



Sissyphilia and Tropicopolitan Sensibilities: Queering the Star in Thai Boys Love Media

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Abstract

This article investigates the queered star image in Thai Boys Love/yaoi (BL)/Y media released after 2020 through the lens of sissyphilia, queer scholarship, and a newly proposed idea—tropicopolitan sensibilities. The study concentrates on PP Krit Amnuaydechorn's BL-star persona. PP Krit practices his sissyphilic persona both within and beyond the Thai live-action BL framework, incorporating elements such as costume, makeup, mannerism, coupling culture, and the spectacle of diverse cultures. Arguably, sissyphilia in Thai BL media of the 2020s is no longer a mere withdrawal from gay men's sissyphobic masculinity. Instead, it should be approached as a testament to another "queer turn" in the Thai mediascape, where an increasing number of celebrities are disrupting and diversifying Thai LGBTQ stereotypes. The BL industry in Thailand employs critical-creative maneuvers to resonate with the socio-political atmosphere of the period and embrace new tropes of transnational queer media.

Keywords: Thai Boys Love, yaoi, sissyphilia, queer Thai media, tropicopolitan sensibilities, Thai LGBTQ

Introduction: Thai BL/Y in Contested Terrain

GMMTV, a prominent participant in the Thai Boys Love (hereafter BL) industry,¹ launched its showcase event, GMMTV 2024 UP & ABOVE, on October 17th, 2023. The event was disseminated via social media platforms and observed by fans worldwide. Immediately following the event, an article titled “The Misogynistic Disposition of Sao-y and the Positioning of ‘Women and LGBTQ’ within an Exclusive Space for Attractive Males” was published in *The Momentum* (Jombaiyok, 2023). The title and content of the article align with the public discourse opposing BL or *yaoi* (hereafter Y) media in Thailand. In this discourse, the issue of underrepresentation and misrepresentation of the LGBTQ community is consistently highlighted (Prasannam, 2023). The author of the article included a viewpoint from an individual identifying as *Sao-y*² who objected to the presence of women in the series’ trailer, suggesting that the Thai BL series enhance negative attitudes towards women.

Emerging in late 1970s Japan, Boys Love (BL), also known as *yaoi* (Y), is a genre of texts that depicts a romantic relationship between male characters *seme* and *uke*, which are comparable in status to a top and bottom. *Seme* characters are conventionally portrayed as taller and manlier compared to *uke* characters. At times the character designs of *uke* are inclined towards androgyny. The genre has come into contact with the phenomenon of fans engaging in coupling or slashing, wherein they reinvent romantic and erotic relationships among male celebrities or characters from popular media. The expansion of BL/Y media in Thailand can be traced back to pirated translations of Japanese BL manga circulated among fans in the early 1990s.

In Thailand, despite the socio-cultural surveillance against pornographic works, the rise of the internet and print-on-demand publishing since the 2000s, has contributed to the growth of the BL/Y genre. To create their works, Thai amateur writers adopted the *seme/uke* trope from Japanese BL; fan fiction and original Y fiction began to flourish among self-published authors. The first adaptation of Thai Y fiction into a television series in the 2010s marked a significant industrial transformation. The phenomenon was entwined with the introduction of digital television in the same decade. The genre became more firmly established in the 2020s, but its popularity has been met with criticism from activists and their allies. The contestation between BL commercialism and its assigned socio-political functions has somewhat been fueled by the equal marriage campaigns in Thailand since the late 2010s and the

¹ Throughout this article, I use BL and Y interchangeably.

² This term used to have a rough equivalence to the Japanese term *fujoshi*. BL media may contain pornographic material; thus, the Japanese word *fujoshi* equates to “rotten girl.” However, there are some Japanese fans adopting the term Y *gāru* (Y girls, rendered from *Sao-y*) to strategically separate themselves from Japanese local fan culture (Baudinette, 2023, pp. 161–162).

government's repetitive creative economy plans in the name of soft power policy since the early 2020s.

Jombaiyok (2023) elaborates that inside the Thai BL series, protagonists who identify as gay are accepted as long as they do not exhibit overly effeminate traits or refer to themselves as *kathoey*.³ Furthermore, their physical characteristics continue to correspond with societal beauty norms. The article highlights the character of Oh-aew from the series *Plae Rak Chan Duai Jai Theo/I Told Sunset About You* (Guno, 2020). Oh-aew openly expresses his non-conforming gender identity. Jombaiyok's article closes by noting that there exists an implicit and rigid distinction between BL series centered on the romantic fantasies of women outside the LGBTQ community, and gay series that actively address and explore gender-related issues. Overall, the author emphasizes the importance of including these two genres under the classification of the "male homosexual category."

As previously stated, the presence of a hostile attitude towards BL media in Thailand is not a recent occurrence. The connection can also be established within the existing academic discourse on BL in the Thai language, wherein BL is regarded as a vehicle for the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology (Prasannam, 2021). The *seme/uke* rule is commonly understood as the *gay king/gay queen* dichotomy within the Thai gender and sexuality system, which emerged in journalistic discourse around the late 1960s (Jackson, 2000; Romjumba, 2003, p. 330).

The primary focus of this article is an investigation into the initial lack of approval for effeminate homosexual appearance in Thai BL media. The detachment from sissyness can be assumed through the dominance of the gay image in the West, filled with masculine physiques. The image was later endorsed by the expansion of internet culture in Thailand, where Thai gay men adopted the gay culture of the 1970s West, sensationalized by queer liberation (Duangwises, 2009, p. 136). Gay scenes in urban Bangkok were likewise an extension of such a phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it is challenging to locate BL/Y media within the West's inflected gay culture, given its origins as a trans-Asian product from Japan and the East Asian region. Arguably, Thai BL, in screen culture, has come to terms with an alternative queer image within the contested socio-cultural terrain. The article hopes to suggest that throughout the BL/Y series' decade-long development in Thailand since 2014, the production and reception of Thai BL screen texts after the defining year of 2020 have undergone a shift from sissyphobia to sissyphilia. The next section will explore how the influx of gay masculinity from the West has sown the seeds of sissyphobia

³ In Thai, *kathoey*, *katoey*, and a formerly pejorative term *tut* mean feminine men, transvestites, or transsexual. In public discourse, which is associated with sex tourism in Thailand, they might be referred to as lady boys.

in Thailand. This article will also investigate the subversive spirit of sissyphilia by examining Thai BL's potential in queering the body and recontextualizing gender and cultural diversity in Thailand as part of the non-Western regions—the queer tropics.

Sissyphobia and Sissyphilia through Tropicopolitan Sensibilities

As mentioned in the introduction, *I Told Sunset About You*, a groundbreaking queer bildungsroman series, revolutionizes the portrayal of queer characters. The series boasts an innovatively relocated setting that contrasts the bustling urban space of Bangkok with the picturesque southern Thai island of Phuket. Phuket's cosmopolitan ambiance captivates female and LGBTQ audiences from Thailand, Chinese-speaking countries, and other regions (Zhao, 2023, p. 17). The term "cosmopolitan" signifies "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other." It involves "an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity" (Hannerz, as cited in Berghahn, 2023, p. 65). The main characters are childhood friends who reconnect at a Mandarin Chinese tutoring school. The series illustrates cosmopolitan flavors through code-switching dialogues between Bangkok Thai, Southern dialects, Hokkien-Chinese dialect, and Mandarin Chinese. As children, the main characters playfully enact sequences from a Thai-dubbed Chinese *wuxia* television series. Additionally, *seme's* elder brother works as a tour guide. Travels bring him into contact with his Japanese girlfriend. Phuket, as a setting, strategically sits at the intersection of various cultures, while early Thai BL series do not aim to depict Bangkok as a hub of diverse cultures.

Phuket exemplifies the tropics' atmosphere, where various cultures are not afraid of speaking their names. The term "cosmopolitan sensibilities" (Berghahn, 2023, p. 67) could be used to describe the vision of this Thai BL series as an alteration from the Bangkok setting to other provinces in Thailand, which may provide a fresh avenue for BL's queer representation. Bangkok is partially dominated by mainstream gay culture; that is, the city has been saturated with the gay masculinity prevailing in the West and Anglo-American world. *Nha Harn the Series* (Tiprachart, 2022) is another example of Thai BL set outside Bangkok. It is set in the northeastern region of Thailand, where Bangkok Thai is not widely spoken. Intimacy between homosexual people and rural landscapes becomes apparent in these series. The series resonate with the queer desire in the film *Tropical Malady* (Weerasethakul, 2004), which is internationally renowned (Polmuk, 2023).

In transnational BL, the image of Bangkok as a gay paradise is even more accentuated. A Singaporean BL web series, *Getaway* (Kunatanad, 2022), which was co-created by a Thai and Singaporean cast and crew serves as an example. The series deals with the soul-searching phase of a Singaporean gay man who flees his homeland to Bangkok as he seeks a spiritual refuge. The plot and the setting revolve

around hotel rooms, swimming pools, pool parties, and sexual encounters among muscular gay men. In this context, Bangkok is a gay sanctuary, but it still has the potential to generate a latent sissyphobic gesture.

I argue that engaging with diverse cultures is significant to introduce new possibilities for queer images in Thai BL texts. In exploring BL, which is going beyond sissyphobia to embrace sissyphilia, we should critique the power dynamic that hinders these possibilities. This leads to the convergence of the notions of “tropicopolitan,” as defined by Aravamudan (1999), and “cosmopolitan sensibilities.” The term “tropicopolitan” refers to “a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial typology *and* actual resident of tropical space, an object of representation, *and* agent of resistance” (Aravamudan, 1999, p. 4; italics in original). The notion was developed for a postcolonial reading of literary works of the 18th century. It also addresses the “tension between representational surplus and referential lack” (p. 5). Here, I coin the term “tropicopolitan sensibilities” for explicating how residents of the tropics, who are also agents of resistance, strategically engage with various cultures.

The justification for considering “tropicopolitan sensibilities” as a framework lies in the conflict between marginalized members within gay communities and the discrimination against effeminate gay men, which can be extended by the power dynamics between whiteness and non-white ethnic identities. Within the American setting, for example, gay Asian males may be perceived as “feminine” amid a socio-cultural context that upholds a masculine power structure reinforced by whiteness. Gay Asian males are perceived as unattractive, as stated by Eguchi (2011, p. 38), which has resulted in the derogatory phrase “no fats, femmes, or Asians” (Ayles, as cited in Eguchi, 2011, p. 48). Sissyphobia, at its core, restricts the potential for queer bodies and desires within and beyond the LGBTQ community.

The influence of white culture has had a major effect on the formation of LGBTQ culture worldwide. Thailand is no exception. The concept of the tropicopolitan is carried out through the processes of tropicalization, which involves multiple approaches. One of these approaches is recontextualization (Aravamudan, 1999). Thus, the next section will examine the impact of Western gay masculinity on the Thai context, emphasizing the persistence of sissyphobia. The concept of “tropicopolitan sensibilities” is articulated to shape a diverse queer body and desire in the name of sissyphilia, exposing power dynamics and creating a space for cultural diversity in the Thai cultural arena as part of the tropics.

Sissyphobia and the Cultural Politics of Gay Masculinity in Thai BL/Y

The recontextualization of gay masculinity in Thailand can be traced back to its formative decades between the 1970s and 1980s. The notion of male homosexual identity was relatively foreign to the Thai public. The infamous murder of a homosexual American journalist in Thailand in 1965 marked its inception. The homicide victim was identified as a patron of urban nightlife and male sex workers, and this became the initial definition and perception of homosexual identity. Furthermore, in subsequent decades, this perception engendered a sense of homosexual panic among the Thai populace (Duangwiset, 2022, pp. 156–157).

The emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s evoked a public discourse on male homosexuality. A heated and ongoing argument took place within the journalistic media and on broadcast platforms, including between Wallop Piyamanontham, a counseling psychologist, and Seri Wongmontha, a famous scholar who openly identifies as effeminately gay. The psychologist conducted outreach initiatives targeting parents seeking guidance on fostering heterosexual orientations in their children. The issue prompted an inquiry into the portrayal of homosexuality on television. During this era, television programming occasionally included effeminate homosexual characters. According to Romjumpa (2002, p. 172), the authorities described these actions as a didactic maneuver intended for heterosexual audiences. In the literary discourse, female authors, starting in the 1970s, have used the principles of developmental psychology in their narrative construction of gay male protagonists in their works. The presence of an unfavorably volatile personality among the main characters is a prevalent characteristic within this specific genre (Pinijvararak, 1984).

Throughout Thai history, the gay community has also been alarmed by its sissy appearance, *tung ting*, and *kathoey* identity. Prior to the advent of gay magazines in the 1980s, *kathoey* referred to a group advocating for specific manifestations of sexually aberrant identity among men (Romjumpa, 2003, p. 331). Since the late 1980s, acting-straight gays and gay men with feminine mannerisms have been distinguished as the two separate categories of homosexuals. *Kathoey* and “gay queen” were typically linked to the latter group. A contestation of homosexual identity took place in gay magazines with positive perceptions of masculine gay men being more prevalent than those of sissy groups. In response, certain public figures who identified as sissy homosexuals criticized those who held a sissyphobic viewpoint, labeling them *l aep* or closeted gay man (Romjumpa, 2002, p. 162).

In 1999, sissy gay men, who were not entirely accepted by the gay community, were subjected to an additional surge in homophobic sentiment. During that period, the Government Public Relations Department issued memoranda to television networks,

directing them to monitor the portrayal of those identified as “sexually deviant” and members of the “third gender.” Under the state’s eyes, young viewers seemingly imitating *kathoey* and/or effeminate gay characters appeared to raise societal concerns (Duangwises, 2022, p. 164).

In the 2000s, the proliferation of internet culture mirrored a comparable attempt to dissociate oneself from homosexual identity, which was notably associated with sissyness. At that time, websites and web boards were a hive of BL novels written by Thai amateurs (Srisuta, 2005). During the decade, advertisements showcasing the attractive physiques of white male models promoted the consumption of homosexual men in urban areas. According to Duangwises (2009, p. 136), Thai gay men in cyberspace emulated the clone culture of the 1970s, when homosexual men in the West were at the forefront of queer liberation and rejected feminine bodies and souls in favor of their masculine physiques. Online gay communities mainstreamed acting-straight gay identity because greater masculinity increased the likelihood of encountering love and desirability (Duangwises, 2009, p. 137).

This brief historical recontextualization is provided as a part of a subversive reading (Aravamudan, 1999) to illuminate how individuals within and outside the gay community alienated sissyness well in advance of the BL industry’s rise in Thailand. As a result, when the BL manga gained significant popularity in the 2000s, the majority of readers began to associate the BL manga’s reimagined male-male romance with the real world’s homosexual relationships. Although Thai female readers gained a postmodern perspective on desire and sexuality by exploring BL manga, sissyness was not much politicized (Srisuta, 2005, pp. 105–107, 117).

Despite possessing an androgynous body, *uke* does not equate to *kathoey*. In the Thai context, transvestitism and transgenderism have since become associated with *kathoey* identity. Consideration could be given to the correlation between *uke* and the *gay queen* due to his gender identity and his less masculine build in contrast to *seme*. Nonetheless, sissyness is typically avoided in characterization. Examining early BL couples in the Thai BL series, adapted from BL novels and set in Bangkok’s urban milieu, should provide a clearer picture.

Love Sick the Series (Kusolkulsiri, 2014) depicts Punn and Noh attending a boys’ school. Their blue shorts are a vital part of the adapted novel’s title. The other case is a BL couple from *SOTUS the Series* (Samajarn, 2016), featuring Athit and Kongphop—engineering students. The protagonists of both series belong to male homosocial communities. The series contains effeminate characters with minor roles. Early in the evolution of the media genre, the characterization relies on the height difference between *seme* and *uke*’s bodies. A sulking attitude could be incorporated into *uke*’s personality. *Seme* is typically more composed and mature.

The character designs of the protagonists in these two series seem not to possess a noticeably feminine quality. The novel version shows slightly nuanced character designs in which conventional *uke* and masculinity are negotiated. Noh, an *uke* protagonist from *Love Sick the Novel* (originally published in 2010), is a Chinese-born son who, despite solar exposure, never gets tanned. Furthermore, rumor has it that Noh, with his round eyes and scarlet lips, is overly cute (INDRYTIMES, 2020, p. 19). Arthit is described as having pointed eyes, an unshaven look, and a height of 178 centimeters in the novel *SOTUS* (BitterSweet, 2016, pp. 1, 9, 381).

As a consequence, the protagonists of the Thai BL series are not regularly subject to the *gay king/gay queen* dichotomy. In the beginning, Thai BL series avoided accepting homosexual identity in accordance with the grammar of Thai BL novels and, or, their source texts shared with the formulae of Japanese BL (Mizoguchi, 2010). During the late 2010s, audiences and the general public endeavored to differentiate BL/Y from gay media, as evidenced by public discourse. Additionally, certain connections were made to gay series that coexisted with BL series, such as *Gay OK Bangkok* (Phukhaotong, 2016–2017). It is noteworthy that the imdb.com website generally assigns this series to the BL/Y genre. Y fans may disagree, however, given that no BL coupling (or *khu jin* in Thai) has developed beyond this series.

Duangwises (2018, pp. 214–215) examines masculinity and homoeroticism in Thai BL series produced during the period of 2014–2016. Specifically, the author analyzes two prominent examples, namely *Love Sick the Series* and *Rak Ok Doen/Make It Right the Series* (Sawatmaneekul et al., 2016). The author argues that the portrayal of male couples in the Thai BL series serves as a means to illuminate sexual encounters and the dynamics of homosocial relationships. The male protagonists in the series do not self-identify as gay; rather, they are depicted as males engaging in sexual activities with their male partners. It is vital that the relationship remain unaffected by effeminate manifestations in both appearance and behavior. Nevertheless, this observation also reinforces the significance of gay or LGBTQ media as opposing BL media. This scenario places BL media in an in-between position.

One could argue that the physical representation of BL/Y actors may serve as an indication of their inclination towards LGBTQ media, thereby moving away from their previously ambiguous stance. The trend of rejecting non-masculine body types and mannerisms persisted in the construction of Thai BL stars' images, as observed from late 2016 to 2017 through the integration of BL into LGBTQ commercialism.

Following the emergence of gay magazines in Thailand during the 2010s, the inaugural Thai edition of *Attitude*, a British gay lifestyle magazine, was published in March 2011. Previously, *Attitude Thailand* maintained a link with GMM Grammy, a

renowned entertainment company in Thailand that was founded in 1983. It actively contributed to the incorporation of gay culture into Thailand’s BL/Y economy. In March 2015, cast members from *Love Sick the Series Season 2* appeared on *Attitude*’s cover. The magazine celebrated its anniversary in November 2016 by featuring Kris/Singto on its cover, exposing their toned bodies, which had previously been concealed beneath engineering workshop shirts in *SOTUS the Series*. Pre-orders were in high demand among admirers around the world. Since then, the issue has become a rare item.

Figure 1. Toned bodies of BL stars from *SOTUS S the Series*.



Featured on the pre-order advertisement for *Attitude Thailand* (Source: <https://twitter.com/attitudethai>)

Uke actors exhibited a tendency to minimize their less manly appearance when featured on the covers of gay magazines. The achievement of Kris/Singto on the cover has motivated BL stars to adopt a more muscular physique. In the May 2017 issue of *Attitude Thailand*, the television series *Water Boyy* (Kusolkulsiri, 2017) showcased the highly anticipated abdominal muscles of its cast members, who were adorned in swimwear. Earth (Pirapat Watthanaset Siri) assumes the character of *seme*, whereas New (Thitipoom Techa-apaikhun) performs the role of *uke*. They

both possess the physique that has been cultivated by gym culture. *Seme* and *uke* are nevertheless distinguished in this series by a minor difference in height and complexion.

The homoeroticized muscularity receives even greater support in the non-GMMTV BL series *Together with Me* (Bunyoprakarn, 2017), which features Max (Nattapol Diloknawarit) and Tul (Pakorn Thanasrivanitchai). They boasted their wet, sexy chests and abs on the September 2017 edition of *Attitude Thailand*.⁴ The involvement of BL stars with the magazine was sustained until the final publication in 2018.⁵

After the *Attitude Thailand* era, muscularity was still a criterion in casting for the BL series. The first example is MeMindY's *TharnType the Series* (Sintanaparadee, 2019). In a suburban Bangkok setting, the series chronicles a romance between a musician and a football player at a university. Mew (Suppasit Jongcheveevat) portrays Tharn in the series. The level of Mew's muscularity surpasses that of Gulf (Kanawut Traipipattanapong), who portrays the character Type. The character design of Type, however, deviates significantly from the conventional portrayal of *uke*, as evidenced by his tanned complexion and manly physique. Tharn (the *seme*) is likewise depicted as openly embracing a gay identity.

An additional illustration of Thai BL's heightened masculinity in contrast to its Japanese equivalent can be observed in the well-received *Be on Cloud's KinnPorsche the Series* (Khomsiri & Vorasataree, 2022) within specific geographical areas. The series explores a romantic relationship within the context of organized crime syndicates. The majority of male characters have finely chiseled physiques. Once again, there is a lack of adequate representation of sissyness. The leading actors exhibit their joint persona as an unconventional BL couple, which potentially was inspired by the bromance trope shared among Hollywood male stars (Phumithammarat & Prasannam, 2023).

This specific trend aligns with the efforts of LGBTQ activists and their allies to advocate for same-sex marriage since 2019. Its prominence increased in 2020, coinciding with other socio-political movements. Pride Month, which occurs annually

⁴ GMMTV's television series, *Water Boyy*, is a remake based on the film *Water Boyy*, directed by Rachyd Kusolkulsiri (2015). This film displays an intertextual relationship with *Love Sick the Series*. *Together with Me the Series* and its later installment, *Together with Me: The Next Chapter* (2018), are based upon Y novels by ++saisioo++. The character of Knock as *uke* (played by Tul) was originally designed as "a tanned handsome boy who was imposed on the *uke* role by me [the author]. I've just wanted to experiment with a romance without the *seme/uke* division" (++saisioo++, 2015, p. 2).

⁵ Many activists who criticize BL fail to acknowledge that BL culture is somewhat an integral part of LGBTQ culture, particularly in the form of printed media. The growth of Cute Boy culture in universities across 2010s Thailand and the heightened inclination towards effeminacy have contributed to the development of new dynamics in the construction of Thai BL couples.

in June, has become highly anticipated among BL fans. Several notable examples of BL stars that gained popularity after 2017 and advocated for LGBTQ rights when the BL culture began to embrace gay culture are Tay (Tawan Vihokratana) and Tul Pakorn.⁶

Thus, the current state of Thai BL culture may lead people to believe that it is primarily characterized by a prevalence of masculine gay attractions in Bangkok's urban setting. However, there is still an attempt to diversify and include queer body types, mannerisms, and desires in the formulae of Thai BL series. The pursuit of diversity is associated with sissyness and the conglomeration of different cultures. This is to emphasize that the cultural politics of Thai BL cannot simply be achieved by following the model of gay liberation and gay culture from the West.

In the next section the article thus explores the case of PP (Krit Amnuaydechorn)—a BL star who authors his queer image. Here I demonstrate the interplay between sissyphilia and tropicopolitan sensibilities, highlighting their mutual challenge to the pervasive sissyphobia in Thai society and the media genre.

Authoring the BL Queen: PP Krit's Queer(ed) and Sissy Image

In June 2022, Thai social media became enraged at the provocative posts made by the indie band Gym and Swim. The posts criticized the selection of Billkin (Putthipong Assaratanakul) and PP Krit to perform on the Summer Sonic 2022 stage in Japan. Members of the band and other indie bands backed up the posts with mocking comments about the talents of this BL couple. Examples of these comments include "Get a room!" and "It's the soft power of Thai *katheoys*, isn't it?" Their posts and comments caused a widespread negative backlash. Fans of Billkin/PP or BKPP and social media users cancelled the band's homophobic expression through hashtags. The band eventually received a six-month suspension from performing as a penalty (SpringNews, 2022).

This reaction is not one-off but can be contextualized within a broader music history. Prior to the emergence of T-Pop in the trans-Asian entertainment scene, the Thai music industry was known for promoting discriminatory attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. In 1994, during the height of alternative rock music, the indie band Sepia gained popularity with their song "Kliat Tut/I Hate Sissies (*katheoy*)." The lyrics use clichéd imagery to portray sissy gay men and transgender people as carriers of

⁶ Regarding Tul Pakorn, he has been exceptionally outspoken. He participated in numerous campaigns. His social media posts regarding gay rights and affection have gone viral. Additionally, he participated in the Pride Parade both in person and virtually. Additionally, Mew Supasit's frequent visits to New York have been factored in (Manager Online, 2022). Mew and Tul are not a BL couple in the BL series; their intimacy can be interpreted as an assumed homosexuality rather than a dichotomy between *seme* and *uke*. They, however, announced that they started dating in early 2024 (AmarinTV, 2024).

sexually transmitted diseases. Thai Thanawut's hit song "Prathueang" ensued, mocking *kathoey*s, who are often mistaken for cisgender women by men. The song went on sale in 1998. In 2014, Vid Hyper presented his well-received song "Katheoy Mai Khoei Nok Jai/Trans Will Never Cheat on You" at the start of the Thai BL boom. The speaker in the song pleads with society to provide transwomen with the opportunity to experience love. The transgender actor (Nat Nisamanee) in the music video, who later became an internet celebrity, has not undergone any sexual reassignment surgeries as of yet. The lyrics highlight the condition of false femininity. This should explain why some artists perceive BL couples and the sissy image in popular media and the music industry as potential threats.

Between 2014 and 2020, there were attempts to challenge heteronormativity in Thai media landscapes. Some prominent figures include Third (Tanaphop Yoovichit) and James (Thiradon Supphaphanphinyo). Third joined the reality show *The Face Men Thailand* in late 2017. He was seen as one of the pioneering androgynous models. He also announced that his take on the industry is to inspire the LGBTQ community about their potential to pursue their dreams (Klangsombat & Purodakananda, 2017). In early 2019, James⁷ was featured on the cover of *Hamburger Magazine*. The cover design generated controversy. He was observed donning attire typically associated with femininity, although he identified as heterosexual. The magazine characterizes his appearance as "spicy androgynous" (PostToday, 2019).

According to Baudinette (2023, p. 105), BL media can "disrupt the heteronormativity of the Thai media landscape." The earlier androgynous images were refashioned and incorporated into the character design and casting process in the Thai BL series. Prior to being cast in the fully developed BL series, PP was selected for the series *Rak Chut Jai Nai Chukchoen/My Ambulance* (Guno, 2019). The series had a romantic storyline involving the characters Tao (played by Billkin) and Thiwxhao (played by PP). PP was distinguished by his gender-neutral clothing and his consistently grumpy expression. The notion of sissyness was brought to the forefront. *I Told Sunset About You* and *Plae Rak Chan Duai Jai Theo 2/I Promised You the Moon* (Riantong, 2021) were both produced as part of the BKPP project in 2020 and 2021, respectively. These series constitute the initial BL project produced by Nadao Bangkok. The premieres happened during a period of political turmoil that extended from 2020 and beyond. The series have caused significant shifts in the media landscape and have had a revisionary impact on LGBTQ issues and the

⁷ James was also featured in a series titled *Great Men Academy* (Hongvivatana & Hongvivatana, 2019), which depicted the experiences within a male boarding school. The presence of a predominantly male homosocial environment inside the series has the potential to be interpreted by audiences as belonging to the BL genre. However, the series was also seen as a "false Y" because the potential *uke* protagonist is transformed from a female into a male by a unicorn's magical powers.

visibility of queer individuals inside the Thai BL media, which led to the “queer turn” of the industry (Prasannam, 2024).

As the industry previously faced bias against effeminate characters, *I Told Sunset About You* was a revolutionary work. The sissy image was regarded as a transgression of BL grammar. In 2017, Sataporn Panichraksapong—an important figure in the Thai BL sector—expressed his viewpoint on BL spectatorship and the industry: “They don’t want to see any of the boys look too feminine. That’s why, when we cast actors, we need to make sure that none of them look effeminate” (Jirattikorn, 2023).

Figure 2. The flamboyant poster for *I Told Sunset About You*.



I Told Sunset About You which screened at the Singorama Film Festival in Songkhla, Thailand, in August 2023, reenacts the tropicopolitan sensibilities. (Source: www.facebook.com/singoramafilmfest)

While Billkin portrays Teh, PP portrays Oh-aew in the series. The progression of their relationship parallels the quest for sexuality with their tropicopolitan background as Phuket-born. Although Oh-aew is aware of his homosexuality, Teh appears to be resistant. A provoking sequence within the series occurs when Oh-aew puts on a red

brassiere and contemplates why Teh's affection for him is inconsistent. However, in the second season, Oh-aew discovers a support system where he can be himself within the queer community. During Teh's older brother's wedding ceremony with his Japanese bride, the queered body of Oh-aew is in full bloom. Oh-aew receives a bouquet and consents to offer Teh and himself an opportunity for reconciliation at a heterosexual wedding reception.

Drawing upon the queer bildungsroman trope (Prasannam, 2024), the series spotlights the *uke* protagonist, PP, in a diverse range of music videos that serve as the original soundtrack for the show. *Hom Pha/Hold Me Tight* made its premiere on May 28, 2021. In the MV, PP reveals his creatively queered body, dressed in a form-fitting, rubberlike purple garment, while holding a sunflower in Bangkok's solitary night. Subsequently, he finds himself enveloped by a light blue blanket, resting upon a bed filled with sunflowers. The visual representation of this MV can be interpreted as being deliberately crafted with a camp aesthetic.⁸

The MV "Hold Me Tight" can be read as a paratext for *I Promised You the Moon*. On August 13, 2021, Nadao Bangkok, operating under the name Nadao Music, uploaded to its official YouTube channel an additional MV titled "It's Okay Not To Be Alright" that starred PP. Surprised fans discovered that Bright (Rapheephong Thapsuwan), who subsequently had a leading role in *Hom Klin Khwam Rak/I Feel You Linger in the Air the Series* (Sintanaparadee, 2023), had replaced Billkin in the MV.

Each of the costumes worn by PP in this music video has the potential to represent camp aesthetic and the queer body. In the first costume, PP sits in a dimly lit chamber without a shirt, gazing at the rain. This image proclaims the melancholic youth. From the rear, a shot illuminated the backbone beneath PP's pale white skin as he bowed his head. In Thai BL/Y novels, *uke*'s figure is characterized by a slender body, with the backbone elegantly described as a pearl necklace. A costume incorporates blue fake fur, a colorful crown, and PP's glittering visage. The costume's sexual fetishistic connotation is intensified when PP appears in a skin-tight garment crafted from red leather cords in the style of Japanese *shibari*.

Another PP's music video featuring the renowned Thai television actor Alek (Teeradetch Metawarayut) was released in February 2022 via Nadao Music. The MV for "I'll Do It How You Like It" was filmed in an abandoned mine and an imaginary wasteland. Alek appears on a large screen, isolated and located on the land in PP's

⁸ Camp aesthetic here is a signifying combination of camp as parody and camp as "the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility" (Meyer, 1994, p. 4). The excessive and flamboyant performances can be interpreted as a challenge to the BL genre's conventional character design.

sensual fantasy. PP also wears clothing, a cowboy hat, and temporary thorny tattoos on his neck and backbone. The scene's pinnacle occurs when PP puts on black leather slacks and a cross-knit wool scarf.

PP established his own company on June 6, 2022, following the release of multiple music videos on Nadao Music's YouTube channel. At that time, PP made a substantial contribution to enhancing his image. According to Dyer (1998, p. 153), there is a difference between viewing a star-as-person and reading a star-as-text. Nevertheless, it is also possible to read PP as a star who is actively authoring his own image as a text. Since the beginning of PP Krit Entertainment's phase, PP has demonstrated an image that I would describe as "BL queen," which acts as evidence of sissyphilia in Thai entertainment industry during the 2020s.

The remaining PP's MVs featured distinct actors and male models. The November 3, 2022, premiere of "Fire Boy" featured a young male model named Jason T. displaying his tempting abs. Furthermore, PP's choreography seemed more alluring. In the MV "Lang Le/Hesitation," Mike (Pirat Nitipaisalkul), also known as Mike Angelo, made his appearance. It was aired on February 15, 2023. This indicates the correlation between PP and the rise of T-Pop, given that Mike has been considered a T-Pop icon since the early 2000s. Additionally, Nai (Naphat Siangsomboon), a famous star of screen media, appeared in "Sen Reaung Doem/Rerun," which premiered on September 19, 2023.

The varying degrees of concentration in spectacle and narrative are fundamental characteristics that define specific genres of moving images. An example is exotic cinema, which has the capacity to foster visual pleasure and potentially tropicopolitan sensibilities and indulges its viewers, not through complicated narrative structure, but through the "spectacle's colorfulness, opulence, and flamboyance...its indisputable sensuality" (Berghahn, 2023, p. 107). PP's music videos prioritize spectacle over narrative. An array of garments is displayed for PP; his queered body constitutes the spectacle. The spectacle is significantly amplified in the music video "Sanoe Tua/Ooh!" (released March 8, 2024), where a computer graphic renders an otherworldly setting while PP appears in revealing costumes and large wings. Eaton (Sakdidej Sasiprapha), the son of a renowned Thai actress from the 1990s, made an appearance in this music video.

Only two of PP's MVs that have been released since 2021 stress narrative over spectacle: "Hesitation" and "Rerun." Despite its story centering on the heist of a small statue of Themis from a gallery, the spectacle remains the focal point in "Hesitation." Symbolically representing blind justice, Themis the goddess of justice, appears wearing a blindfold. However, a lyric of the music video suggests the meaning of the spectacle: "I want to look the other way, but it would waste my time looking at you." A

spin-off of this MV is called “Eye Contact.” The MV “Rerun” debuted in the form of a short film. The narrative relies on romantic relationships among visual art students.

The aesthetic appeal of the queer body is amplified in PP’s MVs through visibilization, gazing, spectacle, and varied attire. The overwhelming spectacle could potentially be viewed as an “excess that disrupts narrative coherence and progression” (Berghahn, 2023, p. 107). Given the history of marginalization, exclusion, misrepresentation, and underrepresentation of queer bodies and sissyness, I find such visual excess subversive. This explains the elaborate and superfluous manner in which “the return of the repressed” is manifested. PP interacts with young men of various ethnicities and looks, including Thai, East Asian, and Caucasian, in the MVs. PP and other male actors and models are not simply objects of desire, as Ponzanesi (as cited in Berghahn, 2023, p. 109) notes, the constructed spectacles require “cosmopolitan critical participants” who can engage in an active process of deconstruction and inquiry into “the process of meaning-making and seduction.”

Figure 3. In the music video, “Ooh!” PP employs the *kabe-don* trope.



The *kabe-don* trope is a tactic typically employed by *seme* characters to assert their dominance. Playing with BL grammar is part of sissyphilic empowerment. (Permission granted by PP Krit Entertainment)

Here, I refer to the male models and actors in PP’s music videos as “PP’s Boys,” inspired by the term “Bond’s Girls,” which depicts women in “glamorous foreign

settings” in the James Bond franchise (Berghahn, 2023, p. 102).⁹ PP likewise closely interacted with other transnational celebrities, such as BamBam (Kunpimook Bhuwakul) and Jackson Wang of GOT7—a boy band formed by the Korean idol industry. The “Khronkhan PP Chana/PP Always Wins Project”-captioned memes and inside jokes among fans are flourishing. This phrase originated from the application that was implemented by the Thai government and was in use during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the “PP Always Wins Project,” PP may pursue any male of his preference. This image, which is both empowering and irresistibly effeminate, appears to validate the concept of “public chemistry” between PP and other prospective *seme* actors (Daradaily, 2022). Therefore, PP’s sissy image becomes more empowering in comparison to the earlier androgynous experiments conducted by Third and James.

The pursuit of PP’s queer and sissy persona has also extended to his status as a fashion icon. In August 2023, PP was spotted on the Miss Universe Thailand stage in one of David Koma’s pre-fall highlights. PP and his team modified the look by eliminating the skirt and incorporating extra garments and mittens (Thangsirisakul, 2023). Notwithstanding the feminine attire, his “slender, boyish physique” (Bowstead, 2022, p. 115) is prominently presented. A considerable number of the clips on PP Krit Entertainment’s YouTube channel showcase the backstage operations of specific PP performances. High fashion receives significant attention. Balenciaga formally designated PP as their inaugural Thai brand ambassador in 2023 (Chansakoolnee, 2023).

The international fashion industry is witnessing a growing trend of high-fashion products showcased on slender and youthful male physiques which are referred to as “waif.” Waif males are contrasted with spornosexual males who display athletic muscularity (Bowstead, 2022). I propose a reading of PP’s queered body as a variation of waif—a type of male model that is marked by “youths with smooth, hairless, pale or dark brown skin, attenuated limbs, slightly hollow thighs, and slim waists” (Bowstead, 2022, pp. 110–112). I would argue that PP’s sissy image can challenge the inclination of BL actors towards a spornosexual image that is associated with a masculinity-favored community. Many BL actors embody a hegemonic masculinity. In a comparable manner, their bodies, gym routines, and athletic activities are showcased on social media, and their love scene-related contents. Illustrative cases include: Bright (Vachirawit Chivaaree); Force (Jiratchapong Srisang); Earth (Pirapat Watthanasetiri); and Zee (Pruk Panich) (Daradaily, 2021).

⁹ The idea of PP’s Boys is somewhat related to the parodic gestures towards the BL genre. The MV poster, which features PP and Eaton, reenacts the *kabe-don* trope from BL. *Kabe-don* literally means “slam against the wall.” Japanese *shōjo* manga and BL feature this trope. The Thai BL series illustrates the trope by highlighting the distinct roles of *seme* and *uke* (Baudinette, 2023, pp. 55–56). PP reverses the position of those characters as a parody from the perspective of camp aesthetics.

Waif male fashion composition tends to evoke “desolation, such as abandoned buildings, deserted backwoods, and grimy bedsits.” Bowstead (as cited in Bowstead, 2022, p. 113) states that it symbolizes “vulnerability and passivity that are most taboo within orthodox masculinity.” The trope can be found in some of PP’s early music videos. Yet PP’s former image of a sad young man (Dyer, 2002) was later overcome by the BL queen persona. In the same month that “I’ll Do It How You Like It” was released in early 2020, PP was invited to appear on Alek’s culinary channel on YouTube. PP was lying on the table jokingly and stating, “You are free to eat me up. Today, I’m acting as food” (AlekT Official, 2022). At that moment, fans began to perceive a possible BL rapport between PP and other presumed *seme* actors besides Billkin subsequent to the closure of the BKPP project.

Despite PP’s imagined coupling with many male celebrities, he remains connected to Billkin/PP couple. PP’s strong persona on stage and screen productions can enhance PP as a BL queen, or *joōsama uke* in Japanese. Creatively adorned with a physique that is distinctly queer, PP always wears skin-tight or dazzling garments. By capitalizing on the association with a transnational queer phenomenon, sissyphilia and tropicopolitan sensibilities have reshaped the perception of the *uke* in the Thai BL industry. PP’s appearance in the Bangkok-filmed music video for Troye Sivan’s “Got Me Started” is evidence of the interaction between PP and a global queer icon (Vatanapahu, 2023). The music video depicts queer images of people from various backgrounds in Bangkok. In the midst of intense humidity and ruby light, we see PP accompanying Sivan. The co-appearance of Thai and Australian queer icons consolidates the role of tropicopolitan sensibilities, which make sissyphilia more materialized.

Concluding Remarks: Sissies Will Be Sissies

The continual presence of the sissy image of PP was not accidental. The sissyness was mobilized via social media around the year 2020. Celebrities, influencers, YouTubers, and TikTokers were not hesitant to experiment with their fluctuating images: sissy gay men and *kathoey*. Also, they collaboratively generated media texts. Farose, AERTHA, NungNaRong, Powerpuff Gay, and Hiwwhee are some notable channels. In addition to PP, there are other rising sissy *uke* stars, such as Earth (Katsamonnat Namwirote), Gun (Atthaphan Phunsawat), Benz (Panupun Wongjohn), Pak (Naphat Leelahatorn), Bank or ISBANKY (Mondop Heamtan), Babe (Tanatat Phanviriyakool), and NuNew (Chawarin Perdpiriyawong).

New initiatives, such as the *Forever You* Project by New (Siwaj Sawatmaneekul), have also endorsed the aforementioned phenomenon. New was the director of many BL series, including *Bang Oen Rak/Love by Chance* (2018), *Dai Daeng/Until We Meet Again* (2019), and *Chueak Pan/Between US* (2022). Since March 2024, the

project has captivated the audience with its promotional materials, highlighting four non-spornosexual *uke* actors, while keeping the *seme* largely hidden. In traditional coupling or *khu jin* culture, *uke* always comes after *seme*. This project revisited this trope, with the paratextual works of the series centering around the *uke* protagonists. The project has offered a new “threshold of interpretation” for BL media consumers. Thai BL stars and media, to some extent, engage with contemporary queer issues in this way.

Formerly criticized in Thai academic discourse, gay bodies were produced for sexual consumption by gay discourse. According to Seangthong (2003), their capacities do not extend to the social, political, and economic spheres. However, I argue, this notion is somewhat debunked through sissyphilia and tropicopolitan sensibilities, which display the “social, political, and economic capacities” of queered bodies in the Thai BL industry. Furthermore, tropicopolitan sensibilities as a framework consolidate this reading, which “makes available the different mechanisms of agency that traverse texts, contexts, and agents themselves” (Aravamudan, 1999, p. 14). A modified convention of BL media texts, sissyphilia, represents an opportunity for the production and reception of Thai BL, which is growing as part of Asian transnational queer media (Baudinette, 2023). Similar to critiques of heteropatriarchy and LGBTQ stereotyping, this should also provide a fresh perspective on Thai BL/Y studies.

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