

QUEER OPPORTUNISM: STATE, MEDIA, AND LGBT+ RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THAI BOYS LOVE (BL) SERIES INDUSTRY

OPORTUNISMO QUEER: ESTADO, MÍDIA E DIREITOS LGBT+ NO CONTEXTO DA INDÚSTRIA TAILANDESA DE SÉRIES BOYS LOVE (BL)

Igor Leonardo de Santana Torres

Mestre em Antropologia pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (Rio Grande do Norte/Brasil).

Doutorando em Antropologia pela Universidade Federal da Bahia (Salvador/Brasil).

E-mail: torres.igorsantana@gmail.com

Recebido em: 5 de março de 2024

Aprovado em: 19 de junho de 2024

Sistema de Avaliação: Double Blind Review

BCIJ | v. 4 | n. 1 | p. 258-283 | jan./jun. 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25112/bcij.v4i1.3726>



ABSTRACT¹

Considering the increasingly frequent appropriation of the LGBT+ community's image and agenda across different levels and contexts, I argue that the Thai government has also been implicated in this process. Initially, this was evident in its support for the BL industry combined with its little attention to LGBT+ issues, particularly marriage equality. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted among Brazilian BL series fans on Twitter and Telegram for nine months (between June 2021 and February 2022) and discussions about politics, media, pink money, pinkwashing, and homonationalism, I introduce the concept of *queer opportunism* address the often contradictory relationship between state institutions or other entities and the LGBT+.

Keywords: BL series. LGBT+ rights. Queer opportunism. Thailand.

RESUMO

Considerando a apropriação cada vez mais frequente da imagem e agenda da população LGBT+ em diferentes níveis e contextos, argumento que o governo tailandês também estava implicado nesse processo. Inicialmente, isso ficou evidente em seu apoio à indústria BL combinado com sua pouca atenção às questões LGBT+, particularmente, ao casamento igualitário. Baseando-me em pesquisa etnográfica entre fãs de séries BL no Twitter e no Telegram durante nove meses, entre junho de 2021 e fevereiro de 2022, e em discussões sobre política e mídia, "*pinkwashing*" (lavagem cor de rosa) e "homonacionalismo", apresentarei o conceito de *oportunismo queer* para nomear uma forma de relação contraditória entre instituições estatais ou quaisquer outras e a agenda LGBT+ a partir de discursos de fãs e do posicionamento do Estado tailandês sobre a indústria BL.

Palavras-chave: Direitos LGBT+. Oportunismo queer. Séries BL. Tailândia.

¹ As a sign of recognition for such engagement in BL series consumption, *Kidnap* (2024) was added to Netflix's catalog in Brazil, becoming the first GMMTV BL series available to Brazilian fans on the platform, following *23.5* (2024), the company's first girls love (GL) series, which was also added.



INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of Thai boys love (BL) series has transcended national boundaries. They are consumed by fans from neighboring Asian countries, such as China, the Philippines, and Vietnam, as well as by fans from Western countries, particularly Latin America, where Brazil stands out. Known as *wai* series in Thailand, they are a genre of male homoerotic audiovisual productions, whose origins date back to the 1970s in Japan (Prasannam, 2019). This popularization is due to a transformation in the Thai media landscape, which has fostered the production and dissemination of these series through media convergence. According to Prasannam and Chan (2023, p. 1), “transmedia storytelling is a mechanism behind the expansion of Thai Y industry [...]” as it “[...] elevates the industry to a transnational scale.”

As an example of the transnational expansion of BL series, on June 24, 2021, the Thansettakij website reported an initiative by the Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), under the Ministry of Commerce, to encourage BL series production companies to distribute their content in East Asian countries’ markets such as Japan and Taiwan, as well as in Latin America¹. Central Boys Love², a prominent Brazilian news page covering BL media, shared this information enthusiastically on its Twitter profile:

The noise we Latin Americans make was noticed by the director of Thailand’s International Promotion Department! Thansettakij mentions that in LA [Latin America] there is a large audience that wants to see series in their languages. The government wants to facilitate the export of BLs. (June 24, 2021, my translation).

Some Brazilian fans greeted the news with enthusiasm, acknowledging their substantial consumption of BL series and attributing Latin America’s inclusion as potential target markets partly to their influence. The majority viewed this development positively, especially anticipating increased accessibility to these productions. The announcement sparked hopes that these series might eventually

¹ As a sign of recognition for such engagement in BL series consumption, GMMTV’s series *23.5* (2024) was also added to the Netflix catalog in Brazil, as well as other countries from North America (Mexico only), Central America, Latin America, and the Caribbean Basin Islands. See the post on the GMMTV Twitter account at: <https://x.com/GMMTV/status/1761032790064423067>.

² The page ended its activities due to disagreements within the team on November 2, 2022.



be available on streaming platforms such as Netflix³ with Portuguese dubbing. As Hope tweeted, “Latin America won” (June 24, 2021, my translation), referencing the region’s newfound prominence within Thai government discussions and the country’s BL industry.

Among the tweets discussing the subject, some expressed strong surprise at this promotional action by the Thai government. Those that particularly caught my attention conveyed a critical and suspicious view of the measure, paying attention to “the power of pink money”⁴ (June 24, 2021, my translation) and the emergence of “Thai soft power” in this phenomenon. According to one commenter, the government seemed more focused on profiting from the experiences of the Thai LGBT+ community than on their rights. While tweets like this did not represent the majority compared to the more enthusiastic and celebratory ones, they stood out for their skeptical stance.

A few days later, on June 28, 2021, International LGBT+ Pride Day, Central Boys Love tweeted about the relationship between the production of BL series and the LGBT+ rights movement in Thailand. The tweet stated: “it is a constant complaint from the Thai LGBT community that the government sells a tourist-friendly image of the country while the marriage equality law has been stalled in Parliament since 2018.” (June 28, 2021, my translation). In doing so, Central Boys Love reiterated previous comments and sentiments expressed by fans, articulated their critical consumption based on an understanding of the nuances between media and politics, and demonstrated concern and support for the Thai LGBT+ community.

At this point, while monitoring these and other reactions to the reported events, I remained engaged in the fandom’s identity-related discourse and sought to understand what meanings Brazilian fans attributed to this seemingly contradictory relationship between LGBT+ rights and BL series in Thailand, with special attention to governmental mediation. While the government had previously concentrated on censoring BL media in the country, it was now actively promoting and stimulating the BL industry

³ They have been released in the West mainly through fansubs and streaming platforms, such as Line TV (Japanese), Viki (American), GagaOOLala (Taiwanese), WeTV (Japanese), and iQiyi (Chinese), as well as through Thai TV YouTube channels (e.g., GMMTV and CH3) or production companies (e.g., Mande, Idol Factory, TV Hunter, etc.). Thai TV YouTube channels and production companies generally publish series episodes divided into four parts and with English subtitles on YouTube. Gradually, subtitles in Portuguese were made available on different YouTube channels, including the GMMTV one. Viki, WeTV, GagaOOLala, and iQiyi offer episodes in Portuguese, though some series (mainly on WeTV, GagaOOLala, and iQiyi) can only be accessed (partially or in their entirety) by subscribing to the platform. Typically, they release one or two episodes for free, restricting access to the others. For reasons that have not been formally disclosed, Line TV Thailand, one of the main free-to-air streaming platforms, suspended its activities on December 31, 2021.

⁴ Widely used in marketing, the expression refers to the consumption potential of LGBT+ individuals. The LGBT+ movement has used it to criticize the incorporation of the LGBT+ public into the consumer goods market, while contrasting this inclusion with the political landscape concerning LGBT+ rights and demanding more legal guarantees.



on a transnational scale (Bunyavejchewin, 2022). Having already observed the divided opinions on this topic, I paid close attention to the interactions and subsequent broader discussions surrounding LGBT+ representation.

Considering the increasingly frequent appropriation of the LGBT+ community's image and agenda across different levels and contexts, I argue that the Thai government has also been implicated in this process. Initially, this was evident in its support for the BL industry combined with its little attention to LGBT+ issues, particularly marriage equality. However, this situation has evolved in recent years, with current Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin⁵ giving notable attention to the LGBT+ rights agenda. The debate on "representational appropriation" (Ishida, 2015) in *yaoi* literature dates back to the 1990s, when gay activists criticized what they perceived as stereotypes and negative portrayals in women's texts. Additionally, recent scholarly works (Ng; Li, 2020, 2022; Williams, 2015; Ye, 2022; Zhang; Dedman, 2021) have theoretically and conceptually explored the intersection of capital, the entertainment industry, queerness, national identity, and the nation-state in BL media production and circulation, particularly in Asian countries (e.g., China, Taiwan, and Thailand).

Thus, to contribute to these discussions, I draw from ethnographic research⁶ conducted among Brazilian BL series fans on Twitter and Telegram, exploring topics such as politics, media, "pinkwashing," and "homonationalism" (Puar, 2007, 2015 [2011]). Using the example of marriage equality in Thailand, I focus on the political dynamics between the state and LGBT+ rights as a central theme, while introducing the concept of *queer opportunism* to address the often contradictory relationship between state institutions or other entities and the LGBT+ agenda. Prior to that, I discuss the social and political landscape in Thailand regarding marriage equality and examine the concept of "soft power" (Nye, 1990, 2004) within the context of the Thai BL industry.

⁵ On August 14, 2024, Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin was removed from office after the Constitutional Court in Bangkok ruled that he had breached ethics rules by appointing to the Cabinet a lawyer who had served prison time. One week earlier, on August 7, the same court ruled that the Move Forward Party should be dissolved due to its lese majeste campaign.

⁶ Participant observation was conducted in fansub groups on Telegram and Twitter profiles between June 2021 and February 2022. The research data corpus includes comments and news circulated on these platforms, as well as information extracted from news sites and government agencies and authorities, such as the Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), subordinate to the Ministry of Commerce. After reading and analyzing seemingly isolated situations and comments, the data were organized to compose the analytical framework presented in this article.



CONSERVATISM AND MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN THAILAND

As Sanders (2020) points out, marriage equality stands out as a key demand in the realm of LGBT+ rights across Asia. Taiwan became the first country in East Asia and in Asia as a whole to legalize same-sex marriage on May 17, 2019. Nepal followed suit and became the first and thus far only country in South Asia to grant such rights following a Supreme Court order. In Southeast Asia, Thailand's LGBT+ movement waited for over a decade since initial discussions and drafts of bills began in 2011 to secure approval for legislation granting same marriage rights as heterosexual couples (Sanders, 2020). However, the last two months of 2023 witnessed significant developments regarding the marriage equality agenda in Thailand. From November to December, the Cabinet, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, approved a marriage equality bill proposed by the Move Forward Party and introduced its own version in response to campaign commitments from the Prime Minister, which included legalizing marriage equality and addressing other gender-related issues. Consequently, four bills were submitted to the Thai Parliament, respectively by (1) MP Tunyawaj Kamolwongwat from the Move Forward Party, (2) Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin from the Pheu Thai Party, (3) the Democrat Party, and (4) civil society.

Although they differed in certain aspects (e.g., divorce, minimum age for marriage, time for the law to be applied after royal approval, etc.), all bills aimed to grant same-sex couples the right to marry under the same conditions as heterosexual couples. Specifically, the Move Forward Party's bill proposed an amendment to the Civil and Commercial Code to "[...] replace terms like 'men and women' or 'husband and wife' with the words 'individuals' or 'spouse' [...]" thereby ensuring equal rights⁷. While specific details about the other bills were not readily available, they also appeared to advocate for similar changes. According to reports from Thai news outlets and political commentators, there was a preference for the government's version proposed by the Prime Minister. As a result, the bills were to be deliberated by the Parliament, compared, and potentially amended to consolidate them into a unified proposal. Approval of the bill would make Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia (joining Taiwan and Nepal in the Asian continent) to legalize marriage equality, marking a significant advancement in LGBT+ rights.

The four bills received overwhelming support in the first reading by parliamentarians on December 21, 2023, with 360 votes in favor, 10 against, and 1 abstention. Subsequently, they were deliberated by a special commission comprising 39 parliamentarians. On March 27, 2024, the marriage equality bill passed its second and third readings with 400 votes in favor out of 415 MPs in Parliament. In addition to granting full rights under the Civil and Commercial Code, the law will allow for adoption rights, although

⁷ See at: <https://time.com/6338255/thailand-marriage-equality-bill/>.



parliamentarians opted not to replace the terms “father” and “mother” with the gender-neutral term “parent.” On June 18, 2024, the marriage equality bill passed its final reading in the Senate, with 130 senators voting in favor, four against, and 18 abstaining. The bill was submitted to the Cabinet, and the Prime Minister forwarded it for royal endorsement. On September 24, 2024, King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand signed the bill into law, which will take effect on January 22, 2025, allowing same-sex couples to marry.⁸

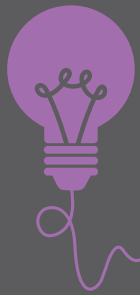
In this context, while marriage equality does not provide a definitive solution to all issues faced by the LGBT+ community, its legal enactment represents a significant advancement, creating opportunities for further progress. Despite recent strides towards passing the marriage equality law, discussions on this agenda had been ongoing and delayed by the Thai government since at least 2019. This delay caused considerable unease among LGBT+ people in Thailand and among national and international BL fans, who critically engaged with and reflected upon this issue. This was the backdrop against which I conducted my research between 2021 and 2022, shaping the considerations presented in this text.

Several international fans, including those from Brazil, engaged in discussions highlighting the practical contradiction of the Thai government: promoting the commercialization and global expansion of BL series while failing to ensure basic civil rights for LGBT+ people in the country with equal fervor. Sharing the same news article from the Thansettakij website in June 2021, Fant (a Thai fan living abroad) called on the DITP to “focus on the legalization of marriage between people of the same sex” (June 24, 2021), acknowledging that this was not under the department’s direct authority. The state’s initiative to boost the BL industry quickly became a focal point in Thai activist discourse and among international fans, who used it to underscore and criticize the government’s neglect of the ongoing debate on marriage equality—a topic long contested by the Thai LGBT+ movement.

This contradiction and the consequent denial of LGBT+ rights became starkly apparent on November 17, 2021, when the Constitutional Court deliberated on the constitutionality of the existing civil marriage law, which effectively barred marriage equality in Thailand. The event galvanized fans and artists, particularly actors from BL series, who rallied under the hashtag #สมรสเท่าเทียม (marriage equality) in clear support of a favorable decision. Among them were Mix* Sahaphap Wongratch⁹, Tay* Tawan Vihokratana, Saint* Suppamong Udomkaewkanjana, Boun* Noppanut Guntachai, Up* Poompat Iamsamang, NuNew* Chawarin Perdpiyawong, Zee* Pruk Panich, transgender actress Jennie Panhan,

⁸ See at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn03we6zpk1o>

⁹ Names followed by an asterisk are the nicknames by which actors, producers, and directors introduce themselves and are popularly known by the public.



and Golf* Tanwarin Sukkhapisit, the non-binary director of *The Eclipse* (2022), who publicly voiced their support¹⁰.

However, not only was the response from the eight judges negative, it also sparked outrage and criticism due to the justification provided months later, on December 2, 2021. Among the arguments supporting the opposing decision were the following statements: (1) LGBT+ individuals cannot reproduce, therefore they are against nature; (2) marriage is intended to create relationships and families, which they fail to do; (3) their marriages could be exploited for social security benefits; (4) this form of marriage can harm government interests; (5) the LGBT+ population, being a new species, requires further study. These arguments from the Constitutional Court were vehemently opposed on Twitter by Thai LGBT+ citizens, international LGBT+ fans, and celebrities, including some of those mentioned above, using the hashtag #ศาลรัฐธรรมนูญเหยียดเพศ (The Constitutional Court discriminates based on sex)¹¹.

Regarding this collective mobilization of fans and artists, Metaveevinij (2023) argues that popular culture has served as a platform for social and political activism among Thai youth in recent years, with digital platforms, especially Twitter, playing a crucial role in these movements. BL series have also become vehicles through which these social and political demands are expressed, as evidenced by productions such as *I Told The Sunset About You* (2020), *I Promised You The Moon* (2021), *Not Me* (2021), and *The Miracle Of Teddy Bear* (2022), which engage with LGBT+ advocacy and the pro-democracy movement (Metaveevinij, 2023; Torres, 2023). Thus, fans and artists actively contribute to critical discourses on politics, democracy, and LGBT+ rights in Thailand (Baudinette, 2023; Metaveevinij, 2023; Saejang, 2021; Torres, 2023).

Despite the political changes from 2021 to 2024, during that period, the disproportionate attention given to BL series compared to the demands of the LGBT+ movement was perceived by some Brazilian fans, particularly those from the LGBT+ community, and Thai LGBT+ activists, as the exploitation of this content for economic gain and to create a favorable government image regarding gender and sexuality issues, which have become increasingly important in this century. Sho and Tara¹² expressed similar

¹⁰ On Twitter, the account Series Y Thailand posted a thread featuring statements from various artists and producers in support of marriage equality. See at: https://twitter.com/theseriesy_th/status/1461238150378897419.

¹¹ See at: <https://www.thaienquirer.com/35548/same-sex-marriage-decision-enflames-internetoutrage/>; <https://www.thaienquirer.com/35559/opinion-the-constitutional-court-says-marriageis-only-for-reproduction-in-outdated-opinion/>.

¹² Two international fans to whom I talked. The first was born in Hong Kong, lived in Australia, graduated in Anthropology and was interested in researching Asian popular culture in the West. The second was born in the United States, lived in South Korea, graduated in Philosophy and was interested in researching ethical relations and film studies.



sentiments about the Thai government's approach: "it seems like the government is happy to make money off of LGBT+ people, but not give them real rights" (June 24, 2021), indicating a lack of equitable treatment for the community it represents. This discrepancy in attention became more pronounced with the launch of Thai Boys Love Content (TBLC) by the Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP) under the Ministry of Commerce.

THAI BOYS LOVE CONTENT AND SOFT POWER

The institutional discourse on the Thai Boys Love Content (TBLC) website justifies the Thai government's interest in offering incentives to companies producing BL series:

Currently, 'Y Series' or 'Boys' Love' content is growing in popularity domestically and internationally. The 'Y' genre was born as the subject matter of novels over a decade ago, and trended among young adults. But it was only when the 'Y' series moved to television that its popularity became more widespread. Much of the original 'Y' content came from overseas, but Thai producers quickly saw the potential and now Thailand has become a hub of 'Y' content, with strong audiences both at home and across Asia. With attractive young stars, fresh plotlines and witty scripts, Thailand has honed the dramatic technique to a fine edge, earning recognition and audience appeal in many territories.

'Y' Series or 'Boys' Love' content has grown from a niche market to develop mass appeal. Originally the fan base comprised mainly young women, but audiences have broadened to include all ages. In an era of intense competition in the digital media industry, 'Y' content has provided a platform for Thailand to excel. Domestic and international revenue from 'Y' content in the last two years has exceeded 1,000 million baht¹³, generated by the films and series themselves, and has created a new generation of stars who now find considerable opportunities as presenters, advertising brand representatives, pop stars, influencers and teen 'idols' attracting large crowds at events and fan meets.

In the past 2 years, Thai 'Y' content producers have created 40 titles and it is expected that there will be 90 titles this year. 'Y' Series' audience base has increased by 328% over the past year, and content released on online platforms, e.g., LINE TV, has attracted 600 million views. The other factor of 'Y' Series content that makes it valuable to

¹³ Approximately US\$ 28,5 million. Quote (1.00000 THB = 0.02838 USD) and conversion made on June 25, 2023, at Wise.



distribution platforms is the incredible social media engagement that it attracts, with viewers trying to guess plot outcomes, cheering their 'dream couple', sharing their views, and generating hashtags and fan groups. With such a wide choice of digital content available to audiences, this social engagement is increasingly valuable, as it can create a powerful brand image which both creates and supports marketing and sponsorship opportunities across Asia and Latin America.

Today, 'Y' or 'Boys' Love' content is popular in a number of key markets, including Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Latin America. As societies across the world become more aware of LGBT+ issues, the market potential for 'Y' series continues to grow. A particularly active and motivated fan-base also spreads word of the series across geographical borders, and creates a market demand in new territories.¹⁴

The TBLC program, coincidentally or not, was released during LGBT+ Pride Month. However, there is no direct or indirect mention of the date that suggests a deliberate intention to link them, although the timing creates a symbolic association. Government support for the expansion of BL series is, however, intimately and explicitly linked to the advancement of LGBT+ rights worldwide and the increased acceptance of this group in society and the market, as seen directly in the promotional text above. Therefore, not only does the program intend to reach a new niche by expanding beyond the audience of heterosexual women but it also aims to use the LGBT+ agenda in its search to conquer new markets and audiences.

Even though BL series fans associate this opportunistic appropriation with the concept of pink money, which signals the consumption potential of LGBT+ people, I questioned whether using it would truly be sufficient to address the interconnection between the marketing relationship of this product, its transnational expansion, and the material conditions of LGBT+ people's existence in Thailand. However, the connection between the greater social acceptance of LGBT+ people (even though they are not the main audience of this media) and the growth of the potential market for BL series leaves no room for doubt about the relevance of economic relations in this phenomenon. Furthermore, TBLC denotes Thailand's movement to consolidate its position as a BL series hub, continuing a project that began in the mid-2000s (Prasannam, 2019, 2023).

While it is evident that capitalist interest underpins the production of BL series, in their origin, pink money was not the target. Initially, there was little to no attention towards a potential LGBT+

¹⁴ This text was transposed literally from the Boys Love Content website. Unfortunately, it is no longer available.



audience within the BL industry phenomenon. Firstly, because this material was predominantly aimed at a heterosexual female audience (Jirattikorn, 2023; Prasannam, 2019, 2023). Secondly, because its popularity among LGBT+ people internationally has only emerged over the last four to five years. This is not to suggest that this audience was absent as consumers before the genre's expansion, but rather that it was a gradual process. Its significant growth was apparent in 2021 and 2022, coinciding with the start of my master's research, with 2020 being considered pivotal due to social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic¹⁵ (Prasannam; Chan, 2023; Torres, 2023).

At first, I did not realize how important the TBLC was. What I initially perceived as merely an online platform for dialogue under the DITP's oversight turned out to be a major government initiative. I saw it as no more than a website with an available form for expressing interest—a seemingly simple tool unlikely to yield significant financial returns. I overlooked the two days (June 29 and 30, 2021) allocated for meetings between potential interested parties from the international market and 10 selected entertainment companies: 9Naa Production, Copy A Bangkok, Filmania, GMMTV, Hollywood Thailand, M Flow Entertainment, Motive Village, Star Hunter Entertainment, Studio Wabi Sabi, and TV Thunder. However, the program's success was surprising. It generated a return exceeding ฿360 million (approximately US\$10.5 million)¹⁶, with Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam playing a leading role in the negotiations, thereby reinforcing the economic potential of BL and media series in Thailand¹⁷.

Faced with the expansion and popularization of these productions, the Thai audiovisual industry, alongside Western and Asian fandoms, has adopted the term "soft power" to articulate the explicit cultural dissemination potential of BL series. As a Brazilian fan commented about the TBLC on Twitter: "Oh, Gosh, soft power. Korea has K-pop, Japan has anime, and Thailand comes in with BL." (June 24, 2021, my translation). However, some caution is warranted in the daily use of popular concepts that have specific theoretical boundaries. Usually, they are misappropriated when indiscriminately applied to attribute meaning to different phenomena.

I do not intend to exhaustively discuss Nye's concept (1990, 2004), but rather to present the meaning attributed by the author to this theoretical instrument. The concept of soft power was developed in response to the shifts in the United States' strategies and power resources during and after the Cold War.

¹⁵ Bunyavejchewin et al (2024, p. 17) mention that "the government in Bangkok has sought to leverage the growth of the Thai BL media and entertainment industry as a means of revitalising the country's economy, which has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic."

¹⁶ Quote (1.00000 THB = 0.02921 USD) and conversion made on Wise, on July 30, 2023.

¹⁷ See at: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/general/2305042/asia-falls-in-love-with-thai-boys-love>.



It stands in contrast to the concept of hard power, which involves the use of coercive strategies through military, economic, and technological means (considered tangible resources) to impose one's will over others. In contrast, soft power involves strategies of co-optation, persuasion, and consensus-building through ideological, cultural, and institutional means—considered intangible resources (Gueraldi, 2006; Nye, 1990, 2004).

However, it is not strictly feasible to assert that BL series constitute the mobilization of co-optation power through attraction and the framing of a political agenda via cultural resources by the state. This assertion holds even with the gradual inclusion of agendas from the Thai LGBT+ movement, such as marriage equality. Soft power entails a conceptual relationship with practices, strategies, and power resources at transnational levels within the context of political relations between countries in the international system. As a political strategy, also considered part of a foreign policy, it aims to enhance a state's political influence (and claims to leadership) over others within the framework of global governance, as a means to mitigate conflicts and foster the most harmonious interactions possible (Gueraldi, 2006).

While the export of audiovisual content and the attraction of tourism are among the criteria that can potentially provide soft power (Nye, 1990, 2004)—areas in which Thailand has excelled in Asia, particularly with the rise of BL series, which themselves are objects that could be used in a co-optation power strategy—considering the production and dissemination of BL series in isolation from the broader context of the Thai cultural industry is insufficient to assert that the Thai government is developing a soft power strategy. As noted by Nye and Kim (2019, p. 42), “the soft power of any country primarily rests on three resources: (1) the attractiveness of its culture, (2) its political values, when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and (3) its foreign policies, when they are perceived as legitimate and having moral authority.”

Based on the author's fundamental definition, merely encouraging the transnational production and commercialization of BL series does not inherently achieve the aforementioned objectives. Soft power utilizes foreign policy, political values, and culture to inspire others to adopt a nation's aspirations and principles as a tactic to achieve its political and economic goals—the core premise of the concept (Gueraldi, 2006). Given the varying interpretations of soft power in Nye's work (1990, 2004), I argue that labeling a phenomenon as soft power depends not solely on its source (culture, values, or foreign policy), but primarily on the extent of its impact on global politics. The effective utilization of two or more sources is crucial for successful co-optation power through attraction, agenda-setting, and increased political influence in negotiations with other nations—objectives and outcomes that define soft power (Gueraldi, 2006; Nye, 1990, 2004).



In view of this, although BL series cannot be classified as an example of soft power in themselves (since soft power refers to a strategic articulation of policies), they can eventually be used as an element of this power strategy if combined with other actions¹⁸. This is because “[...] global circulations of media cultural products promote the construction of soft power, an attractive image of the nation as a whole” (Ney; Kim, 2019, p. 43).

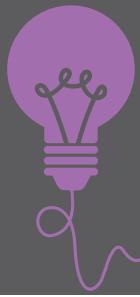
FROM PINKWASHING TO QUEER OPPORTUNISM

The Thai government’s promotion of BL series indicated a form of cultural propaganda and a symbolic, though not pragmatic, dialogue with “the gay and lesbian human rights industry” (Puar, 2015, p. 328), bolstering the idea of a “Thai gay paradise” (Jackson, 1999). As asserted by Saejang (2023),

[...] since the mid-2010s, the burgeoning of BL in Thailand has been tolerated, first, by the military government and, currently, by the military-dominated, civilian government due to BL’s commercial success and its affordance as a veneer of progressive gender politics. (Saejang, 2023, p. 9).

This phenomenon can be partially understood through the concept of pinkwashing (a central strategy in the production of homonationalism) contextualized and bounded by the “historical situation” (Oliveira, 2015) of Thailand. Pinkwashing refers to “[...] the practice of covering over or distracting from a nation’s policies of discrimination of some populations through a noisy touting of its gay rights for a limited few.” (Puar, 2015, p. 326). The concept of homonationalism arises from Puar’s (2007, 2015) analysis of American policies post-9/11, describing “a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves [...]” (Puar, 2007, p. 39). Distinguishing itself from the backward and homophobic Other and serving imperialist, racist (Islamophobic), and capitalist aims, nation-states (specifically the

¹⁸ Researchers have examined the transnational spread of Thai media across East and Southeast Asia through the concept of the “Thai Wind” (Baudinette, 2023). According to communication scholar Dr. Anderson Lopes da Silva, a professor and researcher at the Center for Latin American Studies at Chulalongkorn University, this term aptly describes the phenomenon, “as it occurs more subtly than the Korean Wave, yet no less perceptibly, like a breeze whose freshness is felt even as it passes gently.” (Oral communication, July 21, 2024). In this sense, Baudinette (2023, p. 138) argues that “Thai BL has [...] been central to the success of this newly emergent Thai Wind.” To understand another dimension of the Thai Wind’s circulation in the Global South, Dr. Lopes da Silva is currently researching the relationship between cultural diplomacy and BL series in Latin America, specifically analyzing the soft power actions and strategies of Thai embassies in Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Brazil.



United States) co-opt the LGBT+ agenda to portray themselves as a “sexual democracy” (Fassin, 2019; Puar, 2007). The concept of pinkwashing refers to the “[...] Israeli state’s use of its stellar LGBT rights record to deflect attention from, and in some instances to justify or legitimate, its occupation of Palestine.” (Puar, 2015, p. 327). As much as the United States, Israel also promotes homonationalism.

Based on Puar’s descriptions (2007, 2015), these concepts do not precisely fit the phenomenon of BL series in Thailand, since the country lacked a “stellar LGBT rights record,” and the state did not demonstrate significant concern in promoting or approving laws for this group to produce a modern image of itself. However, this does not imply that Thailand did not seek to portray itself as modern or a “gay paradise,” it simply did so in ways that diverged from the strict definitions of homonationalism and pinkwashing. The authoritarian and dictatorial regime that Thailand has experienced influenced the legal decisions in the country, with these forces persisting despite changes in political regimes. Thus, BL series could be used to paint the country in a positive light, masking its political regime and other violations for the international audience. Simultaneously, these series have also critiqued the political landscape regarding LGBT+ rights in legislation, evident in mobilizations following the verdict on marriage equality. Therefore, caution is necessary when discussing pinkwashing, as the masking tools here could be BL series rather than legal measures for the LGBT+ community. Moreover, the masked object would be not discrimination against other populations but the antidemocratic regime within the country.

Regarding the Thai context, according to Zhang and Dedman (2021, p. 2), gender and sexuality have been central elements “[...] to the disciplinary construction of national-cultural identity since Siam/Thailand’s modern transition in the nineteenth and twentieth century [...],” and their regulation has historically been paradoxical in the country. There has been a shift from the exotification of women and sexual minorities, who are objects of orientalist fantasies in both Western and Asian countries, to state attempts to cleanse their sexualized image through the suppression of non-heterosexual and non-monogamous sexual cultures, and non-cisgender identities (Zhang; Dedman, 2021; Zhang, 2021). This has led to the “[...] government’s association of homosexuality with lewdness and sex work [...],” and a national identity based on monogamy, romantic love, and heterosexuality was defined and reinforced (Zhang; Dedman, 2021, p. 2). Although homosexuality is not criminalized, and Buddhism has no moral prescription against it (Jackson, 1999; Zhang, 2021), homophobia persists in popular, institutional, and state discourses (Jackson, 1999). This homophobia is shamelessly expressed, as seen in the Constitutional Court’s response to the action on the unconstitutionality of the civil marriage law preventing the union of same-sex couples.



When questioning the assertions about the exploitative uses of the LGBT+ public by the Thai government and its interest in promoting the country as gay friendly, Tauan¹⁹ argued that “the Constitutional Court has nothing to do with TV studios.” (December 3, 2021, my translation). Although there was not a direct association between the Constitutional Court and TV studios, the state and the media are directly or indirectly connected, and this connection cannot be ignored, especially considering Thai history, sociocultural, and political contexts. (Jackson, 2002; Musikawong; Khumsupa, 2022; Ünaldi, 2011). Thus, the Constitutional Court’s decision and the Ministry of Commerce’s encouragement to disseminate BL series transnationally underscore the state as a contradictory entity. Synthesizing the concept of pinkwashing and pink monkey, I propose another one to analyze this phenomenon in the context of Thailand’s political and economic strategies related to BL series: *queer opportunism*.

With the coup d’état, carried out by the Army in 2014, the military junta that seized power aimed to strengthen its authority and moral standing. To achieve that, it “[...] resurrected heavy-handed measures targeting sex workers and non-conforming gender groups.” (Zhang; Dedman, 2021, p. 2). Considering the dictatorial context, Zhang and Dedman (2019) argued that the state could instrumentalize BL series through pinkwashing, diverting attention from its authoritarian government. However, Thai students have increasingly articulated protests for democracy alongside LGBT+ demands for rights (especially equal marriage) since 2020. Motivated by the youth’s disillusionment with “royalist populism” and discontent with conservative views on sexuality and politics, these clashes mark a “war of stances,” translated into antagonisms between “[...] heteropatriarchy vs diverse sexualities and monarchized military rule vs political pluralism [...]” (Zhang; Dedman, 2021, p. 4). As Thai youth grows disillusioned with populism and government pinkwashing, BL series can be viewed “[...] as a multivalent “queer” heuristic to illuminate how social formations are reproduced and inverted and acts as a cultural harbinger of potential change.” (Zhang; Dedman, 2021, p. 4).

The conceptualization of pinkwashing presupposes a direct practice of moral distinction between nations regarding gender and sexuality issues. The United States and Israel employ pinkwashing to create a “[...] discursive distinction between gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly destinations [...]” (Puar, 2015, p. 327), targeting Muslim populations in the former case and Palestinians in the latter, a distinction not mirrored in Thailand’s management of diversity through BL series promotion. However, like Israel, the Thai government and tourism agencies also seek to promote themselves and bolster the country’s image as a “gay paradise.” This image is produced in gay men’s imagination in Indonesia, Singapore, and

¹⁹ One of my research interlocutors. Brazilian who lives and works as a teacher in Thailand. Male, 38 years old, cisgender, gay, white, BL series fan.



other Asian countries through tourism and BL series (Baudinette, 2020; Zhang, 2021). Despite this title not holding true in practice, this policy has effects among Asian fans, such as some Filipinos perceiving Thailand as more accepting of homosexuality than their own country (Baudinette, 2020). Conversely, the Brazilian fandom questioned this notion of a “gay paradise” marketed by the Thai government, highlighting the state’s stagnation regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage. They have strongly criticized the instrumentalization of the LGBT+ image for the country’s economic development.

The concepts of pinkwashing and homonationalism, as elaborated by Puar (2015), have limited applicability for the reasons outlined above. Nevertheless, they contribute to understanding the various ways in which the pursuit of alignment (whether practical or symbolic) with Western neoliberal values can manifest for political and economic ends, as observed in the case examined in this article, through the lens of opportunism and contradiction. With that being said, Thailand’s strategy of cultural promotion and support for BL series illustrates how pinkwashing relates to the state’s aspiration towards “[...] forms of Western or European modernity [...]” (Puar, 2015, p. 327). However, this does not require adherence to the LGBT+ human rights industry, nor its promotion in the legislative arenas. While the concept of homonationalism effectively elucidates dynamics in American and Israeli contexts, understanding the specific power relations among gender, sexuality, national identity, and the state requires critical consideration when applying it to Thailand.

Another conceptual term to describe the discussed phenomenon could be “brand homonationalism” (Williams, 2015), although it lacks conceptual coherence. While not explicitly defined by Williams (2015), it would involve promoting social and commercial spaces for queer and feminist stylization to create a national status of modernity. Applied to the transnationalization of *yaoi* content, it suggests promoting a national homotopy discourse through various products (e.g., manga, series, and films), through which countries such as Taiwan are perceived as more sexually modern, “queer-friendly,” and “anti-sexist” than others (Williams, 2015). Williams acknowledges the heuristic potential of homonationalism by asserting that “[...] nation-states do not need to necessarily adopt the logic of rights to prove their modern status, so much as provide social and commercial space for queer and feminist stylisation [...]” (Williams, 2015, p. 1). The term “homonationalism” presupposes the integration of LGBT+ rights in the production, expansion, and legitimization of the nation-state in both Puar’s (2015) and Williams’ (2015) theories. This is evident when Williams refers to Taiwan as an example of “regional brand homonationalism,” noting that queer aesthetics are promoted in Taiwanese media alongside legal advancements for the LGBT+ community, including marriage equality. Williams (2015) observes that this legal gain was motivated by a backdrop of political and moral differentiation from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Thus, there is a congruence with the concept of homonationalism when it comes to the aspect of moral and political



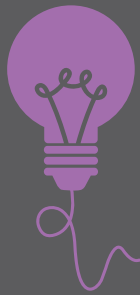
distinction (Puar, 2007, 2015). While there is a similarity with homonationalism concerning the aspect of moral and political differentiation (Puar, 2007, 2015), brand homonationalism specifically emphasizes the relationship between the state and the entertainment industry in managing queerness for the purposes of nation branding.

Ye (2022) similarly observes the applicability of the concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism to the discussion on the Chinese state's appropriation of *dangai* series, recognizing that:

Since homonormativity and homonationalism hinge heavily on institutional recognition and state sanction of LGBT rights in addition to public representation of queer identity, images and lifestyle, they might come across as less applicable to China where LGBT individuals remain largely marginalized within the framework of state and China's global politics, and queer cultural production strictly surveilled by the government and the society. (Ye, 2022, p. 3–4).

Alternatively, Ye (2022) engages with brand homonationalism, emphasizing its "Chinese characteristics," resulting in the notion of "brand homonationalism with Chinese characteristics." According to Ye, brand homonationalism describes the dynamic in which "[...] countries in East Asia where rights for sexual minorities remain largely unacknowledged could still export their commercialized queer and feminist products and cultures." (Ye, 2022, p. 11). However, my contrasting reading of Puar (2007, 20015), Williams (2015), and Ye (2022), lead me to elaborate and suggest another concept to name and describe a relationship akin to that identified by these authors.

The relationship between tolerance and acceptance varies across countries, so one must consider this in the analysis as it impacts the legal standing of the LGBT+ social group. Despite contextual and political differences compared to China and Taiwan, in Thailand, queer aesthetics have been heavily promoted over the past five years without the achievement of legal rights for the LGBT+ community. While Williams (2025) does not draw this distinction, the author introduces the notion that this legal framework should be used as criteria to categorize different phenomena in terms of brand homonationalism, as seen in Taiwan, or *queer opportunism*, as seen in Thailand. In the latter case, the focus is not on queer nationalism but on an opportunistic relationship. In this instance, two epistemological questions arise regarding my conceptual choice over the other options. The first concerns the empirical context used by Puar and Williams in developing their concepts, which differs from the Thai context. The second concerns the morphological aspect, as the terms (homonationalism and brand homonationalism) directly reference Puar's established concept and its specifics (Puar, 2007).



Thus, *queer opportunism* describes the production and implementation of political and economic strategies that, as observed in the Thai government's case, capitalize on the symbolic value of Western neoliberal discourse and the visibility and expansion of LGBT+ rights, without committing to guaranteeing these rights to LGBT+ people within their own territory. Simply put, like pinkwashing and brand homonationalism, *queer opportunism* involves the commercial and opportunistic use of the LGBT+ political agenda, products associated with them, and the individuals themselves to construct an image of democracy and sexual modernity. This construction also acts as a mechanism to distract from, manipulate, and conceal other social and political relations. Despite sharing some similarities with pinkwashing and brand homonationalism, *queer opportunism* also diverges by providing a different context of analysis and focusing more precisely on a specific kind of appropriation and utilitarianism that characterize this phenomenon, highlighting the distinct social actors (both state and non-state, legal and civil) contributing to its functioning.

In this sense, another empirical example of *queer opportunism* is the stance of the Embaixada Real da Tailândia no Brasil (Royal Thai Embassy in Brazil) in its Facebook post discussing the impact of *Not Me* (2021) in Latin American countries²⁰ on February 21, 2022. Accompanied by an image showing the countries ranked on Twitter's Trending Topics (with Brazil at the top), the post announced:

Considered a precursor of the so-called BL series in Thailand and Southeast Asia as a whole, the *Not Me* series begins to conquer South America (Brazil, Peru, Argentina) and other countries in the world that are more open to LGBTQ+ culture, such as Singapore, Mexico, Indonesia, and Portugal. Episode 10 of this series boosted the number of fans and viewers all over the world, making Brazil one of the 4 countries with the most posts on Twitter, making the series reach number 1 on Twitter Trends. There have been more than 350k tweets with the tags #NotMeSeriesEP10 and #NotMeSeries in around 16 countries. Brazil is at the top of this list of spectators on a global level. The series can be watched every Sunday morning, at 10:30 a.m., on the GMM25 and Ais Play channels. (February 21, 2022, my translation).

²⁰ See at: <https://thestandard.co/thai-ent-industry-latin-america/>.



Some fans celebrated the news shared by a Thai government channel²¹, interpreting it as renewed acknowledgement of the Brazilian audience and were hopeful for the possibility that their visibility as consumers would lead to direct distribution. They anticipated not only subtitles but also distribution on streaming platforms such as Netflix. This increased visibility would also strengthen the connection between the fandom and actors who were increasingly aware of Brazilian consumers, expressing gratitude through videos posted on Brazilian update pages dedicated to BL series. Additional proof of the Brazilian BL fandom's rising prominence included fan meetings with several of these actors held in Brazil in 2023 and 2024.

However, in the Facebook comments, alongside those who reacted joyfully to the publication, there were others who called for marriage equality in Thailand. Fans often seized opportunities like this to advocate for demands from the Thai government institutions. In response to these demands, the embassy did not directly address the fans but posted the following text in the comments:

Dear all, thank you for your support and attention given to the Not Me series. Your feedback is extremely important for the international success of this Thai series. The actors are flattered by the repercussion of the episodes in Brazil and try to advocate in the best way possible for the protection and safety of LGBTQIA+ people, not only in Thailand, but in all countries where the series is shown. (Feb. 23, 2022, my translation).

Through this excerpt, the embassy not only avoided acknowledging any commitment by the Thai government to promote LGBT+ rights but also shifted responsibility to the actors to advocate for the protection and safety of "LGBTQIA+ people" both in their own country and elsewhere, thereby redirecting the protection and security of social groups to the realm of interpersonal relationships and the entertainment industry. Notably, the embassy did not discuss guaranteeing these conditions through legal rights, nor did it even mention the word "rights," effectively absolving the state of its responsibilities. By providing an evasive and non-committal response, the embassy sidestepped directly addressing the Thai

²¹ The Embaixada Real da Tailândia no Brasil was not the only entity to mention or comment on the series at some point. These series were the main attraction at the Thai Drama Festival, organized by the Royal Thai Embassy in Tokyo in April 2021, which featured the presence of Inn Sarin Ronnakiat, Job Thuchapon Koowongbundit, Tee Thanapon Jarujitranon, and First Parada Chutchavalchotikul, the cast of *The Miracle of Teddy Bear* (2022). As noted by Bunyavejchewin et al. (2024, p. 16–17), "[...] Thai BL dramas and fan-meeting activities have been incorporated into Thai Festivals organised by Thai embassies and consulates abroad, particularly in East Asian countries." Embassies thus serve as cultural promoters of their countries and do not just fulfill political and bureaucratic functions. However, in Brazil, the embassy has not yet pursued this path. Thailand is thus following in the footsteps of the Korean and Japanese embassies, which support events associated with their respective popular cultures in various countries.



government's negligence regarding LGBT+ rights. Instead, it invested in managing cultural propaganda and leveraging the representational appeal of BL series through Thai actors to promote an image of Thailand as gay-friendly, thereby obscuring existing political contradictions. Regardless of whether the country ensures legal support for the LGBT+ community, the embassy conveyed an image of openness and commitment to social acceptance at both national and international levels, opportunistically aligning with Western trends in sexual democracies (Fassin, 2019).

Just as Puar (2015) draws attention to homonationalism as a domain of power within which pinkwashing operates, *queer opportunism* should also be considered as a field of power and a process involving multiple social agents in various ways and intensities. As an example, in the Thai case, these agents might include: (1) the state, through the Ministry of Commerce and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)²² (Baudinette, 2023); (2) local and foreign tourism agencies, such as those from Japan, organizing virtual tours of filming locations; (3) Thai language teachers in Japan, who promote courses featuring slang used in the series²³; and (4) fans who consume BL series and uncritically propagate representations of a "Thai gay paradise," regardless of their stance on LGBT+ rights legitimacy.

CONCLUSION: FROM QUEER OPPORTUNISM TO BRAND HOMONATIONALISM

The case of Thailand, a country that has become a reference in the production of male homoerotic audiovisual content, but did not approve the marriage equality bill until 2024, presents the challenge of conducting a detailed and localized analysis. This underscores the concept of the state as an ideological product, shaped by power relations structured not only through legal codes but primarily through agents and agencies, including civil society. Institutional and subjective dimensions interact in its formation and are constantly subject to internal tensions and influences from the transnational landscape (Castilho, Souza Lima; Teixeira, 2014).

²² In October 2023, the TAT launched a six-episode mini-series titled *Y Journey: Stay Like a Local* (2023). This mini-series features six popular BL couples, including MaxNat, MosBank, and NetJames, each embarking on journeys through six compelling stories set in tourist attractions in Thailand's eastern region. Through these couples, the TAT expressed on its Twitter account, "we hope they can inspire you to explore more of Thailand." (see at: <https://twitter.com/AmazingThailand/status/1735905348601725007>). See Baudinette (2023) for an analysis on TAT'S use of Thai BL celebrities as soft power resources through different marketing strategies.

²³ See at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/30/thailands-gay-romance-tv-dramas-help-revive-flagging-tourism-industry>.



Despite the differences and contradictions in material terms regarding this capitalist instrumentalization (which in the West involves the promotion of LGBT+ rights, while in Thailand it is limited to an opportunistic approach), one cannot ignore the fact that, before the practice of appropriating male or LGBT+ homoerotic representations becomes a national problem, it is tied to the agency of capitalism over bodies and identities—a phenomenon that can occur in any capitalist context.

The concept of *queer opportunism* names and questions the Thai government's appropriation of LGBT+ issues at a specific historical moment. However, this appropriation, which also occurs with the agendas of other social movements, such as feminism, anti-racism, and ethnic populations, cannot be reduced to a practice exclusive to Thailand. It must be understood within the framework of transformations of the modern ethnosexual subject (Bourcier, 2015), which manifest and are interpreted in diverse ways across specific cultures, to avoid producing orientalist judgments.

Furthermore, while pink money, pinkwashing, and *queer opportunism* cannot be disregarded as components that have been implicit in the Thai government's relationship with the BL industry, their potential symbolic effects cannot be underestimated either. They are considered a turning point in Thai media regarding LGBT+ representation (Baudinette, 2023).

Celebrating male same-sex relationships as charming and adorable, it departs from the representational paradigm of Thai sexual minorities defined by suffering, heartbreak, and existentially diminished personhood. (Zhang; Dedman, 2021, p. 1).

Despite the influence of the context on their narratives (they should not be taken outside the sociocultural power relations of their countries), these productions not only promote positive depictions of homosexuality and homoeroticism but also explore alternative expressions of sexuality that transcend rigid identity politics, such as the traditional 'coming out' narrative. This blurs binary distinctions between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Moreover, these productions can serve as a positive advocacy tool for LGBT+ rights and a means through which the government can promote Thai culture.

In this case, considering the changes in the Thai political landscape, unlike the previously mentioned cases where there is an association between BL series and LGBT+ people without a commitment to the LGBT+ rights in the country, the series have been incorporated directly into state discourse as elements to raise awareness of marriage equality. As an example, on March 13, 2024, the Prime Minister of Thailand



posted a photo on his Twitter (@thavisin) and Instagram (@sretthathavisin) accounts alongside a well-known BL series actor²⁴, with the following caption:

Competing in handsomeness with Apo Natthawin, the owner of a heart-melting smile, who helps the Ministry of Commerce to drive the economy into a new dimension with Y movies and series. Thai society is wide open, and the government will push for equality and gender equality through laws, especially the Marriage Equality Act. So that people of all genders have equal legal rights.²⁵ (March 13, 2024, my translation).

In addition, these series are still acknowledged as drivers of the Thai economy and culture, with the Prime Minister persisting in his efforts to maximize their potential and foster conditions for cooperation between the BL industry and the government. This collaboration aims to emphasize the country's cultural traditions through two new period series: *Shine* (a BL series) and *The Loyal Pin* (a GL series), which will be produced by Be On Cloud and Idol Factory²⁶, respectively. Following his posts with Apo, on March 20, 2024, he published photos (on Twitter) and a video (on Instagram) of a meeting with the Minister of Commerce Phumtham Wechayachai and other actors and actresses, including Saint* Suppapong Udomkaewkanjana (CEO of artist management and production company Idol Factory), Freen* Sarocha Chankimha and Beck* Rebecca Patricia Armstrong (leads of *GAP* (2022), first Thai GL series, both from Idol Factory), as well as the leads of *KinnPorsche* (2022) and *ManSuang* (2023), Mile* Phakphum Romsaithong and Apo* Nattawin Wattanagitiphat (both from Be On Cloud). In the caption, he wrote:

It's Thai time! This is Thailand time. There is no better time to invest in Thailand, sell in Thailand, or travel to Thailand than now. It is estimated that in the year 67 [2024], the export value of films, series, and related industries will rise to one billion baht. Thanks to the Ministry of Commerce, who has a visionary policy to adjust the government to the modern working style. And thanks to the actors Mile-Phakphum, Apo-Nattawin, Freen-Sarocha and Becky-Rebecca, who help showcase Thailand's products, attractions, food, as well as other potentialities to be known among the new generation both through series and social media with a fan base of over 3 million people from 100 countries around the world. #YSeries #SretthaThavisin #YuriSeries²⁷ (March 20, 2024, my translation).

²⁴ See at: <https://siamrath.co.th/n/521559>.

²⁵ See at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/c4hlolisnq5/?igsh=mwexzxmwcml6dzzomq==>.

²⁶ See at: <https://siamrath.co.th/n/522892>.

²⁷ See at: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/c4u7x4dyioo/?igsh=bjnubg5wm2p3dtk4>.



As is evident from the Prime Minister's political actions²⁸ and social media posts, the government publicly commits to LGBT+ rights and BL series, associating the two, particularly due to their perception and investment as soft power resources. This implies that for the government to modernize its marketing and promotion strategies for products, brands, and services using a new platform (specifically BL series and films) to reach a global audience²⁹, it must first conform to Western advancements in sexual rights that directly impact a segment of the BL consumer base (LGBT+ people), thereby also differentiating itself (Thai state and society) morally from other Asian countries.

The impact of these actions in terms of moral differentiation can be clearly seen in comments from Brazilian fans on March 27, 2024, following the approval of the marriage equality law in the second and third readings of Parliament. Among messages referring to Korea as "failed" and "USA-imitating capitalist," and to China as "cursed" and "a lost cause," were statements such as "the beatdown on Korea and China can't stop," "Thailand being the greatest in Asia for this act, beating Korea that seems to live in the Middle Ages," and "Taiwan and Thailand beating Korea, Japan, and China."

Finally, it is undeniable that BL series have drawn global fan attention to LGBT+ rights in Thailand, despite various criticisms and distinctions between BL media and LGBT+ issues. Alongside pressure from social movements, the Thai government is entering a new political and economic phase, making these votes and approvals a milestone in the transition from military junta to democratic government and in the soft power policy through economic investment in BL series. While this may seem self-evident, without diminishing the significance of Thai LGBT+ activism, I wish to underscore that the economic requirements met through BL series represent the enabling factor for the progress of LGBT+ rights in Thailand. These actions highlight a new moment in the history of Thai BL series, which represents "the modern working style" and whose developments should be observed and analyzed in the times ahead. From now on, perhaps one might think in terms of brand homonationalism.

REFERENCES

BAUDINETTE, T. **Boys love media in Thailand**: celebrity, fans, and transnational asian queer popular culture. London: Bloomsbury, 2023.

²⁸ The Prime Minister also joined the launch of the Bangkok Pride Festival 2024 and the Bangkok Pride Parade. See at: <https://twitter.com/ThaiEnquirer/status/1796558887593861528> and <https://twitter.com/ThaiEnquirer/status/1796832938971299954>.

²⁹ See at: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/general/2734265/tv-dramas-promote-thai-products>.



BAUDINETTE, T. Creative misreadings of “Thai BL” by a filipino fan community: dislocating knowledge production in transnational queer fandoms through aspirational consumption. **Mechademia**, v. 13, n. 1, p. 101–118, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/mech.13.1.0101>. Access: Jun. 19, 2020.

BUNYAVEJCHEWIN, P. et al. Socio-demographics, lifestyles, and consumption frequency of Thai ‘boys love’ series content: initial evidence from Thailand. **Cogent Social Sciences**, v. 10, n. 1, p. 1–20, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2024.2307697>. Access: Mar. 21, 2024.

BUNYAVEJCHEWIN, P. The queer if limited effects of boys love manga fandom in Thailand. In: WELKE, J. **Queer transfigurations: boys love media in Asia**. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2022. p. 181–193.

FASSIN, E. A democracia sexual no coração da democracia: a centralidade do gênero para a leitura do presente – entrevista com Éric Fassin. [Interview given to] Larissa Pelúcio e Diego Paz. **Interface**, v. 23, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.scielo.br/j/icse/a/dp6WfstkkjcBp9fKvqtjZQy/?lang=pt#>. Access: Jun. 29, 2021.

GUERALDI, R. **A aplicação do conceito de poder brando (soft power) na política externa brasileira**. Advisor: Ana Lúcia Guedes. 2006. 206 p. Master Thesis (Master in Public Administration)—Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, 2006. Retrieved from: <https://repositorio.fgv.br/items/f8d9eadc-e4fc-4d3c-9bc4-4908703c8f2e>. Access: Dec. 19, 2023.

ISHIDA, H. Representational appropriation and the autonomy of desire in yaoi/BL. In: MCLELLAND, M. et al. (ed.). **Boys love manga and beyond: history, culture, and community in Japan**. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015. p. 210–232.

JACKSON, P. A. Tolerant but unaccepting: the myth of a Thai “gay paradise.” In: JACKSON, P. A.; COOK, N. M. **Genders and sexualities in modern Thailand**. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999. p. 226–242.

JACKSON, P. A. Offending images: gender and sexual minorities, and state control of the media in Thailand. In: HENG, R. H.-K. (ed.). **Media fortunes, changing times: ASEAN states in transition**. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002. p. 201–230.

JIRATTIKORN, A. Heterosexual reading vs. queering Thai boys’ love dramas among Chinese and Filipino audiences. **Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific**, n. 49, p. 1–16, 2023. Retrieved from: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue49/amporn.html>. Access: Dec. 17, 2023.



METAVEEVINIJ, V. Boys love (yaoi) fandom and political activism in Thailand. **Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific**, n. 49, p. 1–11, 2023. Retrieved from: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue49/veluree2.html>. Access: Dec. 17, 2023.

MUSIKAWONG, S. KHUMSUPA, M. Film is dangerous: ten years of censorship in Thailand's cinema, 2010–2020. **South East Asia Research**, v. 30, n. 3, p. 377–394, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0967828X.2022.2129429>. Access: Dec. 23, 2023.

NG, E.; LI, X. A queer “socialist brotherhood”: the Guardian web series, boys’ love fandom, and the Chinese state. **Feminist Media Studies**, v. 20, n. 4, p. 479–495, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680777.2020.1754627>. Access: Dec. 27, 2023.

NG, E.; LI, X. Brand nohomonationalism: guofeng (‘national style’) framings of boys’ love television series in China. **Asian Studies Review**, v. 47, n. 3, p. 1–18, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357823.2022.2142933>. Access: May 27, 2023.

NYE, J. **Bound to lead**: the changing nature of American power. New York: Basic Books, 1990.

NYE, J.; KIM, Y. Soft power and the Korean Wave. In: KIM, Y. (ed.). **South Korean popular culture and North Korea**. London: Routledge, 2019. p. 41–53.

NYE, J. **Soft power**: the means to success in world politics. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.

OLIVEIRA, J. **Regime tutelar e faccionalismo**. Política e religião em uma reserva ticuna. Manaus: UEA Edições, 2015.

PRASANNAM, N.; CHAN, Y.-K. Thai boys love (BL)/Y(aoi) in literary and media industries: political and transnational practices. **Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific**, n. 49, p. 1–6, 2023. Retrieved from: http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue49/prasannam_chan.html. Access: Dec. 17, 2023.

PRASANNAM, N. The yaoi phenomenon in Thailand and fan/industry interaction. **Plaridel**, v. 16, n. 2, p. 63–89, 2019. Retrieved from: <http://www.plarideljournal.org/article/the-yaoi-phenomenon-in-thailand-and-fanindustry-interaction/>. Access: Jul. 1, 2021.

PUAR, J. Homonationalism as assemblage: viral travels, affective sexualities. **Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 319–337, 2015 [2011]. Retrieved from: <https://rlec.pt/index.php/rlec/article/view/1788>. Access: Aug. 2, 2022.

PUAR, J. **Terrorist assemblages**: homonationalism in queer times. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.



SAEJANG, J. Behind online Y counterculture: the role fansubbing groups and social actors play in driving online Y counterculture. **Journal of Language and Culture**, v. 40, n. 1, p. 148–166, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JLC/article/view/254205>. Access: Dec. 17, 2023.

SAEJANG, J. Chinese historical BL by Thai writers: the Thai BL polysystem in the age of media convergence. **Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific**, n. 49, p. 1–15, 2023. Retrieved from: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue49/jooyin.html>. Access: Dec. 17, 2023.

SANDERS, D. LGBT equality and Thai marriage. In: GOH, J. et al. (ed.). **Gender and sexuality justice in Asia**. Singapura: Springer, 2020. p. 203–226.

TORRES, I. **Atravessamentos afetivos, morais e políticos na experiência de consumo de séries boys love (BL) no Brasil**. Advisor: Eliane Tânia Martins de Freitas. 2023. 255 p. Master thesis (Master in Social Anthropology)—Centro de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://repositorio.ufrn.br/handle/123456789/51379>. Access: Apr. 2, 2023.

ÜNALDI, S. Back in the spotlight: the cinematic regime of representation of kathoey and gay men in Thailand. In: JACSON, P. A. (ed.). **Queer Bangkok: 21st century markets, media, and rights**. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2011. p. 59–78.

WILLIAMS, A. Rethinking yaoi on the regional and global scale. **Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific**, n. 37, p. 1–13, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue37/williams.htm>. Access: Nov. 2, 2023.

YE, S. Word of Honor and brand homonationalism with “Chinese characteristics”: the dangai industry, queer masculinity and the “opacity” of the state. **Feminist Media Studies**, v. 23, n. 4, p. 1–17, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680777.2022.2037007>. Access: Dec. 27, 2023.

ZHANG, C.; DEDMAN, A. Hyperreal homoerotic love in a monarchized military conjuncture: a situated view of the Thai boys love industry. **Feminist Media Studies**, v. 21, n. 6, p. 1–5, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14680777.2021.1959370?journalCode=rfms20>. Access: Apr. 4, 2022.

ZHANG, J. **The reception of Thai boys love series in China**: consumption, imagination, and friction. Advisor: Mark Driscoll. 2021. 168 p. Master thesis (Master in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)—Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, 2021. Retrieved from: https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/honors_theses/jm214z157. Access: Jul. 1, 2021.