

# Revisiting Queer Shame in Boys Love/Y Novels and Queer Literary Culture in Thailand

## ข้อนพนิจความอับอายของเกวียร์ในนานิยามวายกับวัฒนธรรม วรรณศิลป์เกวียร์ในประเทศไทย

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**คำสำคัญ:** นิยายวาย, วรรณกรรมเกวียร์, นานิยามวาย, ความอับอายของเกวียร์

### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Following the legalization of same-sex marriage effective in 2025, Boys Love (BL)/Yaoi (Y), a globally recognized queer media, underscores its sociopolitical roles. The celebration of queer visibility and queer pride has gradually become the core value of the genre, influenced by LGBTQ political movements in the Euro-American context. The progressive-oriented approach is, however, challenged by the ideas of "Feeling Backward" proposed by Heather Love (2007). This study explores queer shame within the setting of Thai BL before and after its Queer Turn in 2020. The research aims to analyze queer shame in a selected case study, the neoclassic's *Phi Ai Num Mak or Ai, You Are So Fluffy* (first published in 2021), before expanding to the queer literary culture in Thailand, which is potentially held in the cycle of shame.

**Methods:** This study is categorized as qualitative research. The data selection relies on the exemplary case study method. The selected novel is explored by the textual analysis method and is situated within the shared context of related works. The case study is also employed as a tool for understanding broader phenomena: the queer literary culture in Thailand.

**Results:** The development of Thai BL works is typically articulated in a progressive framework or transitioning from repression to the celebration of social movements. The analysis of queer shame in *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* illustrates how the novel challenges the conventions (*ōdō*) of BL originating from Japanese BL. The text redefines the rigid *seme/uke* formula and resonates with an emerging trend of queered character design in BL works of post-2020. The novel connotes that despite the sociopolitical movements of queers in Thailand, there are still different types of queer shame perpetuated within the queer communities. Nevertheless, queer shame is placed as a barrier to overcome through the framework of popular romance. Situating *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* as a bridge, queer shame in queer literary culture is realized in two directions: 1) the linkage between the development of Thai BL and the Thai literary tradition that presents queer-themed narratives, authored by both female and non-female writers since the late 1970s, and 2) the recovery of the marginalized history of female fans or consumers of BL media, along with the activities they engaged in since the period when BL content faced public condemnation, prior to the state's incorporation of BL into soft-power policy in the early 2020s.

**Application of this study:** The findings of the research have led to further explorations of Thai BL/Y across both the literary and media industries. In addition, it addresses the societal role of Thai BL through newly proposed critical views, as the concept of queer shame has not yet received significant attention in Thai scholarship.

**Conclusions:** The study of queer shame in Thai BL novels provides an alternative perspective on the genre's tradition, coinciding with the proliferation of digital media, transnational fan culture, and social activism. Rather than commemorating queer pride, queer shame can be leveraged as a significant aspect of certain queer communities. Some key notions from the research findings include 1) non-female BL writers recognize queer shame and generate political meaning from that very shame; 2) revisiting the BL genre alongside queer literary culture in Thailand revives queer spirits of the genre; and 3) queer shame unfolds the interplay among literary convention, screen adaptation, star persona, and fan culture within the Thai BL industry.

## บทตัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: นับจากกฎหมายสมรสเท่าเทียมมีผลบังคับใช้ในปี 2568 อุตสาหกรรมวายในฐานะสื่อเกียร์ระดับโลกยังคงทบทวนทางสังคมการเมือง การเฉลิมฉลองภาพประกายของเกียร์และเกียร์ไพร์ด เป็นคุณค่าหลักของประเทศ ผลงานโดยได้รับอิทธิพลจากความเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองของกลุ่มผู้มีความหลากหลายทางเพศในบริบทปูโร-อเมริกัน มุ่งมองที่มุ่งความก้าวหน้าสู่ท้าทายโดยความคิดเรื่อง “การรู้สึกด้อย” ที่เสนอโดย Heather Love (2007) การศึกษาครั้งนี้สำรวจความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ในวายไทยก่อนหน้าและภายหลังทั่วเลี้ยงเกียร์ในปี 2563 การวิจัยมุ่งวิเคราะห์ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ในนวนิยายการ์ตูนศิลป์เกียร์ในประเทศไทยที่ยังคงติดอยู่ในวังวนของความอันอ่าย เช่นกัน

วิธีการศึกษา: การศึกษาครั้งนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ การคัดเลือกข้อมูลใช้วิธีแบบกรณีศึกษาที่เป็นตัวแทน การศึกษานวนิยายคัดสรรใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์ด้วยบทและจัดวางตัวบทในบริบทรวมกับผลงานที่เกี่ยวข้อง กรณีศึกษายังนำมาใช้เป็นเครื่องมือในการทำความเข้าใจปรากฏการณ์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับวีร์ วัฒนธรรมวรรณศิลป์เกียร์ในประเทศไทยด้วย ผลการศึกษา: พัฒนาการของงานวายไทยส่วนใหญ่เป็นผ่านมุมมองที่มุ่งสู่ความก้าวหน้า หรือการเปลี่ยนผ่านจากการกดทับเบี้ยดขับไปสู่การเฉลิมฉลองความเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคม การวิเคราะห์ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ในนวนิยาย พี.อี.นุ่มน้ำ แสดงให้เห็นว่าวนิยายท้าทายขนบวายอยู่ปุ่นโดยออกแบบสู่ตัวละคร เชเมะ/อุตะ ให้ต่างกันชนบท ภาคปฏิบัตินี้สะท้อนให้ต้องกับแนวโน้มใหม่ของการออกแบบตัวละครเกียร์ในงานวายตั้งแต่ปี 2563 นวนิยายเสนอว่า แนวโน้มนี้มีความเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคมการเมืองของกลุ่มเกียร์ในประเทศไทย แต่ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ที่หลากหลายรูปแบบยังคงตอกตึงอยู่ในชุมชนเกียร์อย่างไรก็ตาม ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์วายอยู่ในฐานะสิ่งกีดขวางที่ถูกฝ่าข้ามตามขนบวาย โรมานซ์ของวนิยายวาย เมื่อใช้ พี.อี.นุ่มน้ำ เป็นสะพานเชื่อม ทำให้เกิดความเข้าใจวัฒนธรรมวรรณศิลป์เกียร์ในประเทศไทยในสองทิศทาง ทิศทางที่ 1 คือ การเชื่อมพัฒนาการวายไทยกับกลุ่มวรรณกรรมไทยที่นำเสนอแก่นเรื่อง เกี่ยวกับเกียร์ ทั้งที่ประพันธ์โดยนักเขียนหนุ่มและนักเขียนที่ไม่ใช่หนุ่มนักบังตั้งแต่ช่วงปลายทศวรรษ 2510 และทิศทางที่ 2 คือ การถูกนิปปอนประวัติศาสตร์ชายขอบของความวายหรือผู้แสดงงานวายและกิจกรรมที่พากเครื่องน้ำจากช่วงที่ส่อaway เพชรัญกับการประนามจากสังคม ก่อนที่รัฐจะผนวกรวบเรียงเข้าสู่นโยบายซอฟต์พาวเวอร์ในช่วงต้นทศวรรษ 2560

การประยุกต์ใช้: ข้อค้นพบจากการวิจัยนำไปสู่การขยายผลศึกษาวายไทยทั้งในอุตสาหกรรมวรรณกรรมและสื่อ นอกจากนั้นยังนำเสนอบทบาทเชิงสังคมของวายไทยด้วยมุมมองอย่างใหม่ เพื่อแก้ไขความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ที่ไม่ได้รับความสำคัญมากนักในงานวิชาการภาษาไทย

บทสรุป: การศึกษาความอันอ่ายของเกียร์ในนวนิยายไทยน้ำเสนอมุมมองใหม่ต่อขนบทของประเทศไทยที่พัฒนาจากสื่อดิจิทัล วัฒนธรรมแฟนชั่นชายชาติ และกิจกรรมเคลื่อนไหวทางสังคม แทนที่จะรำลึกถึงเกียร์ไพร์ด ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์กลับมีบทบาทสำคัญต่อชุมชนเกียร์ ข้อสังเกตบางประการจากข้อค้นพบของการวิจัยประกอบด้วย 1) นักเขียนรายที่ไม่ใช่หนุ่มตระหนักในความอันอ่ายของเกียร์และสร้างความหมายทางการเมืองจากความอันอ่ายดังกล่าว 2) การขับพินิจงานวายร่วมกับวัฒนธรรมวรรณศิลป์เกียร์ในประเทศไทยมีส่วนในการเรื่องพื้นจิตวิญญาณเกียร์ที่ผูกอยู่ในประเภทผลงาน และ 3) ความอันอ่ายของเกียร์เผยแพร่ให้เห็นเกลียวสัมพันธ์ท่วงขับวรรณกรรม การดัดแปลงเป็นสื่อสกรีน ภาพสร้างสรรค์ และวัฒนธรรมแฟนกulty ในอุตสาหกรรมวายไทย

## Introduction

The equal marriage law was effective in Thailand in January 2025. Celebratory echoes resonated throughout the streets, particularly in Bangkok and across social media platforms. The legal union of queer couples was regarded as the milestone of a prolonged campaign, which was somewhat consolidated by the political unrest and heightened LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> rights movements since 2020. Thailand is the first nation in Southeast Asia to adopt such legalization.

The socio-political activism correlated with the expansion of Y/Boys Love (hereafter BL)<sup>2</sup> media in Thailand and other regions. Y, also referred to as yaoi or BL, refers to male homoerotic content inspired by their origin in Japanese popular culture conceived in the 1970s. It features *seme* and *uke* characters; they are roughly equivalent to top and bottom within the context of male-male sexual encounters. The genre was introduced in Thailand around the late 1980s

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation LGBTQ in this research covers intersex (I), asexual (A), non-binary (N), and other groups (+). Queer theories enable the examination of genders and sexualities, focusing on those transgressions of socio-cultural norms.

<sup>2</sup> In this research, the terms “Y” and “BL” are used interchangeably.

and the early 1990s, initially in a form of manga in pirated translation (Bunyavejchewin, 2022), and gained popularity following the success of its first novel-to-screen adaptation in 2014.<sup>3</sup> At first, the Y or BL content has, however, been critiqued by activists for centering on the sexuality of queer<sup>4</sup> characters fantasized about by fans, who are mostly female, rather than advancing LGBTQ sociopolitical agendas (Prasannam, 2023).

Thai BL content flows through various media, including manga, prose fiction, screen adaptations, and event media. The BL series enjoys significant appeal among international audiences, as the translation of Thai BL novels does not keep pace with the rapid availability of translated subtitles for Thai BL series provided by voluntary fans and streaming companies. Given these circumstances, much of the scholarship tends to overlook the close connection between the Thai BL media and the literary industry. Both BL and Yuri or Girls Love (hereafter GL), works featuring female homoeroticism, publishing houses continue to thrive. The e-book platform, such as MEB, persists in identifying the BL genre as marketable.

In the expansion of the BL genre in the Thai sociopolitical context, queer pride has been prioritized. All forms of Thai BL, particularly after the prevalent political protests in 2020, grew in concert with the celebration of the progress of the campaign for same-sex marriage and LGBTQ rights, which is pinpointed as the “Queer Turn” of the genre (Prasannam, 2024). Advancing the cause of queer communities and activism tends to be a key agenda of BL texts in response to criticism in the public discourse accumulated since the late 2010s (Kumsubha, 2022; Prasannam, 2023).

On the flip side, queer shame seems to be ingrained in the depiction of sad young men and urban settings (Dyer, 2002) in Thai screen texts of the 2000s. *Rak Haeng Siam* (รักแห่งสยาม)/*Love of Siam* (2007)<sup>5</sup> is a seminal work of Thai queer cinema that has later been canonized along with other queer screen texts within the development of the BL genre in Thailand (Nilsirisuk, 2018). In *Love of Siam*, Tong and Mew are protagonists. Tong once declares his feelings: “*I can't be with you as a boyfriend, but that doesn't mean I don't love you.*” Before the declaration, both of them wrestle with the sense of shame stemming from themselves as well as familial and societal expectations. That is regarded as the mission of BL media: to actualize queer love against all odds. Ironically, this mission might lead to a different type of shame.

From the skeptical perspective, Thai BL notoriously commodifies the coupling of fictional characters and BL stars, or *khu jin* or *khu 'gine* (derived from the word “imagine”). *Khu jin* practices were sometimes labeled as queerbaiting and exploitative cultural appropriation (Kaewmak, 2022; Chansakoolnee, 2023), although *khu jin* or star coupling can also be from real people, not necessarily from characters in media texts (Garg, 2019). Thai BL, therefore, seems to require reparative reading to uphold its sociopolitical function and hope for queer audiences (Baudinette, 2022; 2023). Nevertheless, the marriage of queer protagonists was foregrounded in Thai BL before 2025. Thai BL novels widely project same-sex marriage prospects in their storylines and on the book covers since the 2010s, correlating with the growing trend of wedding endings in queer romance in the Anglophone world (Kies, 2024). Until after 2020, the queer wedding scenes and campaigns were even more frequently acknowledged in Thai BL series

<sup>3</sup> 2014 marked the emergence of digital television culture with the broadcast of *Love Sick the Series* on MCOT. The same year saw the airing of season 2 of *Hormones the Series*, which featured a BL couple. The Y Boom since 2014 was likewise defined by the launch of BL films, such as *My Bromance* and *Love's Coming* (Prasannam, 2015 : 126).

<sup>4</sup> Characters involved in male homoeroticism and BL/Y creation, in this research, are not labelled as gay men, as “gay” is somewhat related to identitarian categorization. The term “queer” is instead used to connote the potential of queer characters to be interpreted as deviations from the norm. See more of the explanation in the section on research framework and methods.

<sup>5</sup> In this research, titles of films, series, and novels in the Thai language are romanized with the Royal Institute of Thailand's system (now the Royal Society of Thailand), announced in 1999, except ໜ, which, as a beginning letter, is romanized as *j* instead of *ch*. Some specific names follow the authors' preferred spelling of their own names in English when they are known. When the titles first appear, both romanized and Thai titles are displayed, followed by their English versions. Subsequently, they are mainly referred to by their English titles.

(Joseph & Nedpogaeo, 2023). One of the testimonies to this progressive act in 2025 is *Khemjira Tong Rot* (เข้มจิราต้องรอด)/*Khemjira the Series*. It displayed the marriage certificate of two male spouses and the children's adoption documents, echoing the implementation of the same-sex marriage law in January 2025.

When it comes to the dialogue between Japanese and Thai BL, in Thai adaptations of Japanese BL live-action dramas, the queer messages are amplified, e.g., *Cherry Magic 30 Yang Sing* (*Cherry Magic 30 ยังซิ้ง*)/*Cherry Magic* (2024) and *Khian Rak Duai Yanglop* (เขียนรักด้วยยางลบ)/*My Love Mix-Up!* (2024). The consumption of BL contents represents "a nonheteronormative space in which the precarious lives of people with nonheteronormative genders and sexualities are allowed to become visible, intelligible, and legitimate, [fans'] consumption of the genre can be considered political" (Bunyavejchewin, 2022 : 186). This way, the readership and spectatorship of BL in contemporary Thailand are inclined towards the celebration of queer visibility, which has been part of the agenda of gay liberation in North American and European regions since the late 1960s and cohered with the establishment of LGBTQ organizations and the Pride Movement. Thai BL stars series reciprocate this practice through their political advocacy and the rainbow flag trope, both within and beyond their series. They have been called upon by fans to be politically vocal (Metaveevinij, 2023; Prasannam, 2023), and some of them then integrated activism with their star personae (Baudinette, 2025).

What is the function of shame in LGBTQ movements within the context of Pride? Shame was a catalyst for the Stonewall Riots in 1969, LGBTQ rallies, and the formation of queer communities globally, which "founded not only collective affirmations of pride but also in residual experiences" (Halperin & Traub, 2010 : 4). The legacy of Stonewall significantly influenced the initial scholarship in lesbian and gay studies. The key goal in both the movements and academic settings is to "transmute shame into pride, secrecy into visibility, [and] social exclusion into outsider glamour" (Love, 2007 : 28). The tension between shame and pride arose in this manner. The mission of queer media in later periods has largely persisted and continues to be expected by audiences. To address the research questions, two scenarios must be connected, exploring the concepts of pride and shame within the Thai BL cycle following its "Queer Turn" in 2020.

The first scenario refers to the dismissal of the BL series promotion during the Bangkok Pride Parade on June 4, 2023. Some activists and allies perceive Thai BL as exploitative commercialism (Kaewmak, 2022; The Matter, 2023). Proportionately, academic discourse criticizes Thai BL novels, which serve as primary sources for BL series. Mainstream scholarship on Thai BL novels critiques the potential perpetuation of bipolar gender in these works, and some scholarship maps the *seme/uke* dichotomy with the *gay king/gay queen* framework of the Thai system (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017; Khatkheaw & Piayura, 2018; Pimsak, 2019; Sonnum, Jeennoon, & Chaowalitprapan, 2020; Wongwet, 2022). The BL genre cannot, thus, detach from shame or being shamed of its lack, despite its sociopolitical ambition over the years.

The second scenario involves the celebrations of Gay Shame, which originated in Brooklyn in 1998; the Gay Shame Awards in the early 2000s; and the Gay Shame conference organized at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2003. The Gay Shame movements are to embrace "those queers whose identities or social markings make them feel out of place in gay pride's official ceremonies: people with the 'wrong' bodies, [...], people of color, boy-lovers, bisexuals, immigrants, and the poor and the disabled" (Halperin & Traub, 2010 : 9).

Consequently, shame serves as a ground for BL and vice versa. Thai BL may represent aspects of "mainstream gay pride" that are not universally embraced, as the genre does not fully align with the "identity-affirming functions" (Halperin & Traub, 2010 : 9). It is arguable that shame, as a part of negative feelings, contributes to the political nature of Thai BL in the same way as pride does. The BL genre is, to some extent, located in the tradition of queer literary and media culture in the Thai and trans-Asian contexts. That is why the sad young men trope and residues of the film *Love of Siam* are still conjured up in BL media, both on page and screen. The evidence can be found in many BL works:

12% the Novel and Lun Rak 12% (ลุ้นรัก 12%)/My Only 12% the Series (2022), Plae Rak Chan Duai Jai Thoe (แปลรักฉันด้วยใจเธอ)/I Told Sunset About You (2020), Napsip Ja Jup (นับสิบจะจูบ)/Lovely Writer the Series (2021), Phrajan Man Kai (พระจันทร์มันไก่)/Moonlight Chicken (2023), and Ongsa Sun (องศาสุข)/Absolute Zero Series (2023), to name a few. All of these texts address shame and its associated negative feelings, such as paranoia, self-hatred, and secrecy (Love, 2007). And on the premise of shame, the protagonists build and rebuild their romantic relationship. In this way, is Thai BL/Y reluctant to solely look forward to the future? The answer is based upon “contradictory feelings: pride and shame, anticipation and regret, hope and despair,” alongside “the odd situation of ‘looking forward’ while we are ‘feeling backward’” (Love, 2007 : 27).

The scenario of the pride/shame dichotomy in the Thai BL genre is worth exploring. What would happen if certain BL texts speak of and speak for shame? Is the deviance from heteronormativity the only cause of shame in contemporary Thai BL? The key question also involves the positioning of BL novels within the larger literary culture of Thailand and the challenges that might obstruct such position, whilst the bridge between BL/Y screen media and queer screen culture in Thailand has materialized (Nilsirisuk, 2018; Kaewmak, 2022 : 288–297).

In a problematizing manner, this research is situated through the framework of queer shame, as it “aims to question the assumptions underlying existing theory in some significant ways [...] taking something that is commonly seen as good or natural and turning it into something problematic” (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011 : 32–33). This study, therefore, presents a theoretical experiment on a Thai BL novel authored by a non-female writer, serving as a springboard for revisiting Thai queer literary culture since the 1970s, prior to the Y Boom. It hopes to propose that BL/Y works are connected to a broader queer literary culture through the concept of queer shame, even though the queer literary production and reception of the earlier periods do not fundamentally share a tradition with nowadays BL/Y in Thailand.

## Research Objectives

1. To experiment with the idea of queer shame with the analysis of the novel *Phi Ai Num Mak* (พีอีนัมมาก)/*Ai, You Are So Fluffy* (2021) written by the neoclassic—a Thai queer writer.
2. To employ the idea of queer shame as a framework for revisiting and repositioning Thai BL/Y novels in the queer literary culture of Thailand.

## Research Methods

### 1. Research Framework: “Feeling Backward” through Queer Shame

Pride Month (June) and LGBT History Month (varies by country) show the LGBTQ movement’s push-and-pull between looking forward and backward. Pride Month commemorates Stonewall, but early gay and lesbian critics “tended to ignore the difficulties of the past in order construct a positive history” (Love, 2007 : 18). The term “history” in LGBT History Month encourages us to look back before moving forward. History matters to LGBTQ movements.

The following question corresponds to the type of past that requires commemoration. This issue causes significant differences between gay and queer perspectives. Historically, “queer criticism, by contrast, has focused on negative aspects of the past in order to use them for positive political purposes” (Love, 2007 : 18). This research utilizes the term “queer shame” as a response to the negative connotations associated with the term, drawing on the concept of Gay Shame (Halperin & Traub, 2010). Love (2007 : 2) stated that “the word ‘queer,’ like ‘fag’ or ‘dyke’ but

unlike the more positive ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’ is a slur.” The adoption of the term “queer” in the late 1980s was deliberate, as it resonated with a historical context of insult and abuse, reflecting the associated pain.

This study embarks on the queer shame represented in a Thai BL/Y novel published post-2020—the period when LGBTQ activism in Thailand has flourished again. Addressing the text in this context seems to align with the sociopolitical expectations in public discourse that Thai BL should authentically depict LGBTQ experiences and challenges. In pursuing this political stance, some male characters in Thai BL/Y of recent years articulate their sexualities as either gay or bisexual, contrasting with the conventions of Japanese BL, which impose sexual ambiguity. This research aims to resist practices associated with the “affirmative turn” (Love, 2007), endorsed by such public discourse.

The research framework draws substantial inspiration from Heather Love’s work, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007). This project will examine the residual queer shame that persists following the emergence of queer pride in a Thai BL novel, highlighting what may be regarded as the “dark side” of contemporary queer representation (Love, 2007 : 4). The selected novel encourages a reevaluation of queer literary culture in Thailand through the lens of queer shame. The analysis is to echo with Love (2007 : 4), whose research examined “several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary texts visibly marked by queer suffering.” This research revisits queer shame, which is associated with social exclusion and the historical “impossibility” of same-sex desire (Love, 2007).

The cases analyzed by Love (2007) include modernist fiction. The works were normally interpreted as representatives of newness and/or sociopolitical changes. To reconnect with the works in the “Feeling Backward” stance offers an alternative approach to the texts and their related contexts. Still, in the Thai context, Love’s ideas were received in a limited cycle. The notable scholarship was proposed by Polmuk (2025), who studied sorrow in Thai queer poetry published in gay magazines of the 1980s. “Feeling Backward” is to see the politics of negative feelings, which foster the sense of imagined communities among queers. Rather, this research focuses on queer shame in a selected literary text before expanding to its broader context.

## **2. Research Methods: From a Case to Its Broader Culture**

This study qualitatively examines queer shame in the selected novel, in alignment with research objective 1. The research design employs an exemplary case study method (Yin, 2018). The case study focuses on *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* (2021), written by the neoclassic and released following the genre’s Queer Turn in 2020 (Prasannam, 2024). Arguably, the main plot is driven by the pride/shame dichotomy, which is not common in conventional BL novels written by female authors before 2020. The author showcases a queer persona on social media and notes in the novel’s preface that all elements can be mapped within the paratextual network<sup>6</sup> of the case study, thereby reinforcing the relevance of queer shame concepts in the research.

Upon achieving research objective 1, the study proceeds to research objective 2, which involves tracing the legacy of queer shame in Thai queer literary culture. Literary culture involves individuals, institutions, and activities that give lives to literature, manifesting in both tangible formats, such as books, and intangible forms, including electronic and sonic literature. Readers, marketers, publishers, novelists, critics, and scholars engage with diverse activities within

<sup>6</sup> The paratextual network refers to Gérard Genette’s ideas on the elements that exist outside the main body of the literary text. It encompasses the materiality of the book: cover, preface, table of contents, afterword, and footnotes, among others. The paratextual network around the book might cover practices such as criticism, reviews, BookTok (book content on TikTok), book launch events, and authorial persona. One of the roles of the paratextual network is to serve as “thresholds of interpretation” for audiences.

literary culture, such as consumption, selling, purchasing, casual reading, recitation, generic classification, taste-making, canonization, and screen adaptation (Collins, 2010). The role of queer shame serves as a link between BL novels and the broader literary culture, an area that remains underexplored in existing scholarship.

## Research Results

The research results are divided into two sections, structured in a “Feeling Backward” manner. The initial section involves an analysis of queer shame in a selected BL novel from the 2020s. The second part revisits and situates BL novels within the wider context of queer literary culture in Thailand. The chronology is called into question when examined retrospectively. The revisit observes an ongoing phenomenon in relation to queer shame, tracing its origins to the 1970s, when queer-themed literature began to thrive in Thai literary culture.

### 1. Revisiting Queer Shame and BL Convention in the neoclassic's *Ai, You Are So Fluffy*

Scholars have explained the BL genre, characterizing it as queer text (Prasannam, 2022; Welker, 2022; Baudinette, 2023). Both the presence of LGBTQ-related content and the way readers engage with the texts support this observation. Currently, heterosexual women are no longer the sole producers and consumers of BL genre. It is evident that there are non-female writers in Thailand who are actively involved in the advancement and proliferation of the BL genre within the literary industry. BL authors continue to engage in ongoing experimentation with tropes and approaches within the genre, aiming to enhance its richness and intensify the representation of the “Q” (queer) in the LGBTQ acronym.

The endeavor to transcend conventional *seme/uke* character design derived from the Japanese BL (Baudinette, 2023) and challenge the prevailing stereotype of the straight-acting gay has been gaining momentum since 2019. Prominent BL novel publishers, such as Deep Publishing, have played a significant role in this shift. Deep Publishing is a key competitor of every other big BL publisher feeding novels to screen adaptations, e.g., EverY and Nabu Publishing. Nottakorn's novel *Tonhon Cholathee* (ต้นหอนชลธี), published by Deep Publishing in March 2019, serves as the initial example. Prior to attending college, the *uke*, who lives in Chonburi, eastern Thailand, always wears girlish T-shirts and hairpins. In contrast, the 2020 screen adaptation with the same title diminished the provocative image of the effeminate.

In June 2019, Deep Publishing released *Bok Laew Chai Mai Kon Jip Hai Du Di Di* (บอกแล้วใช่ไหมก่อนจีบให้ดูดีๆ)/*Did I Tell You to Reconsider before Making a Move?* by Phu Sueng Longrak Yingsao Nai Phapwat (ผู้ชี้แจงหลังรักหยิ่งสาวในภาพวาด). The novel presents a seductive protagonist who has feminine traits in both physical appearance and verbal expression. The physical appearance contrasts with a masculine, slender physique hidden behind the clothing he or she wears. Conversely, *uke* is a masculine profession—a mechanic. The height difference is maintained.

In 2020, Orpheus published the novel *Yak Riak Theo Wa Bi* (อยากเรียกเธอว่าบี)/*Want to Call You My Bae*. The novel recounts the story of a *kathoey* who has not undergone sexual reassignment surgery. This trait is commonly referred to in colloquial Thai as *kathoey mi ngu* (transgender with a snake). We can categorize this novel as a hybrid genre, blending elements of transgender fiction with the BL genre. It demonstrates a significant departure from its predecessors in the genre, namely Keeratee Chana's *Thang Sai Thi Sam* (ทางสายที่สาม)/*The Third Path* (1982) and Damayanti's *Bai Mai Thi Plit Pliw* (ใบไม้ที่ปลิดปลิว)/*Falling Leaves* (1988). *Want to Call You My Bae* refers to the sexual pleasure that transgender *uke* continues to experience from her own male genitalia.

Deep Publishing continued to engage the readership with yet another unconventional initiative—transvestism. In the 2021 release of *Honey Miniskirt*, the *uke* character finds himself in the company of his male friends. The relationship commences with a casual act of cross-dressing, wherein the *uke* takes on the role of a false girlfriend for the *seme* protagonist. However, it is important to note that the spoken language of the *uke* persona nevertheless conforms to the male language register.

The context of the literary industry enabled a non-female BL author to conduct additional experiments. The subject of this case study is an author with the pseudonym theneoclassic. He has published numerous BL/Y novels with Deep Publishing as an openly queer author. He has become one of the mainstream Thai BL writers, as his work *Ruedu Long Pa* (ຖុកអំពេះ)/*Lost in the Woods* (2019) was adapted into a series in 2025. He is also a novelizer for *Only Friends: Dream On* (2025), a subsequent installment of GMMTV's *Only Friends* franchise since 2023.

theneoclassic's first popular work was *Ya Ma Yu Kap Kung* (យោមាយកំកុង)/*Don't Get Close to Kung* (2018), depicting dormitory life and romance among freshmen. Subsequently, in 2018, *Jao Jakkrawan* (ខោចករាល)/*Lord of the Universe* portrayed a romantic relationship between *seme*, a "hot nerd" dentistry student, and *uke*, a descendant of a transnational Yakuza family. The author's third installment of what he calls the Yellow Universe is titled *Sut Ja Thon #Khon Yang M* (សុចាបន #គណឈុរោងអើង)/*M Is Unbearable* (2019). The *seme* and *uke* are portrayed as professional rappers. While *uke* is typically shorter than the *seme*, his physique is ambiguous due to the presence of muscular abs. However, the *uke*'s body undergoes some degree of grooming within the Likay family. The majority of well-known Likay performers endorse androgyny. *M Is Unbearable* could be considered an experimental work within the queer text umbrella, as it challenges and disrupts the rap community's norms. This particular community should have been characterized by hypermasculine traits.<sup>7</sup>

*Ai, You Are So Fluffy* (2021) modifies the literary conventions of the Thai BL novels. In the preface, the author declares that his romantic experiences act as the source of his creative inspiration. The novel is dedicated to the author's former romantic partner, who openly identifies as a sissy but takes sexual roles as a top. The term *phua sao*, or "sissy top," is defined by theneoclassic (2021 : 4) as "beautiful sis who we fell in love with and wanted him to be our bae."<sup>8</sup> He continues: "[My ex-boyfriend] was gay, but he didn't really fit the typical mold of a gay man." The image of the author's boyfriend is further described: "He got his nails done, dyed his hair, wore some eye-catching clothes, and had an androgynous look. Still, he entered me during our intimate moment. Whenever we went out, he always seemed to shine brighter than I did" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 4). The work is described by the author as "a love letter to express how much I miss you from the bottom of my heart" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 5). In light of this, the novel is not a pure fantasy but rather centers around empirical queer romantic love.

The senior-junior trope defines the romance between Ai and Salmon (hereafter Mon) in the novel. Set on a university campus in Chiang Mai province in northern Thailand, the narrative centers on the protagonists' university experiences. Interestingly, the conflict stems from the dichotomy of shame and pride. Ai's image as a male university pageant is atypical. Ai, who is based on the author's ex-boyfriend, possesses an effeminate personality despite his sexual position as top.<sup>9</sup> The difference in height between the *seme* and the *uke* is sustained. Additionally, Mon, with low self-esteem, is not convinced that he earns Ai's affection.

<sup>7</sup> Some other interesting works include *Rot Riw Thinnakorn* (រោតវិវាទិនករ)/*Beneath the Sun* (2020) and *Darajak* (តារាជករ)/*Galactic Eclipse* (2020), in which the author aims to queer the traditional portrayal of Thai genteel romance, typically featuring Thai gentlemen and nobles.

<sup>8</sup> Quotations from the novel are italicized to distinguish them from surrounding texts.

<sup>9</sup> Dyer (2002 : 30–32) observed that the queen (or sissy) and the dyke (or butch lesbian) were the most recognizable archetypes among the gay and lesbian community during the early 20th century. Mannish women and effeminate men may assert in-betweenism or decline strict sex role-playing. Queens, or sissy gay men, are particularly unmanly and unwomanly. They are "thus often seen as tragic, pathetic, wretched, despicable, comic, or ridiculous figures" (Dyer, 2002 : 32).

Shame is characterized by emotions of difference, exclusion, and prohibition (Love, 2007). In the realm of activism, pride could take over the place of shame. In the novel *Ai, You Are So Fluffy*, heterosexism does not induce embarrassment. One possible theory is that the novel's sociocultural backdrop occurs after 2020, a period characterized by rising LGBTQ activism. This sentiment may run parallel to the novel's plot development and characterization. In the novel, gay males nevertheless engage in bigotry against sissyness or non-mainstream gay identity.

A situation that impacts the growth of Mon and Ai's romantic relationship is Mon's rejection from the university cheerleading squad audition. Peach (Ai's ex-boyfriend), despite Mon's industrious preparation, declares with a chuckle, "*Mon, you're not cheerleader material. Your height in centimeters is 169. Only 170 centimeters plus is acceptable for us*" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 125). This is Peach's act of malice. When audition committees ridicule him, Mon feels humiliated. "Big belly" and "soft and clumsy" are characteristics to which Mon refers (theneoclassic, 2021 : 80, 89). In addition, Mon finds muscular straight-acting gay men unpleasing, whereas he finds sissy gays attractive (theneoclassic, 2021 : 89). Due to his self-perception as an undesirable gay, Mon's affection for Ai is disapproved of. Although he aspires to man up and to date Ai, he is unable to do so. "*I've never gone out with uke. Actually, I've never dated anyone before*" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 76). He once shared with Ai, "*I feel very at ease, and you appear quite adorable whenever you expose your sissy side*" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 99).

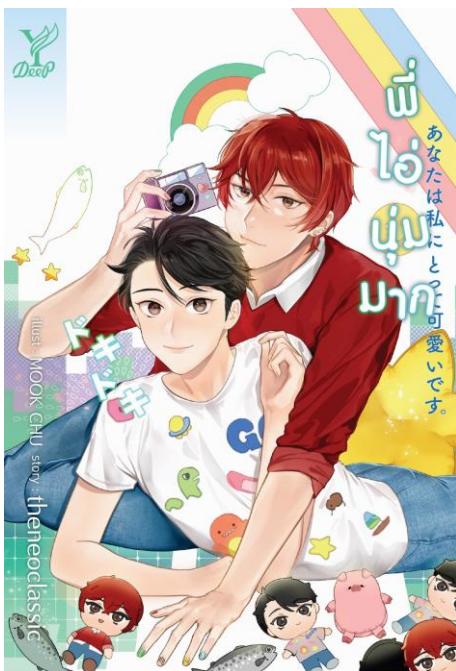


Figure 1 Cover of *Ai, You Are So Fluffy*

(Source: Satapornbooks, 2020 [published with permission from the publisher])

Unlike Mon, Ai boldly experiments with his queer physique and effeminate traits, aware of the perceived eccentricity. Ai is always referred to by Mon as *khon suai*, or "my belle," and, amusingly, "you flirty belle" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 118). Once, Mon believes that he can "top" Ai, but he later realizes that this is not the case. Ai once revealed that he and Mon are "sisters" to the beefy staff at his manicure salon. Conversely, Ai is addressed as "hia" by Mon's straight friend, which translates to "elder brother" in Teochew dialect. They even engage in a bro fist bump (theneoclassic, 2021 : 315). Ai can accompany Mon's father on a round of golf while he converses with Mon's younger sister regarding cosmetics. He also describes himself as "a spicy daughter-in-law" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 245).

Queer shame in selected Thai BL novel is revisited to reveal that it is ingrained within the genre, and with socio-cultural change, it can be redefined. In mainstream Thai BL media, parents tend to be depicted as supporters of their queer sons. Parental conflicts are typically confined to subplots, resolved once the primary romantic narrative is addressed, often in a utopian fashion (Chan & Lee, 2025). Conversely, *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* indicates that queer shame may originate from and exist within the queer community. The hostility towards sissyness and non-normative bodies is a legacy of hegemonic gay masculinity, which is in some way fostered by the heteropatriarchy (Prasannam, 2024).

The aspects of sissy persona and queer body image are extensively examined in empirical research by social scientists<sup>10</sup>; however, they are not commonly articulated in Thai BL/Y novels. Effeminate traits are conventionally associated with *uke* characters. The issue arises when the traits are embedded in a *seme* character design. This challenges the noble path (*ōdō*) of BL (Baudinette, 2023) and the notion in Thai academic and public discourses that the *seme/uke* formula mimics *gay king/gay queen* dichotomy in the Thai perception and *male/female* characters in heterosexual romance (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017; Pimsak, 2019; Jirattikorn, 2020; Klaharn, 2021; Prasannam, 2024).

The *seme* characters of conventional Thai BL on page and screen are expected to be muscular and straight-acting, which somewhat is a fruit of the values of gay masculinity heightened by the Thai gay media production and consumption since the 1980s (Duangwises, 2018). It was pursued in a contact zone between BL and gay media in the late 2010s, when muscular BL actors' well-sculptured bodies were showcased on magazine covers (Prasannam, 2024). This was again intended to avoid the in-betweenism associated with "queens" or sissy gay men, who are often perceived as particularly unmanly and unwomanly (Dyer, 2002). *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* otherwise explores another "aspect of queer life, no matter how embarrassing or discreditable" (Halperin & Traub, 2010 : 11), projecting controversies on queer shame within the contexts of BL culture, queer communities, and the dominant discourse on masculinity.

The title of the novel indicates that the character design of *seme* is a key device. It challenges the stereotypical hegemonic masculinity of queer men and the BL/Y convention. *Ai* pursues a literature degree in the Faculty of Liberal Arts instead of engineering or medicine as found in mainstream Thai BL novels. With his *kawaii*-manicured nails, *Ai* turns the pages of an English novel. After his ballet training, he offers *Mon* a ride on his sister's Italian big motorbike. He uses the final particle "kha" in Thai, which is commonly used by women.

*Ai*'s fluctuated queer persona is also manifested in the color of his hair, which alternates between shocking pink, pink in the shade of iced red syrup with milk, black, and silver. His cosplay activity demonstrates a lighthearted bodily stylization. As the subject of cosplay, *Ai* resembles a "player in a play." Cosplay subjects may be prohibited from making symbolic gendered statements in particular circumstances (Lunning, 2022 : 119). Still, *Ai*'s cosplay can be interpreted as homage to the youth subculture and a creatively queered body. *Ai* puts on the costume of *Harry Potter* franchise's *Draco Malfoy* and ornaments himself with unnatural silver hair for a campus sporting event. He states, "Honestly, I'd totally go for a *Luna Lovegood* vibe." (theneoclassic, 2021 : 158-159). Then, he performs a cover dance to the K-pop female group *Twice*'s "Free Special" (theneoclassic, 2021 : 166).

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<sup>10</sup> In Asian and Asian American contexts, gay sissyness is problematic. Since the 2000s, the online gay community in Taiwan has served as the primary source of evidence. There was sissophobia and sissy lesbianphobia projected by the platform. The message board was filled with derogatory remarks. "Gay male sisters, please do not annoy me!" "Rejecting sissies!" and "I hate sissies; therefore, I ain't sissy!" are a few examples (Lin, 2006 : 272). A significant backlash directed at a sissy gay informant of Lin's survey is as follows: "Don't you know you are so sissy, so old, so short and small, so unwanted? Don't you feel ashamed to post your personal ad here for seeking sexual partner? I'll never have sex with you" (Lin, 2006 : 272). That precisely exemplified difference, exclusion, and prohibition.

One significant cosplay has Ai portraying the character Ban from the anime series *The Seven Deadly Sins*, modeling a scarlet leather costume with a deep V-neck. He jokingly complaints to Mon, stating, “*Wearing this costume really wears me out. I need to get in a quick muscle pump!*” (theneoclassic, 2021 : 346–347). Ai usually keeps a lean, robust physique. To complete the look, he recreates a muscular physique. In this case, muscularity can be regarded as cosplaying. Lunning (2022 : 126) makes the following observation: “Men, often heavy-set and bearded, cosplay as prototypically powerful female characters (the *Sailor Moon* characters) or as hyperfeminine, magically powerful manga or anime characters.” In contrast, Ai momentarily and whimsically embraces the anime character’s brutal masculinity in order to assert his “fluffy” personality.

Cosplay may be compared to drag performances in which masculinity or femininity is exaggerated in the opposite direction. In this manner Mon finds Ai appealing. The queered body by Ai is playful and surprising. Ai’s cosplay and his unconventional gay self can be read as a means of liberation from the pride/shame dichotomy. As part of the romance’s narrative, Ai’s declaration of love to Mon is quite captivating: “*You’ve embraced me without any conditions. ... I used to feel like I was a bit odd, not very strong, and didn’t really matter much. You really help me feel good about myself and give me the courage to just be me. I’m finally in a place where I can stand up for someone else*” (theneoclassic, 2021 : 311). The plot’s resolution indicates that to embrace shame can lead to pride. Yet shame is not cleansed; it is to be addressed and to be owned by queer men.

*Ai, You Are So Fluffy* explores sissyness and non-normative bodies as empowerment. This is a different type of shame compared to the age before the Pride Movement. The happy ending seems to be linked with the protagonists’ acceptance of each other’s imperfection. It complies with the ending of a typical romance novel, which somewhat dictates the BL convention. This can be read as a celebratory pride when barriers bound in shame are removed. The novel, however, challenges the pattern of “from closet to community”; the protagonists are out since the plot’s exposition. The community is not built among queers but is a gathering of friends of different sexualities. Love (2007) can offer an alternative view on queer shame here. She suggests, “We can turn shame into pride, but we cannot do once and for all: shame lives on in pride, and pride can easily turn back to shame” (Love, 2007 : 28). This notion opens onto the other section dealing with the positionality of queer shame within a wider queer literary culture in Thailand.

## 2. Revisiting Queer Shame in the Thai Boys Love/Y and Queer Literary Culture

Until the 2020s, Thai society persisted in its pursuit of knowledge regarding the tradition of BL. Interviews, articles, and research exhibit the positionality of BL in public discourse. BL has, to some extent, emerged as a representation of gender diversity and its related phenomena in Thailand. In the wake of the Queer Turn in 2020, the BL industry redefined its role as an ally of LGBTQ movements, in contrast to its earlier position that distanced itself from gay identity, which was associated with the noble path related to Japanese BL (Baudinette, 2023). The section that came before illustrates how queer shame contests the BL convention, detailing the recontextualization of queer shame in a framework that extends beyond the Euro-American context.

This second part of the research results revisits queer shame within Thai queer literary culture through the framework of “Feeling Backward” (Love, 2007), employing BL novels as a bridge. The evolution of the BL genre in Thai public discourse is often characterized by phrases such as “from the underground to the limelight” (Prachachat, 2020) or “from the ‘Black Hole’ to the Thai Soft Power” (The Active, 2024), which reflect its progress-oriented nature. This section hopes to explain how the BL genre remains stuck in the cycle of queer shame, adopting many forms of backwardness (Love, 2007 : 7).

The first notable author at the transitional period of Thai BL culture between the Y Boom period and the early 2020s is Ro Ruea Nai Mahasamut (ร อรุณามาสุมุต), whose works can be placed in a conversation with activism emerging in the past two years of the 2010s. Ro Ruea Nai Mahasamut's works markedly address the ideas of shame, a subject that is uncommon in mainstream Thai BL novels. In the plots, shame stems from an unresolved father wound, childhood trauma, transgender identity, and the protagonists' forced coming-out process (Prasannam, 2022).

In one of her works, *Yot Wine Lae Thapthim* (หยดไวน์และทับทิม)/*Red Wine and Ruby* (2023), the BDSM issues are delivered not in compliance with the conventional BL, particularly from Japanese manga, but through the lens of shame. In the novel's preface, it is lamented that "*We're outsiders because we enjoy feeling the pain. But we're not really into the latex suit and whip, and definitely not the handcuffs or gag ball. That puts us on the outside of the BDSM community*" (Ro Ruea Nai Mahasamut, 2023 : 3). The author stands out in bridging BL novels with a wider range of queer-themed writings representing human hurt by and healed from shame and other negative feelings. Her queer but non-BL writings, under the other name Jidanun Leungpiansamut, include *Si Sutthai Khong Klangkhuem* (ສີສຸດທ້າຍຂອງກລາງຄົ່ນ)/*Monochromatic Night* (2022) and *At Mai Mo Hak Phro Bang* (ອາຈໄໝເໜັນທາກເປົ່າປະບາງ)/*Unsuitably Vulnerable* (2022).

Another author who employs queer shame in her works is Orawan Vichayawannakul. Under the pseudonym MAME, she is acknowledged for her significant contributions to the BL genre. Her outstanding works include *Love by Chance* or *Rak Ni Bangoen Khue Khun* (รักนี้บังเอิญคือคุณ)/*My Accidental Love is You*, published in 2015 and adapted into a series in 2018, as well as *Tharn & Type Kiat Nak Ma Pen Thi Rak Sa Di Di* (เกลี้ยดนักมาเป็นที่รักจะดีๆ)/*Tharn & Type*, which was first serialized in 2014 and had its series adaptation released in 2019. The relationship between these two works exemplifies MAME's perspective on queer shame. The male protagonist (Pete) in *Love by Chance* identifies as a gay man. His romantic experience, however, results in violence perpetrated by his former partner. In *Tharn & Type*, a gay friend who develops romantic feelings for the *seme* protagonist, Tharn, lures a *uke* character to a non-consensual encounter. In the same novel, the *uke* protagonist (Type) endures childhood trauma stemming from a near-assault by a predatory pedophile. Despite his homophobic sentiments, Type falls for Tharn, making him feel even more ashamed. MAME's depictions of queer characters somewhat link queerness to promiscuity, illness, and violence, particularly in the context of popular romance.

MAME has established herself as a successful author, publisher, and BL showrunner. In her master's thesis, she looked into female BL authors and their diverse forms of capital within the Pierre Bourdieu's framework. The study suggests that female authors hold positive attitudes toward gay men. BL works are the space where the authors can express themselves (Vichayawannakul, 2016 : 82). A majority of female authors previously engaged with BL content as consumers. The findings are relevant to MAME's own experiences.

Examining the works of Ro Ruea Nai Mahasamut along with those of MAME builds an understanding of queer literary culture in Thailand, which extends beyond mere production aspects. Fans of BL engage in interpretative practices, giving its consumption a unique experience (Klaharn, 2021 : 144). Through *mōsō* or *sao wai* gaze (Baudinette, 2023 : 66–68), female minor characters in BL novels and series often engage in fantasies about the homoerotic relationships between male protagonists, positioning themselves as dedicated supporters or shippers within the context of BL terminology. These practices are found in both authors' works. In Japan, fans of BL are referred to as *fujoshi*, which translates to "rotten girls." The term implies guilt and shame associated with the consumption of BL content, which deviates from the social norm; however, through these emotions, the pleasure from reading is actualized (Nagaike, 2003).

“Sao wai gaze” creates a communal sense among *sao wai* or Sao-Y (BL fangirls). The mode is applied to both literary reading and consumption of BL content in the form of a series or BL stars’ personae. This notion contributes to bridging BL novels to their broader queer literary culture in Thailand, as reminded by Collins (2010 : 17): “popular literary culture [is] where mass media and literary reading are not mutually opposed but interdependent experiences, crucial associated tastes that tell us more about how people who consider themselves readers actually come to their literary experiences, which are no longer restricted to the solitary act of reading a book.” It is worth rethinking how Thai BL fans have come into contact with queer shame, as they are included in this revisiting project.

The emergence of the BL genre in Thailand dates to the late 1980s and early 1990s. Pirate translations and works published by well-known comic publishers, such as Vibulkij Publishing, were significant resources for fans. The collection of oral histories from BL fans reveals recollections of both shame and pleasure (Lertwichayaroj, 2017). Thai female fans engaged in BL-related activities since the 1990s, such as reading, writing, exchanging news, and participating in Thailand’s inaugural cosplay event in 1998. The ACHO group is an important BL fan cycle (Vinitphol, 2023 : 9). In their oral history, shame could originate from the consumption of BL content and the judgement of friends and family members. Therefore, reading and engaging with like-minded individuals provided the anticipated pleasure (Jiararattanakul, 2007; Lertwichayaroj, 2017; TingThingsThink, 2021).

In August 2005, Sao-Y experienced another surge of shame, marking the beginning of the period that is referred to as the “dark age” of BL media in Thailand. The television program Lum Dam (หลุมดำ)/Black Hole identified BL as sexually obscene media and a potential threat to young audiences. This incident resulted in a crackdown on both the production and reception aspects of BL culture in Thailand. Purchasing BL might be perceived as acquiring illegal drugs. Closely monitored by Thai authorities, many BL personal collections and merchandises were confiscated and destroyed (Thongtha, 2021 : 133). This incident was followed by the closely monitored circulation of erotic and LGBTQ-related books in one of the largest bookstore chains in Thailand—SE-ED bookstores in 2012 (Manager Online, 2012).

Fans of earlier Thai BL often stress the importance of conjuring the period of shame in the history prior to BL’s incorporation into the state’s creative economy scheme in the 2020s (Lertwichayaroj, 2017; Vinitphol, 2023; Salmon Podcast, 2023). Sao-Y might not inherently identify as queer; however, the BL reading practices can reveal a queerer potential of the genre in addition to its disruption of heteronormativity (Nagaike & Aoyama, 2015 : 128). The pleasure of Sao-Y can be subjected to queer shame because it challenges societal norms, even as some LGBTQ activists and allies, who support progressive ideology, also denounce such pleasure (The Matter, 2023).

The other avenue of revisiting BL novels alongside queer literary culture in Thailand is to connect BL works with queer-themed literature before the Y Boom through queer shame. The great divide between these two literary traditions may stem from the introduction of BL in Thailand as translated manga, before the emergence of prose fiction as the prevailing form.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, in the portrayal of queer men within Thai literature, novels created by women since the 1970s frequently serve as key references. The scope of queer-themed literature in academia was broadened by Pumyim (2007), who examined Thai queer life writings hand-in-hand with fictional works. The inside-out writing style employed by queer autobiographers is emphasized. Indeed, the research was conducted during the flourishing period of life

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<sup>11</sup> To locate translated *manga* in Thai literary culture might be questioned in terms of Thainess and literary values. In the Thai academic discourse, manga or cartoons and foreign works in translation can, however, be integrated into the history of contemporary Thai literature (Nukulkit, 2000). Some scholars argue that we can also classify those works as para-literature (Pinit-Phuwadol, 1991). That was an open space for popular fiction, particularly BL novels, to be later accommodated in the scope of contemporary Thai literature together with modern classics and the literary canon (Chunlawong, 2025).

writing in Thailand, spanning from the late 1990s to the 2000s. The literary phenomenon became linked with pocketbooks written under the names of celebrities or people in the entertainment industry (Chunnanonda, 2005). The proliferation of life-writing pocketbooks is evident from their content on social exposés and the “dark side” of Thai society, which is closely associated with the BL “Black Hole” incident emerging from journalistic coverage. The minoritized subjects were extensively represented within the life writing genre of the 2000s. Authors of queer literature thus employed the life-writing mode to engage the readership.

The best-known case of the period was *Sengped* (เซ้งเป็ด)/*Boring Love*, authored by an amateur writer under the pseudonym Sengped.<sup>12</sup> The work was serialized in 2006 on the webboard of the website www.pantip.com, one of Thailand's largest virtual communities. It initially emerged under the topic “I am not gay; why are you hitting on me?” It tells the experiences of Ped and Oi, two colleagues in the airport. Oi pursues Ped although Ped is heterosexual. Nevertheless, the complex and intimate feelings emerge independently of any affirmation of homosexual identity, which is supported by the followers on the website. The story concludes with Ped eventually securing new job, while Oi is ordained as a Buddhist monk. Ped's personal account captured widespread attention online; it was later consumed and appropriated by Sao-Y as a BL work. Ped's personal account captured widespread attention online; it was later consumed and appropriated by Sao-Y as a BL work. *Sengped* inspired a diverse range of fan art and fan fiction. The story encouraged Sao-Y's mode of reading, reenacting the male homoerotic relationship of real individuals and fictional characters.

Moreover, Sengped gave birth to one of Thailand's largest BL online communities: www.thaiboyslove.com in 2006. The website is also referred to as Lao Ped (เล้าเป็ด)/Duck Coop or Duck Farm, named in honor of the story and the author's pseudonym. The website was also a fruit of the BL crackdown in 2005. As an emotional refuge for Sao-Y, it was built upon the pillars of pleasure and the shame connected with BL consumption. The website www.thaiboyslove.com functions as an important platform for BL prose fiction authored by both amateur and professional writers.

Subsequently, Anit Publishing released the story of Sengped and its second installment in 2008. The publisher was known for its life-writing content, regarded as popular but non-normative, including topics such as sex workers, LGBTQ, and urban sexual experiences. *Sengped* was adapted into a film and released on DVD format in 2009. The film director was Sarawut Intaraprom, who later made films and web series presenting controversial and rather explicit sexual relationships among gay men. Therefore, *Sengped* held a liminal space between BL and queer media. The cast members of the film were physically well-built. The work was then adapted into a BL series by JINLOE Company. The new titles are *What the Duck Rak Landing* (รักแลนดิ้ง)/*What the Duck the Series* (2018) and *What the Duck Season 2 : Final Call* (2019).

The analysis of *Sengped* corresponds with problematic generic classification. It has been categorized as an autobiography (Prasannam, 2010b), an autobiographical work incorporating elements of fiction or memoir (Boon-Long, 2011), and a novel (Pankhlam, 2013). The author once affirmed that it was his personal account in an interview with GM PLUS magazine (June 2007). Autofiction may qualify as an alternative classification for this work. Still, the idea of queer shame remains a subject of investigation in this work, as the author (or narrator) does not fully accept the gay identity. His acknowledgment of his sexual orientation is situated within a particular context involving Oi: “I really just want to be friends with him and look out for him. If you throw all of this together and pop it in the microwave, ding!, take it out, and it spells out ‘I'm gay,’ then I guess I'm admitting I'm gay now. I'm gay for him... T\_T” (Sengped, 2008 : 124).

<sup>12</sup> “Sengped” is a slang word meaning “world-weary” (Pankhlam, 2013 : 173), “bored,” and “frustrated.” Ped, in the Thai language, literally means duck.

The author fails to establish his alliance with the queer community. Sengped feels shame about queer love because he identifies as straight and has romantic feelings for women. His queer identity is claimed only to love Oi; it is not realized in the form of a sexual encounter. The premise of potential platonic love subtly fits with the BL convention, where the explicit acknowledgment of gay or queer identity can be disregarded, rendering queer love an ideal. However, it is often subjected to criticism due to the progressive stance adopted by LGBTQ activists and their allies.

The revisit of queer shame here might shift focus back to MAME and her contribution to Thai BL. One should observe that she tends to locate BL novels within the stream of male homosexuality-themed fiction by Thai female authors since the 1970s (Vichayawannakul, 2016 : 217). A question arises: Is the integration of BL novels with the works of earlier female authors merely an observation based on the gender of the writers? Furthermore, the two traditions of realism and romance are in conflict with each other. Therefore, I argue that queer shame can connect these two traditions in the revisit of queer literary culture in Thailand. The connecting strands can be found even in the 2020s.

In 2023, the novel titled *Malai Bai Pruek* (มาลัยใบพุกน้ำ) / *The Garland of Leaves*, written by Nirapati, was published. The novel was created after the success of the author's earlier pieces. The author employed a revisionist writing mode towards BL culture flourishing in the 2020s. The novel is placed in the tradition of queer-themed literature from a realist perspective. In the author's note, he drops the names of Srifah Ladawan, Krissana Asoksin, Suwannee Sukontha, and Verawat Kanoknukroh (Nirapati, 2023 : 381). Therefore, *The Garland of Leaves* recounts contemporary queer issues in an anti-progressive fashion: the BL industry, sex workers, urban cruising culture, queer public figures, and queer Buddhist monks. To critique the utopian stance of the BL genre, the novel foregrounds queer shame while explaining the BL phenomenon in Thailand:

For FC service, the Y couple should look out for one another: grabbing drinks, wiping off sweat, and keeping their partner shaded from the sun. This could totally win over fans. They've got something to daydream about. But it should still look natural and not overdone to avoid feeling fake. [...] Isn't it pretty funny? Two decades back, people would freak out when guys came out as gay or Kathoey. Kathoey got banned from the screen to stop people from copying the behavior. [...] Being open and being accepting aren't the same thing. Honestly, marketing is what it's all about for me. Acceptance can be anything that brings in some cash. (Nirapati, 2023 : 228–229)

Nirapati's works can also be mapped with queer-themed literature by non-female authors, which began to flourish during the late 1990s and 2000s (Kuthavekul, 2005; Pumyim, 2007; Supanvanit, 2011). An important example is Verawat Kanoknukroh's trilogy released from 1995 to 2008.<sup>13</sup> The work deals with sexual minorities in relation to class, cruising culture, varied forms of capital, the fluidity of sexualities, AIDS, and Buddhism (Prasannam, 2010a). Queer shame remains evident in narrative structures and character designs. Non-female authors may present a more nuanced depiction of queer life than pioneering female authors (Kuthavekul, 2005), including Srifah Ladawan, Krissana Asoksin, and Suwannee Sukontha, to name a few (Pinijwararak, 1984).

The revisit of Thai queer literary culture through queer shame here might conclude at the Cold War era of the 1970s, when the first novel centered on the theme of male homosexuality, Krissana Asoksin's *Pratu Thi Pit Tai* (ประดุจที่

<sup>13</sup> The trilogy comprises of *Sak Dok Mai* (ชาวดอกไม้) / *The Remain of the Flower* (serialized between 1995 and 1996), *Dai Si Muang* (ด้วยสีม่วง) / *The Purple Life* (2002), and *Huang Jamlaeng* (ห่วงจำแลง) / *Bareback in Bangkok* (2008).

ปิดตาย)/*Behind the Closed Door*, was serialized between 1974 and 1975. It narrates the story of a gay man married to a woman who keeps up appearances. The initial queer-themed texts by female authors examine queer culture in urban Bangkok, including gay scenes such as saunas, bars, and nightclubs. The novel resonates with works of the same period, influenced by psychological and psychiatric discourse that regards queer sexuality as symptomatic deviance (Boonkachorn, 1982 : 54–57; Pinijvararak, 1984). Interestingly, the author mentioned her friend's plea in the preface: "I really hope you won't write in favor of increasing the number of gay people in our country. This is really causing a lot of damage to society already." The author, despite her claims of a well-informed vision, reciprocates that sentiment: "Believe me, I won't portray a positive image of gay people, even if I don't create a negative one. You know, I'm not going to encourage the population growth of gay men. Therefore, both the individual issuing the warning and the one receiving it may experience a sense of relief" (Asoksin, 2013 : n.p.). That was another source of queer shame, to be surpassed by queer-themed fiction of later periods.

In *Behind the Closed Door*, the characterization of a gay character, Rabin, matters. Rabin represents a stereotypical gay man whose sissy persona comes out from time to time (Supanvanit, 2011). He distracts the male protagonist, causing him to turn away from heteronormativity. Shameful Rabin is the one who destroys heteronormative matrimony and family. In this context, sissyness is equivalent to queerness, which was rejected by both heterosexual society and the gay community until it was reclaimed by BL novels in the 2020s. That might be considered a progressive take on the unbreakable ties between queer shame and queer literary culture in Thailand.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Mainstream research on *yaoi* and BL in the Anglophone world focuses on three strands: fandom, psychoanalysis (of the text and reception), and queer theory (Turner, 2018). Although Thai BL has a political potential (Welker, 2022), scholarship on BL literary works in the Thai language tends to cling to fictional elements and connections between character design and queer genders and sexualities (Pimsak & Unthaya, 2017; Pimsak, 2019; Wongwet, 2022). Existing scholarship in the Thai language seems to correspond to the noble path of Japanese BL and the gender and sexuality system in Thai culture, where bipolar gender is ingrained even in queer sexuality (Jackson, 2000). Instead, this research aims to illuminate the queer aspects of the BL genre in Thailand, which bear a controversial link to queer shame. One of evidences is the space of BL literary, screen, and star industries in Bangkok Pride Forum 2025 despite the aforementioned protest in 2023. Nonetheless, based on queer pride, this research proposes an alternative perspective on Thai BL—queer shame and "Feeling Backward" (Love, 2007)—which can be regarded as both a queer theoretical framework and methodological approach (Ahmed, 2025 : 259–260).

The contribution of this research to the Thai literary studies field is that queer shame offers an alternative approach to Thai queer-themed literature, both in terms of textual analysis and literary historiography. Earlier scholarship analyzed queer writings through medical, psychiatric, socio-cultural, representational, discursive, and identitarian perspectives (Pinijvararak, 1984; Kuthavekul, 2005; Pumyim, 2007; Numuen, 2008). Furthermore, it is found that the scholarship on honor and shame in Thai literature, both classical and contemporary, does not cover queer-themed works. The cultural categories of honor and shame are bound with social background and duties (Raksamani, Chunlawong, & Noinimit, 2007). The newly suggested research framework, method, and their associated findings are to motivate a reevaluation of shame within Thai literature, focusing on popular fiction, its connections to other media, and the wider literary culture.

Based on the research objectives, research findings can be discussed and expanded in three aspects:

### 1. Queer shame is acknowledged and politicized by the non-female BL writers.

theneoclassic's *Ai, You Are So Fluffy*, critiques the divisive values within gay communities. In Thailand, the sissyness of gay men was initially rejected. It was later empowered by BL media, though in a nuanced fashion (Prasannam, 2024). The novel is the testament of internalized shame among Thai gay men. Apart from rejected sissyness, Thai gay men strive for perfect physique and beauty standards through cosmetic surgery and materialistic consumption (Duangwises, 2018). Those who can meet the standard are categorized as *Plamuek Thaew Bon* (ปลาหมึกแกรบบ)—the squid in the upper row). The slang is derived from grilled dried squid, a street food in Thailand, where the squid in the upper row is more expensive (Jombaiyok, 2024).

The launch of *Ai, You Are So Fluffy* promises to further revisit queer shame in Thai BL culture. The exemplary case includes works of Prapt (ปราปต์). After the success of his BL novels adapted into television series, *Khun Mi Patihan* (คุณหมีป้าภิหาริย์)/*The Miracle of Teddy Bear* (published in 2019) and *Khat* (คาธ)/*Eclipse* (published in 2021), Prapt launched a novel titled *Maeng Lamoe* (แมงละเมอ)/*Dreams of the Mayfly* (2022). It features a chubby and timid *uke* and a tanned-skinned *seme*, opposing the Thai BL convention. In Prapt's *Khat 2* (คาธ 2)/*Eclipse Year 2* (2023), the character seemingly introduced as the *seme* protagonist turns out to be the *uke*. This twist is noteworthy given that First (Kanaphan Puitrakul), known for his *seme* roles in GMMTV's BL series, including *Eclipse the Series* (2022), portrays this particular character and the muscular physique as described in the novel. Deep Publishing brings these works to life. The role of this publisher in promoting different flavors of Thai BL can be further investigated.

The other example is *GELBOYS Sathana Kak Jai* (GELBOYS สถาณะ กก.จ.)/*GELBOYS the Series* (2025), directed by a queer director—Naruebet Kuno. The series deals with what *Ai*, from *Ai, You Are So Fluffy*, is criticized for: a fancy nail manicure entailed by sissyness. The title, "GELBOYS," comes from the gel look on the nails. The romance between two protagonists is set in a high school, a nail parlor, and the Siam Square area. Again, the noble path of Thai BL is contested, as the series features an *uke* with a ripped, muscular body; a *seme* who is interested in nail aesthetics; a *seme* who is much shorter than the *uke*; and an *uke* who dates a transgender high school girl. The series' cultural stance pays tribute to the unapologetic youth culture and Thai popular music of the 2000s. The residual signs of queer shame can be identified through the design of characters and the setting. The hairstyles of the *seme* and *uke* protagonists are reminiscent of Tong and Mew from *Love of Siam*. Additionally, the act of strolling through Siam Square functions as an echo of the canonical film.

### 2. Revisiting the BL genre alongside queer literary culture in Thailand through queer shame revives queer spirits of the genre.

In response to the social criticism and expectation that Thai BL should be politically engaged with LGBTQ issues, the prioritized mission of Thai BL since the late 2010s is to empower romantic relationships and matrimony among queer subjects. This mission is evident both in the BL texts and paratexts. Located in the sphere of popular culture, a distinguished case is the original soundtrack of Thai BL series, which are widely consumed and showcased. To echo the aspirational message of the genre, Amp (Achariya Dulyapaiboon), a celebrated songwriter who wrote a successful BL series original soundtrack like *Khan Ku* (คันกู) from *Phrao Rao Khu Kan* (พระราชาคุกัน)/*2gether the Series* (2020), once explained, "The song created for the BL series is pretty much the same. For me, LGBT love is just love. ... When I produce a BL series OST, I just can't get behind the idea of impossible love. Love is out there, and it can happen to anyone" (G Music, 2021).

Nevertheless, queer shame challenges the newly established grand narrative of Thai BL. It traces the shameful history of the queer and BL community in Thailand. Suppressed by sociocultural norms, the queer and BL communities

can unite to critique a full-on commodification of the genre run by the entertainment company and the state's soft power policy. When the boundaries of generic classification and reception collide, the revised trajectory offers a way to rethink the history of queer-themed literature in Thailand. This way the literary historiography of the BL genre in Thailand is posited as an ongoing project. The research findings support the synthesis of publishing history, media history, and literary history.

### **3. Queer shame unfolds the interplay among literary convention, screen adaptation, star persona, and fan culture within the Thai BL industry.**

The textual analysis indicates that queer shame arises from the subversion of the BL convention. The *seme/uke* rule, in some cases, poses significant challenges in the screen adaptation of BL novels. The starting case refers to the casting for the adaptation of a BL webtoon: *Chan Ni Lae Than Khun Thi Suai Thi Sut Nai Siam* (ฉันนี่ Haleท่านนุนที่สวยที่สุดในสยาม)/*I'm the Most Beautiful Count in Siam* by Yuen Kin Pakka Thi Tha Phra (ยืนกินปากกาที่ท่าพระ). It was first published by Hermit Books in 2023. Change2561 officially announced the adaptation in 2024. Fans extensively criticized the adaptation for its infidelity to the source text. The actor portraying the *seme* is shorter than the *uke*. The incident resulted in a dispute between the fans of webtoon and those of the actor (Khaosod, 2024).

Certain atypical *seme* can be found in productions of other companies. Junior (Panachai Sriariyarungruang), a GMMTV talent, can serve as another case here. As he lacks a muscular physique, fans playfully refer to him as Me Kung (เมะกุ้ง—a shrimp *seme*), connoting a skinny body. Implicitly, Junior experienced pressure to conform to the gym culture. His co-star mocked that he aims to become a lobster *seme* (becoming more muscular). The notion was mentioned in both on-site and online events: the Garnier event on March 1, 2025 and Shopee Live LOREAL UVD X JM LIVE on March 3, 2025, for instance. These two cases exemplify body issues, latently associated with shame, within the BL world. The subject is worthy of further investigation.

The other scenario involves the reversal of roles between *seme* and *uke* actors. The adaptation of *Not the Best but Still Good* by peachhplease into *Duang Kap Thoe* (ดวงกับเมorch)/*Duang with You the Series* is scheduled for production in 2025. DoMunDi decided to cast Por (Suppakarn Jirachotikul), previously portraying *seme* in *Ki Muen Fa* (กีฟ มีนฟ้า)/*Your Sky* (2024), as *uke* in this series, while TeeTee (Wanpichit Nimiparkpoom), formerly a *uke*, was assigned the role of *seme*. This casting choice has generated much disappointment among fans (Onebuntern, 2025).

Ultimately, queer shame sets the entire BL industry in an even more contested terrain. This research presents a novel approach for analyzing Thai BL novels, demonstrating a perspective on the cultural politics of queerness in the Thai society. Future studies might cover queer adaptations of BL novels that employ queer readings of the source text. Situated within the framework of the Queer Turn since 2020, the inclusion of an asexual character in *Wandi Waitthaya* (วันดีวิกฤต)/*Wandee Goodday* (2024) exemplifies this phenomenon. Besides, this research encourages a closer look at the ties between queer authorship and BL works on page and screen.

This research hopes to end with an epilogue endorsing the timely relevance of the BL genre, queer shame, and the “backwardness” of contemporary Thai society. On November 2, 2025, two seemingly unrelated pieces of news emerged. The first news was about a BL star named Oat (Pasakorn Sanrattana) who rose to fame from *Nai Hia Bok Mai Chop Dek* (ไนหินเอียงอกไม่ชอบเด็ก)/*My Stubborn the Series* (2025). He made comments on BL fans who are into the NC scenes<sup>14</sup> and boldly remarked, “Before, I felt like I was just drifting around in the industry. I've burst into brightness all of a sudden. Everything's great! The timing couldn't be better, and the harvest season is just spot on.” That led to

<sup>14</sup> NC is slang used in the Thai BL industry. It is derived from “Not for Children” or “No Children.” The term is used to describe sexually explicit content in BL novels and series.

his official public apology (The Thaiger, 2025a). This incident further reaffirms the exploitative nature of the BL industry, which is associated with shame.

The other news worsened the progressive outlook of the Thai society. Police forces arrested gay men at a drug party on November 2, 2025. Many news agencies reported the news as a “Gold Mine Party,” a slur associated with gay anal sex. That caused a huge backlash against journalistic institutions from netizens over a day (The Thaiger, 2025b). These two incidents demonstrated the queer shame stemming from the lack of total acceptance of LGBTQ rights and visibility within Thai society. Therefore, queer shame remains a prevalent currency of the day, compelling those who aspire to look forward to sometimes feel backward.

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