heteronormative family.

The chapter concludes that the shows put importance on the gender of the characters and the actors by emphasizing their masculine sides and maintaining gender roles, which is not found in other BL subgenres. Though every BL subgenre features characters that have a soft masculine look, there is more variation than in *series wai*, as not all characters follow soft masculinity. Only *yaoi* series also feature androgynous-looking characters. Something that makes *series wai* unique is the emphasis on masculinity despite the soft masculine looks of the characters.

4.1. Pan-East Asian soft masculinity

Pan-East Asian soft masculinity is, as mentioned in the literature review, a combination of different concepts. These concepts are the Thai “cute boy,” the Japanese *bishōnen*, and the Korean “flower boys.” The *bishōnen* culture was exported to Thailand in the 1990s due to the growing popularity of Japanese popular culture. This phenomenon merged with the Korean flower boy, which got a foot in Thailand in the 2000s along with the Korean wave, also called the *Hallyu* wave and the trans-Asian popular culture.⁸⁹

Jung describes the flower boy syndrome in which pretty, feminine men are idolized instead of tough, masculine men. Flower boys are often teenagers, who have vulnerable hearts, immature personalities, and are inconsiderate.⁹⁰ Lawrence gives a more detailed description, ‘kkonminam [(flower boy)][...] is characterised by softer jaws, double eyelids (epicanthic fold), high nose bridges, defined pectoral and bicep muscles, and an overall smooth and hairless body. Kkonminam also wears fashionable clothes, uses cosmetics, and even undergoes plastic surgery.’⁹¹ Watchers of the series observe these characteristics, too, when looking at a list on MyDramalist.com from “AmandaMarta” (pseudonym).⁹²

⁸⁹ Prasannam, 64; Kwon, ‘Co-Mmodifying the Gay Body’, 1570–71; Zhang and Dedman, ‘Hyperreal Homoerotic Love in a Monarchized Military Conjuncture’, 1041.

⁹⁰ Colby Y. Miyose, ‘Unrealistic Weeds of Love and Romance: The Korean Drama and the “Flower Boy” Genre’ (M.A., United States -- Nevada, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2015), 27, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/1710455108/abstract/DB51606C402C4498PQ/1>; Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Oldboy, K-Pop Idols*, TransAsia: Screen Cultures 326362347 (Hong Kong: University Press, 2011), chap. 2; Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 120.

⁹¹ Lawrence T. Monocello and William W. Dressler, ‘Flower Boys and Muscled Men: Comparing South Korean and American Male Body Ideals Using Cultural Domain Analysis’, *Anthropology & Medicine* 27, no. 2 (June 2020): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13648470.2020.1742575>.

⁹² AmandaMarta, ‘The Origin of the Flower Boy Trend’, *MyDramaList*, 21 April 2013, <https://mydramalist.com/article/2013/04/19/the-origin-of-the-flower-boy-trend>.

Figure 16: *My Beautiful Man* (left) and *A Man Who Defies the World of BL* (right)



A *bishōnen* can be described as someone who is androgynous. The person has female characteristics but identifies himself as male.⁹³ This androgynous look is found since the beginning of Japanese BL's creation. Though in the beginning, the characters were more genderless, they evolved into males with androgynous looks.⁹⁴ This look was adapted to erase the female presence in problematic love stories while having a character that resonates with the subordinate's looks.⁹⁵ This look remained to be used and is also used in other media besides *shōjo* manga that is directed at women, like boybands that appropriate the *bishōnen* look to entice women.⁹⁶ Also, some characters in the Japanese *yaoi* series still have this androgynous look when looking at *My Beautiful Man* (2021) (See Figure 16). But usually, the characters have a less androgynous look but are more in line with soft masculinity, like *A Man Who Defies the World of BL* (2021) (See Figure 16).

⁹³ McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 197.

⁹⁴ McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, 79–81.

⁹⁵ McLelland, 71–72.

⁹⁶ McLelland, 69.

Figure 18: *Together With Me* (left) and *Golden Blood* (right)



Although *series wai* does not feature androgynous characters like the *bishōnen*, it follows the characteristics of the Korean flower boy. By far most series use young men in *series wai* with the exceptions of *Together With Me* (2017) and *Golden Blood* (2021). The main characters from *Together With Me* and one main character from *Golden Blood* have strong facial features which do not resonate with soft masculinity and look older than the average *series wai* characters as visible in Figure 18.

Nevertheless, other series have soft masculine characters of whom softness is emphasized through lighting methods and editing. This is visible through the difference between how the actors look behind the scenes and on-screen. For example, behind the scenes,

Figure 17: Gulf Kanawut in daily life (left) and on screen (right)



the scabrous, tanned skin is visible, but the final product shows clear and bright skin. The actor Gulf Kanawut is an example of how the character looks different from the actor regarding skin. As Figure 17 shows, Gulf Kanawut has a darker skin tone, wears braces, and has oily, acne-prone skin. However, in the right picture of Figure 17, Type, the character he plays in *TharnType 2: 7 Years Of Love* (2020), has a lighter skin tone and soft-looking skin. Type also does not wear braces.

The importance of a soft appearance through skin tone and skin structure is also found in other BL subgenres. As the posters in Figure 19 display characters that all have soft and bright skin. However, they do not all conform to soft masculinity, as the characters in the Chinese series *Guardian* (2018) look older, have stronger facial features, and one has facial hair. The right character on the poster of the Taiwanese series *Be Loved in House* (2021) also has strong facial features. They conform to a hybrid form between soft masculinity and “strong masculinity.” Strong masculinity refers to having strong facial features and not looking boyish. The poster of the South Korean series *Mr. Heart* (2020) shows men who conform to the flower boy, therefore also to soft masculinity. The posters show that a certain softness and brightness of the characters is needed but there is more variation than in *series wai*.

Figure 19: Posters from (FLTR) *Guardian* (2018)(China), *Be Loved in House* (2021)(Taiwan), *Mr. Heart* (2020)(South Korea)



Figure 20: Tul from Love By Chance (left) and Love By Chance 2 (right)



A case that shows the importance of having a character that follows soft masculinity is the replacement of the actor who plays Tul, the brother of one of the main characters, Tin, in *Love By Chance* (2018) and *Love by chance 2: A Chance to Love* (2020). In Figure 20 are the actors who played Tul. In the first season Na Thanaboon Wanlopsirinun, at that time 30 years old, played Tul, but in the second season, Meen Nichakoon Khajornborirak replaced him who was at that time 21 years old. In the first season, Tul played the antagonist, while in the second season he developed a romantic relationship with his male childhood friend despite being married to a woman. As the pictures show, both actors have different appeals. Na Thanaboon is an adult male, while Meen Nichakoon has a youthful vibe. The change of actors while keeping the rest of the original cast shows how characters that engage in a same-sex relationship must follow the soft masculinity features.

4.2. Thai masculinity

Although characters in *series wai* follow the concept of soft masculinity, there is also a focus on Thai masculinity. *Yaoi* features couples in which one man is associated with masculinity and the other more with femininity. Although, they both have feminine traits.⁹⁷ *Series wai* often focuses on the masculinity of both characters. This development of showing two masculine men

⁹⁷ McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 84.

in a relationship in Thai media started in 2007 with the film *Bangkok Love Story* and shortly after in the same year *Love of Siam*. Before these films, same-sex romance media featured always a feminine male, like *kathoey* or *tut*, in a relationship.⁹⁸

In Thai, the English word “man” [แมน] is used as an adjective for “masculine.” So, a *man* man is a masculine man. *Series wai* features only relationships between two *man* men, so not between a *man* man and a *kathoey*. Things that are considered as *man* are being “strong/muscled or beefy, unshaven/rough or lean and toned.”⁹⁹ However, the flower boy syndrome results in a smaller space between the gendered concepts of femininity and masculinity, because the current versions of masculinity are becoming more feminine. Therefore, gay men need to have a feminine and a masculine side.¹⁰⁰ This is best visible in gay queens, which is the sexually receptive partner. Characters who are gay queens are more feminine than gay kings. A gay king is the insertive partner. The term gay quing is used for versatile homosexual men.¹⁰¹ Figure 21 shows characters that are perceived as *kathoey*, gay queen, and gay king. As seen, Pete has a softer and more boyish appearance than Tharn, while they are around the same age. Penelope

Figure 21: *FLTR*: Penelope (*Love With Benefits*, 2021) (Kathoey), Pete (*Love By Chance*, 2018) (Gay queen), Tharn (*TharnType*, 2019) (Gay King)



⁹⁸ Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 99, 117.

⁹⁹ De Lind van Wijngaarden, ‘Being Both and Acting “Man”’, 1130, 1136.

¹⁰⁰ De Lind van Wijngaarden, 1137.

¹⁰¹ Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 11, 91; De Lind van Wijngaarden, ‘Being Both and Acting “Man”’.

looks how *kathoey* in series typically look in general: quite a masculine face and body but feminine hair and clothes.

Additionally, duties such as Buddhist ordination, joining the sangha or monastic order, and enlisting in the army are also part of Thai masculinity and being *man*.¹⁰² Also, playing sports that are regarded as masculine, such as soccer, football, and fighting sports are considered as showing masculinity. Ordination is used in *TharnType 2: 7 Years Of Love*, where Type decides to get ordained since he cannot give his parents grandchildren and he wants to do something for them out of filial piety. Furthermore, there is a saying when one becomes a monk at the age of 20 (Type's age), (s)he does merit for his/her father.¹⁰³ As his father did not agree with the relationship between Tharn and Type, this was a way to appeal to Type's father. As for sports, soccer is used the most, like in *Love Poison* (2019), *2Gether* (2020), *Nitiman* (2021), and *Siew Sum Noi* (2021). Other sports like swimming and basketball also occur (*Top Secret Together* (2021), *Don't say no* (2021) (Basketball); *Until We Meet Again* (2019), *En Of Love / Tossara* (2020) (Swimming); *Bad Buddy* (2021) (Rugby)).

Furthermore, masculinity in the series is displayed by showing that the person is in a heterosexual relationship, contrasting them with stereotyped *kathoey* and *tut*, and interviews that underline the actors' heterosexuality (see "2.2. Generic conventions and tropes within *series wai*"). Although, nowadays these interviews that underline the actors' heterosexuality occur less often than at the beginning of *series wai* production. Nevertheless, in the series the initial focus on heterosexuality is present. Bunyavejchewin argues part of Thai masculinity is being heterosexual, and so the initial focus is on the character's heterosexuality.¹⁰⁴ This is sometimes also the case, even if the character does not identify himself as heterosexual, like

¹⁰² De Lind van Wijngaarden, 'Being Both and Acting "Man"', 1136.

¹⁰³ S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 282, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558184>.

¹⁰⁴ See literature review

Book in *Make It Right* (2016). Book is portrayed in the first episode as if he is in a relationship with a girl. However, after a couple of episodes, the viewer discovers that he is homosexual. Therefore the heterosexual relationships in *series wai* do not last a long time or are not the main and most important couple in the series.

Kathoey is used to emphasize the gap between the *man* leads and the *kathoey* that form a potential threat to society. Besides, in *lakhon*, they are used to reinforce the “normality” and “correctness” of the protagonists’ heterosexual relationships.¹⁰⁵ Forty series of the analysed series feature *kathoey* and/or *tut*. Although *series wai* has no heterosexual main relationship, *kathoey* and *tut* still reinforce the “normality” of the character as the leads are not stereotypically portrayed as *kathoey* or *tut* even if they identify themselves as homosexual. This is for example visible in episode 3 of *Love By chance* when Pete and *kathoey* interact. In that scene, *kathoey* and *tut* are stereotypically portrayed as being loud and sexually suggestive, while Pete is close to the opposite of it.¹⁰⁶

4.3. *Seme-uke* role division and heteronormative gender roles

Research on the *wai* genre found that couples are regularly categorized as *seme* or *uke* (see Chapter 2). The terms originate from Japanese martial arts where *seme* means the attacker and *uke* the receiver.¹⁰⁷ The *seme* also called the ‘top’ or dominant and abbreviated to *me*, is the active, penetrating partner in sexual intercourse. The *uke* also called the ‘bottom’ or submissive and abbreviated to *ke*, is the passive, penetrated partner.¹⁰⁸

By the means of appearance, the character can be categorized. Because the *seme* should be the ‘masculine’ one, while the *uke* should be the ‘feminine’ one. Furthermore, the *seme* tends

¹⁰⁵ Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 119–20.

¹⁰⁶ Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Prasannam, ‘The *Yaoi* Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction’, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Baudinette, ‘Lovesick, The Series’, 120–21; Prasannam, ‘The *Yaoi* Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction’, 64; McLelland et al., *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, 10.

to be older and taller than the *uke*. Understandably, there are cases where the *seme* and *uke* do not follow these characteristics. Take for example Ae and Pete in *Love By Chance* and Pure and Folk in *My Gear and Your Gown* (2020) where Pete and Folk are the *uke* but taller than the *seme*. Or Kongbop and Arthit in *SOTUS* (2016) where Kongpob is the *seme* but younger than Arthit.

This generic convention is exported from *yaoi* to other countries' BL subgenres. Therefore, this division is also found in Chinese manhua, where the *seme* is called *gong* and the *uke* *shou*.¹⁰⁹ But, this role division is less clear in the series as it must be more nuanced because of the state censure.¹¹⁰ In the South Korean and Taiwanese series, it is present, however, in the case of South Korea, it is less clear than in the Japanese, Taiwanese, and Thai series.

The *seme-uke* role division supports the use of heteronormative terms since the man would be the *seme* and the woman the *uke*.¹¹¹ This is visible in the endearment terms, often “wife” and “husband,” they give to each other or how friends refer to their friend's partner. One classic example is *SOTUS* where Kongpob says that he will make Arthit his wife. Or how the trailer of *En of Love: TOSSARA* (2020) describes the story as “TOSSARA: the engineer who's the med student's wife.”

Besides the use of heteronormative terms, the behaviour can cause viewers to see heteronormative roles. One may follow more the stereotyped “male's behaviour” like being messy, dirty, not being able to cook, and less emotional while the other follows the stereotyped “female's behaviour” like being clean and ordered, being able to cook, and emotional.¹¹² This mimic of heteronormativity is found in Thai gay films, like *Bangkok Love Story*, and also series

¹⁰⁹ Ling Yang and Yanrui Xu, ‘Chinese Danmei Fandom and Cultural Globalization from Below’, in *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, by Maud Lavin (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 9.

¹¹⁰ Saejang, ‘Behind Online Y Counterculture’, 157.

¹¹¹ Saejang, 157.

¹¹² de Lind van Wijngaarden, ‘Being Both and Acting “Man”’, 1129.

like *Bad Buddy*.¹¹³ In *Bad Buddy* Pran is neat, emotional and can cook. While Pat lives quite dirty by not showering when he sweat and his room is a mess. This role division can cause viewers to still categorize the characters as *seme* or *uke*, although the couple could be reversible, like in *Bad Buddy*.

The *seme-uke* and heteronormative role division imply a need for a “male” and a “female” in a relationship, which therefore supports *siwilai*. *Siwilai* is the ideal, modern civilization that contains committed, hetero couples as described in “*Series wai* as support of social norms.” Although the *seme-uke* role division is regular, five series feature at least one couple that does not imitate this role division (*Bad Buddy*; *Not me* (2021); *Why R U?* (2020); *Y-Destiny* (2021)). Nevertheless, heteronormative roles could still be present even though there is no *seme-uke* role division. Therefore, the divisions are to promote *siwilai* although being it a same-sex couple.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter looked into the display of, and emphasis on masculinity and heteronormative gender roles. Characters in Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese subgenres conform to soft masculinity or a hybrid form of soft and strong masculinity. At the same time, as the characters from other subgenres are in line with different kinds of masculinity, it shows more variation than *series wai* where all characters conform to the pan-East Asian soft masculinity with some exceptions. Although it sounds paradoxical, *series wai* also focuses on masculinity due to Thai masculinity through behaviour and characteristics. This makes *series wai* an innovative and hybrid subgenre as it combines soft masculinity which is found in other subgenres too and Thai masculinity.

In addition, the chapter looked into the gender roles that are present in the characters’ relationships. The research found that there is still a need to have a ‘female’ and ‘male’ in a

¹¹³ Pongpanit, ‘The Bitter-Sweet Portrayals of Expressing and Maintaining “non-Normative” Genders and Sexualities in Thai Mainstream Cinema from 1980 to 2010’, 116.

relationship about the stereotyped gender roles. This is also related to the *seme-uke* division in a same-sex relationship. Although this division is not always present, as some couples are reversible, still, heteronormative gender roles can be present in the relationship. This is to promote *siwilai*.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations

This thesis looked into the Boys' Love subgenre *series wai* from Thailand. It focused on why this subgenre is innovative and hybrid. The study demonstrated how *series wai* is different from subgenres from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan and therefore what makes it unique. The main question of this paper was “Why is *series wai* an innovative, hybrid subgenre within the Boys' Love genre?” The research demonstrated two aspects to answer this question, namely the transmedia popularity and masculinity and gender roles. This thesis aimed to show that calling *series wai* with the general name “BL” does not do justice to the genre. The paper, therefore, gave an overview of how it is unique, innovative, and hybrid, to motivate future research to use the term *series wai* to refer to Thai BL.

Series wai is unique in the way how the business around *series wai* is not just about the series themselves, but also about the actors and the business that relates to the series. *Wai* novels are also connected to this industry as they often function as a base for the series since they already have an audience. But the industry covers more than just the series since the actors appear as an imagined couple in advertisements, MVs, series, and fan meetings. Also, events like concerts are organized for the fans. Furthermore, popular couples are recycled, namely by reusing them as the main or secondary couple in another series. These productions and events motivate *sao-wai* to keep supporting them and motivate *khu'gine*. Although it is a vicious circle, *khu'gine* motivates companies to recycle couples and organize events as well. Therefore, the *wai* genre is not only about the series themselves, but also all the events and productions related to it. Most of all, the industry related to *series wai* is more about promoting the actors as imaginary couples than promoting the series.

Besides, the actors that are coupled also have an exemplary role. The fact that they stay together and appear in multiple series together in some cases, shows a committed ‘love.’ This

committed love is an example to true romantic couples of how a relationship should look like. So, without cheating and staying loyal to one partner. Therefore, it also fits the ideal of *siwilai*, which embraces loyalty between partners, as explained in ‘Generic conventions and tropes within series.’”

Secondly, the series put importance on the characters and the actors’ gender by emphasizing their masculine side. Although soft masculinity is also found in BL subgenres of other countries, it is different from Thailand, as other countries have more variety. *Series wai* puts more energy into emphasising masculinity than any other country as it has various ways to emphasize masculinity, like sports, ordination, sexuality, personality trait, and role division. Although masculinity is a subjective term, the series follows Thai masculinity as guidance. Though, this form of masculinity is changing because of the pan-East Asian soft masculinity. Nevertheless, in the series Thai masculinity and being *men* are important.

In addition to emphasizing masculinity, the series also maintain heteronormative gender roles, although not always clear. This is connected to the so-called *seme-uke* role division. This division is associated with the heteronormative role division as the woman would be the *uke* and the man the *seme*. This is visible through one partner having the female stereotyped characteristics and the other having the male stereotyped characteristics. Furthermore, heteronormative endearment terms can be used, such as the combination of “wife” and “husband.” This role division shows that a ‘female’ person and a ‘male’ person are needed in a relationship. However, it also occurs recently that characters involved in a same-sex relationship cannot be categorized as *seme* or *uke*. Nevertheless, the heteronormative gender roles support the ideal of *siwilai*. *Siwilai* is about the committed heteronormative family. Therefore, although it is about a same-sex couple, the gender roles show how an ideal couple is, namely between a man and a woman.

The study did not take Western BL into account, since the scope of the research would be too big. But also, the cultural differences have assumably more influence on the genre which deserves deeper research. Lastly, the Y boom in the West began later than in Asia, so probably there is less to compare and analyse.

As this field is relatively new, there are gaps to fill. This research hoped to fill the base, however, there is more to the genre than this. This research does not include interviews with visions of various kinds of people like directors, producers, writers, actors, and consumers. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness of the misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ in series. At the same time, there is also growing support for LGBTQ+ rights and criticism of the misrepresentation. Many actors call out for LGBTQ+ rights and demand less focus on their sexuality. This is also the same for some BL producers like Aof Noppaharnach who tries to represent LGBTQ+ in his series. But as this is a recent development, it is too early to analyse. Therefore, it is recommended to look into this when there is more data available and the movement of demand for LGBTQ+ rights in Thailand becomes bigger and more supporters open up about their standing point. Probably, the growing representation of LGBTQ+ could also be a unique side of *series wai*.

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Appendix 1: Series

Series wai

Title series	Year	Director
2 Moons	2017	Kanchanapun Meesuwan
2 Moons 2	2019	Aam Anusorn Soisa-ngim
2gether	2020	Champ Weerachit Thongjila
A Tale of Thousand Stars	2021	Backaof Nopparnach Chaiwimol
Bad Buddy	2021	Backaof Nopparnach Chaiwimol
Bite me	2021	David Bigander
Brothers	2021	Marut Sarawat
Calculating love	2020	Sappakosol Supsavati
Cause you're my boy	2018	Andy Rachyd Kusolkulsiri
Dark Blue Kiss	2019	Champ Weerachit Thongjila
Don't say no	2021	Pique Passawut Sukbua
En of love Tossara	2020	Niink Karnpicha Sinlertpattana, Ko Nantalit Tampacha
En of Love Love Mechanics	2020	Niink Karnpicha Sinlertpattana, Ko Nantalit Tampacha
En of love This is Love Story	2020	Niink Karnpicha Sinlertpattana, Ko Nantalit Tampacha
Fish Upon the Sky	2021	Golf Sakon Wong
Friend forever	2020	Andy Rachyd Kusolkulsiri, Klaryder Nathawat Piyanonpong
Gen Y	2020	Nob Sathanapong Limwongthong
Gen Y 2	2021	Nob Sathanapong Limwongthong
Golden Blood	2021	Mike Phontharis Chotkijsadarsopon
I am your King	2017	Kapper Worarit Ninklom
I am your King 2	2019	Kapper Worarit Ninklom
I Promised You the Moon	2021	Ham Vasudhorn Piyaromna, Kate Karakade Norasethaporn
I told the sunset about you	2020	Boss Naruebet Kuno
Ingredients	2020	NA
Love Area Part 1	2021	Nattapat Sookwongsil
Love by chance	2018	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul
Love by chance 2: A Chance to Love	2020	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul
Love Poison	2019	Phadej Onlahung
Love Poison 2	2021	NA
Love Sick	2014	Andy Rachyd Kusolkulsiri
Love Sick (2)	2015	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul
Love with benefits	2021	Hatairut Sunthornampai
Lovely Writer	2021	Tee Bundit Sintanaparadee
Make it Right	2016	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul, Cheewin Thanamin Wongskulphat

Make it Right 2	2017	New Siwaj Sawatmaneeekul, Yuan Danop Taninsirapapra
My Boy	2021	NA
My Bromance	2016	Ten Tosatid Darnkhuntod
My bromance 2: 5 years later	2020	Nicchi Nitchapoom Chaianun
My dream	2018	Job Piyawat Chaithiangthum
My engineer	2020	Lit Phadung Samajarn, Peed Panchapong Kongkanoi
My gear and your gown	2020	New Siwaj Sawatmaneeekul
My Mate Match	2021	Nam Kritidet Sinjoemsiri
Nitiman	2021	Jane Botta
Not Me	2021	Nuchie Anucha Boonyawatana
Oxygen	2020	Jane Botta
Second chance	2021	NA
Siew Sum Noi	2021	Mike Phontharis Chotkijsadarsopon
SOTUS	2016	Lit Phadung Samajarn
Sotus S	2017	Lit Phadung Samajarn, Jane Botta
Still together	2020	Aof Noppaharnach Chaiwimol
Thank God it's Friday	2019	Andy Rachyd Kusolkulsiri
TharnType 2: 7 years of Love	2020	Pique Passawut Sukbua
TharnType	2019	Tee Bundit Sintanaparadee
The Best twins	2019	Phadej Onlahung
The cupid coach	2021	NA
The Yearbook	2021	Mean Phiravich Attachitsataporn
Theory of love	2019	X Nuttapon Mongkolsawas
Together with me	2017	Jet Boonyoprakarn
Tonhon Chonlatee	2020	Koo Ekkasit Trakulkasemsuk
Top Secret Together	2021	Peerapon Matheang
Until we meet again	2019	New Siwaj Sawatmaneeekul
Why R U?	2020	Cheewin Thanamin Wongkulphat
Y-Destiny	2021	Cheewin Thanamin Wongkulphat
YYY	2020	Cheewin Thanamin Wongkulphat

Chinese BL

Title series	Year	Director
Addicted Heroin	2016	Ding Wei
Advance bravely	2017	Yang Long
Breaking Dawn	2019	Su Hao Qi
Farewell My Villain	2020	NA
Forward Forever	2020	Liu Yi Zhi, Ma Yi Heng
Guardian	2018	Zhou Yuan Zhou, Gao Han, Xie Yi Hang
Holy Fox Son 2: Fairy Mountain Battle	2017	NA
Love Is More Than a Word	2016	NA
My Esports Genius Brother	2021	NA
One in a Hundred	2020	Chai Ji Dan
Precise Shot	2020	NA

The Fairy Fox	2017	NA
The Silent Criminal	2020	NA
The Untamed	2019	Steve Cheng, Chan Ka Lam
Till Death tear us apart	2017	Chen Peng
Word of Honor	2021	Gary Sing, Jones Ma, Li Hong Yu

Yaoi

Title series	Year	Director
A man who defies the world of bl	2021	Miki Koichiro
His - I didn't think I would fall in love	2019	Imaizumi Rikiya
Life~love on the line	2020	Ninomiya Takashi
Mood indigo	2019	Miki Koichiro
My beautiful man	2021	Sakai Mai
My love mix up	2021	Kusano Shogo, Horai Tadaaki
Ossan's love in the sky	2019	Yuki Saito, Ruto Toichiro, Yamamoto Daisuke
The novelist	2018	Miki Koichiro
Ossan's Love	2018	Yuki Saito, Ruto Toichiro

South Korean BL

Title series	Year	Director
Behind cut	2021	Han Woo Im
Color rush	2020	Park Sun Jae
Light on me	2021	Lee Yoo Yeon
Mr. Heart	2020	Park Sun Jae
My sweet dear	2021	So Joon Moon
The tasty florida	2021	Yang Kyung Hee, Yang Kyeong Hui
Tinted with you	2021	Ra Ha Na
To my star	2021	Hwang Da Seul
Where your eyes linger	2020	Hwang Da Seul
Wish you: Your melody from my heart	2020	Seong Do Joon
You make me dance	2021	So Joon Moon

Taiwanese BL

Title series	Year	Director
Be loved in house: I do	2021	Chiang Ping Chen
Because of you	2020	Zero Chou
Bro and me	2019	NA
Craving you	2020	Chiang Ping Chen
Dark blue and moonlight	2017	Adiamond Lee
HIStory1: My Hero	2017	Lee Ching Jung
HIStory1: Obsessed	2017	Adiamond Lee
HIStory1: Stay Away From Me	2017	Tsai Mi Chieh
HIStory2: Crossing the Line	2018	Tsai Mi Chieh
HIStory2: Right or Wrong	2018	Lee Ching Jung
HIStory3: Make our days count	2019	Tsai Mi Chieh
HIStory3: Trapped	2019	Lee Ching Jung

HIStory4: Close to you	2021	Nancy Chen
See you after quarantine	2021	Lin Pei Yu
We Best Love: Fighting Mr. 2nd	2021	Ray Jiang
We Best Love: No. 1 For You	2021	Ray Jiang

Appendix 2: Glossary

Term	Definition
<i>Bishōnen</i>	A <i>bishōnen</i> can be described as someone who is androgynous.
<i>Bōizu rabu</i>	<i>Bōizu rabu</i> , also abbreviated to BL (not in this paper) appeared in Japan around 1992 as a distinct genre of male-centred homoerotic comics and novels. A characteristic is the good endings.
Gay king	The sexually insertive partner
Gay queen	The sexually receptive partner
Gay Quing	A versatile homosexual man
<i>Hnum-wai</i>	Y[aoi] boys, locale male BL/ <i>wai</i> fans
<i>Kathoey</i>	They want to look like women completely and want to be regarded as such. They are not overly effeminate. Transgenders can also be called <i>kathoey</i> .
<i>Khu'gine</i>	The act of coupling
<i>Kkonminam</i>	Originates from South Korea. They are often teenagers, who have vulnerable hearts, immature personalities, and are inconsiderate.
<i>Lakhon</i>	A genre of popular media that focuses on heterosexual romances between wealthy urbanite.
<i>Long ruea</i>	Lit.: Boarding the boat. The practice of reimagining male homoerotic intimacy
<i>Man</i>	In Thai, the English word “man” [แมน] is used as an adjective for “masculine.” So, a <i>man</i> man is a masculine man.
<i>Phai ruea/jaew ruea</i>	Lit: rowing the boat. The practice of reimagining male homoerotic intimacy

<i>Sao-wai/Sao-y</i>	Y[aoi] girls, locale female BL/ <i>wai</i> fans/ To be sao-y is to appreciate same-sex male couples in writings, screen cultures, and other cultural productions.
<i>Seme</i>	Penetrating partner
<i>Shōnen-ai</i>	A type of male-male romance manga written by women, focuses on tender, romantic involvement between two male protagonists.
<i>Tut</i>	Men by appearance, but women by heart. However, they do not want to transform themselves. Also, they are overly feminine.
<i>Uke</i>	Penetrated partner
<i>Yaoi</i>	<i>Yaoi</i> was born out of <i>shōnen-ai</i> in the mid-1980s and focuses on hardcore male-male sexual intercourse. In the present day, the term for Japanese BL.