

# From Underground Manga to Popular Novel: The Development of Yaoi Publishing in Thailand from 1994 to 2015

Krittaphol Viphaveekul

*Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10700, Thailand*

(Corresponding author's e-mail : [krittaphol.v@chula.ac.th](mailto:krittaphol.v@chula.ac.th))

*Received: 28 August 2025, Revised: 16 October 2025, Accepted: 20 October 2025, Published: 12 November 2025*

## Abstract

This paper explores the development of Thai Yaoi culture, tracing its roots to the 1990s when it emerged under Japanese BL manga influence. Thai Yaoi culture has evolved to present its most popular form, Yaoi series, which gained global market prominence by the 2020s. Initially, however, Thai Yaoi culture faced significant societal resistance as an underground subculture. Yaoi manga and novels were labeled pornographic content and subjected to aggressive censorship, forcing them underground during the mid-2000s. This raises the question: how did Thai Yaoi culture develop and gain widespread popularity within a decade despite these challenges? This study employs historical research based on documents, interviews, and digital footprints to examine the development of pioneering Yaoi publishers and the Yaoi publishing field in Thailand.

The development of Thai Yaoi publishing reflects the dynamic interplay between censorship, fan communities, and shifting social values. The findings reveal that Yaoi manga and novels were prohibited not solely for their homosexual content, but primarily because their explicit erotic content was the key factor leading to Yaoi publications' ban in the 2000s. Although targeted by censorship, Yaoi publishing persisted and transformed into popular novels in the mass market by 2013. The emergence of online platforms, digital printing, and social media facilitated new forms of participation, enabling amateur creators to publish, distribute, and engage with fans. Passionate fans played crucial roles in this process. They negotiated power dynamics with both the state and publishing industry while transforming their product from underground Yaoi manga to Yaoi novels. This transformation laid the foundation for the widespread success of Thai Yaoi series as an autonomous culture since 2016.

**Keywords:** Yaoi culture, Yaoi publishing, Manga, Novel, Censorship, Thailand-Japan

## Introduction

The popularity of Yaoi<sup>1</sup> series, a homosexual romantic TV drama, today contrasts sharply with Thailand's situation two decades ago, when Yaoi publishing was prohibited and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment prevailed. While attitudes toward homosexuality

became more open in the late 20th century, older generations and conservatives insisted homosexual behavior was foreign to Thai society (Jackson, 1995). *The Love of Siam* (2007), a pioneering Thai LGBTQ+ romance film,<sup>2</sup> received significant social criticism due

<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the term "Yaoi" instead of the more commonly used "BL" (Boys' Love) for several reasons. In its original Japanese context, "Yaoi" encompasses both male homosexual romance (yaoi) and female homosexual romance (yuri), representing a broader and more diverse genre of homosexual romance than "BL"

alone (Fujimoto, 2015, 76- 80). Additionally, in Thailand, homosexual romance is commonly referred to as "Y" or "Wai," which more closely aligns with the pronunciation and etymology of "Yaoi" than "BL."

<sup>2</sup> While some scholars classify *The Love of Siam* as the pioneering Yaoi drama (Loetwitchayarat, 2017;

to the same-sex kiss scene (MGR Online, 2008), and Pride parades encountered societal opposition until at least 2009 (Prachatai, 2009).

In this context, Yaoi culture's development in Thailand faced significant political and social constraints, as seen in the cases of Yaoi manga and novels in the 2000s. These works were labeled as pornographic, leading to aggressive censorship from both the government and media industry. This period of suppression is known as the "Black Hole Period" (Loetwitchayarot, 2017). As a result, Yaoi fans and producers engaged in underground activities until the early 2010s.

Given these restrictive circumstances, a compelling question arises: How did Thai Yaoi culture transition from its underground phase to achieve the widespread popularity of Yaoi series? While recent years have seen a surge in research on Thai Yaoi culture coinciding with the rise of Yaoi series, this critical question remains largely unexplored.

This paper aims to trace the development of Thai Yaoi publishing from the 1990s to the 2010s as the pioneering cultural product of Yaoi culture in Thailand. It explores how Yaoi publishers interacted within the publishing field to negotiate the political and social constraints surrounding Yaoi culture mentioned above. The study employs historical research, utilizing documents and interviews with Yaoi publishers, complemented by relevant digital footprint analysis from social networking sites.

While the study primarily focuses on the publishing sector, it acknowledges that other cultural influences, such as K-pop, Thai dramas, and television programs, have significantly contributed to shaping Thai Yaoi culture (Loetwitchayarot, 2017; Vinitphol, 2023). However, this paper concentrates on publishing as the foundational element of Thai Yaoi culture, an aspect that has been relatively underexplored in existing literature.

As this study emphasizes, Yaoi culture represents a unique expression of homosexuality that may conflict with traditional ethics in various countries. While global society has become more accepting of LGBTQ+ communities, this progress remains vulnerable to reversal. Morris (2025) illustrates this risk through Alabama's State Library Board efforts to ban books depicting transgender individuals positively. Understanding the historical processes of social suppression can benefit both cultural production scholarship and provide fundamental knowledge of cultural censorship.

### Literature review of Thai Yaoi culture

The origins of Thai Yaoi culture can be traced to the 1990s, when it emerged under the influence of Japanese Boys' Love culture, including manga and J-pop. Thai Yaoi culture evolved during the 2000s and 2010s, manifesting in various forms such as manga, novels, and television dramas known as Yaoi series, the latter becoming the most popular cultural product.

*Love Sick the Series* (2014) is considered the first Yaoi series broadcast on public television and has received a positive response since 2014. Since 2016, Thai Yaoi series have achieved domestic market acceptance, evidenced by annual production exceeding 10 titles. Bunyavejchewin and Sukthungthong (2021) summarized the record of the Yaoi series broadcast publicly during 2014-2021 as follows: 2014- 5 titles, 2015-7 titles, 2016- 14 titles, 2017- 19 titles, 2018-12 titles, 2019-19 titles, 2020- 34 titles and 2021-54 titles.<sup>3</sup> From 2020 onwards, Thai Yaoi series became popular in Asian markets, including Japan. Particularly, the popularity of Thai Yaoi series in Japan, called "Thai Numa," is conceptualized as a "reimport" phenomenon because Yaoi series were imported back into Japan, the country where Yaoi originated (Vinitphol, 2023). Furthermore, the popularity of Thai Yaoi series has contributed to the positive image of Thai culture,

---

Prasannam, 2019; Baudinette, 2023), the film's categorization as BL or gay genre remains debatable. Although *The Love of Siam* features teenage boy romance resembling the Japanese BL narrative, its story primarily focuses on the suffering of the gay protagonists and social rejection. This characterization

aligns more closely with gay cinema conventions than BL narrative traditions.

<sup>3</sup> These data include both main- Yaoi series (with homosexual protagonists) and sub- Yaoi series (featuring homosexual sub-protagonists).

increasing the domestic economy, and promoting gender equality (Shimauchi, 2024; Jirattikorn, 2025).

Economic data indicates that the Thai Yaoi drama market demonstrates rapidly increasing commercial value. According to a report from Siam Commercial Bank predicts that the share of Yaoi series in Thailand's entertainment production value will rise from 0.7% in 2019 to 3.9% in 2025, showing an average yearly growth of 17% and reaching over 4.9 billion baht (SCB EIC, 2025).

Scholars have explored various aspects of Thai Yaoi culture, particularly focusing on Yaoi series. Bunyavejchewin (2018) clarifies the terminology and characteristics of Wai (Y) in the context of the Yaoi series. Baudinette (2019) examines the Yaoi series through the lens of historical development, framing it as a new form of representational queer politics. Hiramatsu (2023) analyzes the evolution of LGBTQ+ drama and its integration into Thai Yaoi series. Pongsapitaksanti (2023) investigates the characteristics, production processes, influences, and current reception of Yaoi drama in Japan. Prasannam (2019) examines the complex interrelationships between Yaoi series, fandom, and industrialization.

Recent research increasingly connects fandom phenomena with broader social and political issues. Prasannam (2023) examines political practices, including criticism and self-censorship, within Thailand's literary industry. Jirattikorn (2025) investigates the growing popularity of Thai Yaoi series among Japanese viewers, arguing that Yaoi series reshape understandings of gender and desire beyond traditional cultural hierarchies. Shimauchi (2024) explores Japanese cyber-fandom of the Yaoi series,

focusing on fans' perceptions of Thailand and queerness. This study suggests that fandom experiences bridge Yaoi series narratives with real-world social issues, contributing to democratic discourse and promoting greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities in Japan.

While these prominent studies provide valuable insights into contemporary Yaoi culture, they primarily focus on Yaoi series, leaving room for further exploration of the historical development of Yaoi publishing. Thai Yaoi publishing emerged in Thailand in the 1990s, nearly two decades before the Yaoi series. Jiarattanakul (2007) pioneered research on early Thai Yaoi culture, exploring the initial phase when Japanese manga and Thai fanfiction were the primary products, and the fandom in Thailand was characterized by "Saow Y," or Thai Fujoshi.<sup>4</sup> This study also documented the inception of social resistance to Yaoi culture, leading to what is known as the Black Hole Period.

Vinitphol (2023) examines Thai Yaoi culture's development from the 1990s through its reimportation to Japan, contextualizing this evolution within Japan-Thailand cultural hybridity processes. Thai Yaoi originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s through Japanese Shojo manga influence. During this period, pioneering fan communities such as "ACHO"<sup>5</sup> emerged, engaging in illustration creation, fanfiction writing, and community networking.

Vinitphol divides its pre-Yaoi series trajectory into three periods. The Golden Age (2000-2005) saw growth in manga and novels, with "Doujinshi"<sup>6</sup> events and translations of Japanese BL expanding the market. The Dark Age (2005-2010) followed censorship and raids triggered by the TV program Black Hole, which labeled

<sup>4</sup> "Fujoshi" is a Japanese slang term referring to female fans of Yaoi or BL. It literally translates to "rotten girl," implying that women who enjoy male-male romantic relationships are considered unsuitable for marriage according to traditional social expectations.

<sup>5</sup> "ACHO" is a pioneering Yaoi fan group in Thailand that established their circle in 1994. The name ACHO derives from the names of four Japanese manga writers: Sayuri Amagi (A), CLAMP (C), Haduki Shinobu (H), and Minami Ozaki (O). ACHO members shared their favorite manga, novels, and illustrations within the

group and published amateur magazines and novels during the early 2000s. One ACHO member opened a Yaoi bookstore named Mod Dam in Siam Square, which was later shut down by police in 2007. For more detailed information about ACHO, see Vinitphol (2023).

<sup>6</sup> "Doujinshi" refers to self-published works in Japan, most commonly manga, novels, or art books, created by individuals or groups. The term derives from "doujin," meaning people who share common interests and collaborate on creative projects.

Yaoi as harmful. The Renaissance (2008-2014) marked recovery through self-censorship, age ratings, and online platforms that nurtured original Thai works and sales. This revival laid the foundation for *Love Sick the Series* (2014), which spurred the Yaoi series boom via digital TV and platforms like Line TV and YouTube. Additionally, Vinitphol identifies three key factors in Thai Yaoi culture's development: the proliferation of online novel websites, the rise of "Khu Chin" (shipping), and the digital television transition.

Vichayawannakul (2016) examines the processes of communication and cultural capital accumulation in Yaoi novel production, focusing on the interactions among Thai female writers. Jiemvijuck (2017) explores Japanization in Thailand through Johnny's Otaku activities, fanfiction, and cover dance during the 1990s and 2000s. Baudinette (2023) offers a concise history of Thai BL media and fandom, tracing its trajectory from the rise of Japanese BL manga to the boom of Yaoi series. However, this work relies largely on secondary sources and interviews with non-industry individuals, resulting in some inaccuracies in the account of the development process.

From the review of previous literature, a gap emerges in understanding the developmental process of Thai Yaoi culture. Except for Jiararattanakul (2007), Bunyavejchewin (2022), and Vinitphol (2023), most studies emphasize the success of the Yaoi series since 2014 while giving little attention to the period of suppression during the mid-2000s. Bunyavejchewin (2022) raises the important question of why homoerotic narratives such as Yaoi have been legally tolerated in Thailand since 2014, despite the country's relatively conservative social climate at the time. He suggests that this tolerance may be linked to shifting gender norms in Thai society.

While I agree with this perspective, it does not fully explain the emergence of Thai Yaoi's popularity during the 2010s. This paper argues that a more comprehensive explanation requires examining both shifting social conditions and the dynamic interactions within the Thai Yaoi publishing industry. These factors facilitated the transition of Yaoi culture from an underground movement into the public sphere and supported its establishment as an autonomous culture.

## Methodology

This historical research explores two key questions: 1) What social conditions influenced Thai Yaoi publishing? and 2) How did Yaoi publishers and writers navigate social constraints to transform Yaoi culture from underground to mainstream within the Thai publishing field? The methodology employs a descriptive approach based on documentary analysis, digital footprint examination, and in-depth interviews to investigate Thai Yaoi publishing's development.

Through analyzing paper and online documents alongside interviews with Yaoi publishers, this research traces how social constraints, state actions, and industry conditions shaped Yaoi publications. The analysis examines interactions between fan communities and publishers, individual backgrounds, the evolution from fan-based activities to amateur publishing ventures, mainstream market integration, and cultural production processes. This approach provides essential data for reconstructing Yaoi publishing's development in Thailand. Given the absence of official government records on Yaoi publishers, this study synthesizes diverse archival sources and digital evidence to map the industry's trajectory, as outlined below.

This research employs primary sources from the digital newspaper archives of the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, including *Thairath*, *Khaosod*, *Phuchatkan Raiwan*, and *Krungthep Thurakij*. In addition, online sources such as *MGR Online*, *Prachatai* and *Thuengluk Thuengkhon* are used to document public discourse and government responses to Yaoi culture during the censorship period. The study also draws on secondary sources, including TingThingsThink (2021), which features an interview with the owner of "That's Y bookstore," a pioneering Yaoi bookstore in the mid-2000s, and Jiararattanakul's (2007) pioneering thesis on Yaoi manga, which details the censorship era. These sources provide crucial contextual background and corroborate the findings derived from primary materials.

To demonstrate the early activities of Yaoi publishing, this research investigated digital footprints from Facebook pages of pioneer Yaoi novel publishers, including individual creators (Nigiri-Sushi, n.d.; TRomance, n.d.; Indigo, n.d) and publishing houses (Nabu Publishing, n.d.; Hermit Books, n.d; Bakery Book, n.d.; Zynestras, n.d.; 2belovebook, n.d.; Raikrob,

n.d.). Additionally, the study examined digital traces from early fan communities such as BL Market (n.d.) and Props&Ops (n.d.) to understand community dynamics and market development.

This study conducted interviews with representatives from four pioneering publishers: Saphan Publishing, Nabu Publishing, Bakery Books, and Hermit Books. These publishers commenced Yaoi novel publication prior to the mainstream boom. Participants were selected through the snowball sampling method. Brief introductions of these publishing houses are provided below.

Saphan Publishing is a pioneer in female homosexual romance, or Yuri, established in the 1990s. The founder of Saphan Publishing manages the business herself, serving as both editor and writer. Saphan Publishing published several Yuri novels until the boom of Yaoi culture in the 2010s and played a leading role in the protest movement against SE-ED<sup>7</sup> in 2012, when the chain bookstore announced its ban on literature depicting homosexual themes. One of her works, *Chan Maichai Arailoe Nokchak Khonthirakkhun: 3* [I'm nothing else but someone who loves you:3], a collection of female homosexual romance short stories, was seized by metropolitan police at the National Book Fair in 2008.

Nabu Publishing is a pioneering Yaoi publisher established in 2007. It launched several influential novels that were subsequently adapted into popular Yaoi series, including *Sotus* and *Nithan Phan Dao (A Tale of Thousand Stars)*. Building on this success, the company expanded internationally in 2016 by founding Taisei Book, which specializes in licensing foreign Yaoi content from Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan. Together, Nabu Publishing and Taisei Book produce over 10 titles annually, balancing translated Yaoi manga with original Thai works.

Bakery Books, a business unit of Chomromdek Publishing, pioneered the translation of Chinese Yaoi novels into Thai, most notably *Paramachan Latthiman (Demonic Path Ancestral Master, 2019)*. Chomromdek Publishing was founded by renowned Thai novelist

Botan, but the company's direction shifted when Botan's daughter, the second-generation owner, discovered Yaoi culture. An active participant in Yaoi community gatherings, she recognized the genre's potential after witnessing its emergence at the 2012 National Book Fair. Together with university colleagues, she launched Bakery Books to specialize in Yaoi publications. Drawing on her inherited knowledge of the publishing industry, she has sustained consistent Yaoi novel production from the company's founding through the present day.

Hermit Books, though managed by a small core team, maintains impressive production volume, publishing over 30 titles annually across original Thai novels, translations, and manga. Despite its medium size, the company commands a National Book Fair presence comparable to major publishers like Deep, Ever-Y, and Sense. Founded in 2010, Hermit Books achieved breakthrough success after its 2013 National Book Fair debut. The company's impact on Thai Yaoi culture is exemplified by *Dai Daeng (The Red Thread, 2018)*, which was adapted into the popular Yaoi series *Until We Meet Again (2019)*.

These interviews offered insider perspectives on strategic decisions, challenges, and opportunities that influenced Thai Yaoi publishing during pivotal transition periods. Integrated with paper and digital documentary sources, analysis of these publishers' development and interactions illuminates evolving social conditions and dynamic relationships with state authorities and the publishing industry.

## Development of Yaoi-publishing

### 1. The social constraints on Thai Yaoi publishing during the 2000s

The development of Yaoi culture in Thailand reflects the complex interplay between traditional values, censorship, and evolving social attitudes toward sexuality. Although homosexuality was historically stigmatized as non-normative, it was not explicitly criminalized under Thai law. From the late 20th century onward, increasing visibility of queer identities

<sup>7</sup> SE-ED is a large publishing conglomerate operating in publishing, distribution, and bookstore businesses. SE-ED's bookstore business operates more than 200

branches, mostly located in shopping malls throughout the country.

intersected with shifting social attitudes. However, in the 2000s, public concerns about explicit content's impact on youth morality triggered censorship campaigns, particularly targeting Japanese manga and Yaoi publications. These dynamics reveal how cultural suppression shaped Yaoi publishing's trajectory, as examined in Section 4.2.

### ***1.1 The background of constraint on homosexuality in Thailand***

Yaoi represents a unique expression of homosexuality that may conflict with the ethical norms of different countries. In Thailand, homosexuality has historically been viewed as non-normative, influenced by traditional beliefs. However, it has not been explicitly condemned as evil by religious doctrines or legal statutes, in contrast to some Western or Islamic societies. Buddhist scriptures, known as the "Tripitaka", contain numerous references to behaviors that could be interpreted as homosexual or transgender (Jackson, 1998). In secular society, homosexuality has been stigmatized as abnormal, but traditional Thai law did not explicitly criminalize it. Moreover, there is no documented history of punishment for homosexuality-related crimes (Romchapa, 2003).

Western medical discourse in the 1960s introduced explicit condemnation of homosexuality in Thai society. The notion of homosexuality as "degenerate" emerged from attempts to attribute it to hormonal and nervous system abnormalities. This perspective, prevalent among some urban middle-class populations, was heavily influenced by contemporary psychiatric knowledge. The late 1970s saw a significant shift in Western discourse on homosexuality, with the removal of its classification as a mental illness. A new wave of academics, influenced by recent Western theoretical movements such as postmodernism, feminism, and cultural studies, critiqued knowledge rooted in medical academia, creating new interpretations of gender and sexuality in Thai society. In addition, the 1990s saw a rise in homosexual representation in social spaces, with the emergence of gay characters in television series, films, stage plays, novels, and songs. The proliferation of gay establishments in major cities such as Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, and Phuket provided gay men with more opportunities to connect (Duengwiset, 2015).

Since the mid-1980s, publications addressing erotic expression and homosexuality in the Thai public sphere have become more liberal, reflecting a shift towards more open social attitudes regarding sexuality. Print media, particularly periodical magazines, played a significant role in helping gay men view themselves as not mentally ill. Gay magazines gradually emerged beginning the early 1980s, including titles such as "Mithuna [June]," "Morakot [Emerald]," "Neon," and "Midway." These gay magazines provided an open sphere for gay people to accept their own identity without self-denial.

Globalization in the early 2000s made queer identities more accessible, with the market serving as both a site of autonomy and subordination, offering freedom from heteronormative controls while exposing individuals to market uncertainties. This commercial sphere created a foundation for advancing queer rights. During the late 2000s, Thai queer individuals gained increasing recognition from businesses as legitimate consumers and from politicians as citizens deserving equal rights. This development reflected broader socio-economic and cultural changes linked to Thailand's integration into global networks (Jackson, 2011).

While attitudes toward homosexuality in Thai society gradually became more open in the late 20th century, some older generations and conservatives in positions of authority became more aware of sexuality's presence in society. Some even claimed that homosexual behavior was foreign to Thai society and introduced by Westerners, denying its previous existence in Thai culture (Jackson, 1995).

### ***1.2 Censorship of Japanese manga in Thailand***

This study reveals that explicit erotic content, rather than homosexual content alone, was the primary factor leading to Yaoi publications' ban in the 2000s. Censorship, intensifying in the mid-2000s, primarily targeted explicit content conflicting with Buddhist ethical principles central to Thai traditional values or "Thainess." This prompted strong state resistance, especially after the 2005 coup when conservative elites escalated censorship efforts.

While publications on homosexuality became more liberally tolerated, the focus of critique on proper sexual expression shifted from homosexual media to Japanese manga. Japanese manga has been published in

Thai society since the 1970s and gradually gained popularity in the late 1980s. Various Japanese manga genres have gained public popularity, including Boys' manga (Shonen), Girls' manga (Shojo), Young Adult manga (Seinen), and Adult manga (Seijin). The latter two categories typically contain sexual and violent themes, with Adult manga specifically featuring pornographic content. Adult manga, or pornographic manga for both male and female audiences, has prompted public discourse critiquing Japanese manga for its sexual and violent content within academic circles since 1990 (Yuwanakorn, 1990; Visutkul, 2000; Pongpakai, 2001). These concerns primarily focused on children, who were considered innocent and vulnerable, with fears that the content would lead them to engage in criminal activities

Over time, criticisms of Japanese manga intensified in Thai newspapers, notably escalating after the broadcast of *Crayon Shin Chan*<sup>8</sup> around 1997. Sensational headlines appeared, such as “Chinchang Hyaplon Dekthai Khlanghnak [Chinchan, the obscene manga]” (Khaosod, 1997, 1, 13), “Katunlamok Phaingiap Khong Yaowachon [Porn Manga: Silent Hazard for Youth]” (Krungthep Thurakij, 1997), “Katunlamok Rabatkhaio Wat [Porn Manga Found Circulating in Temples]” (Thairath, 1997, 1, 11, 19), and “Thatkatunlamok [Porn Manga Slave]” (Khaosod, 1998, 1, 16), fueling public anxieties. The Minister of Education's concern regarding this issue prompted police action, leading to the seizure of pornographic materials from several print sellers.

The Cultural Surveillance Centre was established in the 1990s to preserve and promote Thai culture and ethics. However, its direction changed significantly after 2000, displaying a strong ambition to suppress alternative and popular cultures, particularly imported foreign cultures. This shift was evident in its conservative motto, “Kanraksa Watthathum Khue Kanraksa Chat” (Preserving culture is preserving the nation), which supported its authority to purge cultures differing from its defined notion of Thainess

(Thungsuphachai, 2010). Other organizations, such as the “Samakhom Khropkhrua Opoun” (Warm Family Organization) and “Khruengkhai Faorawang Thang Watthanathum” (Cultural Surveillance Network), were also active in investigating and reporting children's activities involving explicit erotic expression and content.

The broadcast of the TV program “The Black Hole” (Lhum Dam) on August 27, 2005, marked a significant turning point that prompted action from the police and the Ministry of Culture. The episode titled “Katunsaiphannmai Khraipenyuea” (The New Genre of Manga: Who Are the Victims?) ignited moral panic by portraying Japanese manga as a corrupting influence, leading innocent youth into sexual misconduct and societal degradation. The program claimed that pornographic and homosexual content was prevalent in manga, asserting that “If you buy three mangas, you will find two of them to contain explicit sexual expression” (Thuenglukthuekhon, 2005). These provocative revelations sparked widespread parental anxiety, leading many to take drastic measures such as burning their children's manga collections, regardless of the actual content.

The discourse supporting the freedom of Yaoi fans faced significant opposition in Thai society. In 2006, Yanathron Jiararattanukul, a graduate student and Yaoi enthusiast, presented her research on the practices of Saow-Y (female Yaoi fans) at an academic conference. Her work aimed to reflect on the cultural struggle and gender politics within Thailand's patriarchal society. However, her presentation was met with strong disapproval from the public media (Jiararattanukul, 2007, 37).

This resistance was further exemplified by a controversial newspaper headline: “Poetchai Saoyaoi Khlang Katungay [Deep Interview with Gay Manga Obsessed Girl].” The article featured a harshly critical journalist who stated, “...this gender distance allows them the freedom to consume and write without inhibition, fostering a curiosity about sexuality without

<sup>8</sup> *Crayon Shin-chan* is a Japanese manga series written by Yoshito Usui since 1990. It is a Seinen manga and targeted at heterosexual audiences. *Crayon Shin-chan* received an anime adaptation that continues to this

day. It is known for its irreverent humor, satirical portrayal of family life, and occasionally crude jokes, which have made it both popular and controversial.

shame, including being lewd and rude; these women are not mentally normal” (Khaosod, 2006, 31).

The late 2000s marked a significant shift in the Thai state’s approach to addressing “improper media” (Sue Mai Mhoesom), with a particular focus on pornography. Previously, censorship responsibilities were primarily handled by the police. However, this period saw a transition of these commands to the Cultural Surveillance Centre and the Thai media committee, signaling a move towards a more centralized approach to media regulation (Thungsuphachai, 2010). This era was marked by numerous high-profile actions targeting various forms of media deemed inappropriate, with the most significant incident being the raid on books at the National Book Fair.

The shift in censorship responsibility coincided with Paiboon Wattanasiritham’s rise to power. This prominent conservative served as Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs and President of the Thai Media Committee during the Junta government (2006-2008). In 2007, Paiboon initiated an investigation into the National Book Fair at Queen Sirikit Convention Center, uncovering a significant pornographic manga presence (MGR Online, 2007a). This set a precedent for subsequent actions. Between 2007 and 2008, police inspections targeted “suspicious” printed materials, expanding beyond pornography to include homosexual themes and romantic fiction.

Following Paiboon’s concerns, Thai authorities intensified efforts to seize inappropriate media. The Metropolitan Police, Cultural Surveillance Centre, and Ministry of ICT conducted bookstore raids between 2007 and 2008. On July 18, 2007, Akiba manga store in Siam Square was raided, with numerous licensed titles from publishers like Siam Inter and Vibulkij confiscated. On November 30, 2007, three Yaoi bookstores, Moddum, Moddaeng, and That’s Y, were raided for selling male-male sexual content in Japanese, Chinese, and Thai (MGR Online, 2007b). The private sector also restricted sexual expression during this period. After the 2007 raids, Siam Inter suspended distribution of 20 seized manga titles. In 2012, SE-ED stopped accepting “literature depicting gay, lesbian, or other homosexual themes” across its over 400 stores (MGR Online, 2012).

During the 2000s, Yaoi producers and fans faced their significant challenges. Despite growing popularity,

political and cultural pressures led to heightened censorship from state authorities and the media industry. This forced producers underground, limiting distribution channels and creating economic constraints. Consequently, Yaoi fans and producers had to exercise greater caution, often resorting to online platforms or unofficial channels to reach their audience and continue their activities.

## **2. From underground to popular culture: Development of Yaoi-publishing**

Under the political and social pressures outlined in Section 4.1.2, how did Yaoi publishers and writers achieve success in the mid-2010s? Vinitphol (2023) explains that this success occurred because publishers implemented age-rating systems starting in 2008, coinciding with the rise of social media and shipping culture. However, these actions alone seem insufficient to explain the increased tolerance for Yaoi culture exhibited by both Thai state officials and the media industry during the widespread presence of Yaoi novels in the first half of the 2010s. I argue that this development resulted from Yaoi publishers’ and writers’ successful adaptation of their practices to navigate social constraints within the publishing field. Additionally, broader economic and political changes beyond the industry supported this development, enabling Yaoi publishing’s transition into the public sphere.

### ***2.1 The genesis of Yaoi publishing (1994-2005)***

During this period, Yaoi publishing was limited to small groups and had not yet entered the national market. The sale of Yaoi publications was mostly confined to small communities, primarily in Bangkok. The key actors were manga publishers and passionate fans who operated with distinct characteristics. The first group, including Love Book, CN, Rizza, Wow Comic, and Nebura, were pioneer manga publishers that emerged in the mid-1990s, producing unlicensed Japanese BL manga. These publications were characterized by poor print quality and low prices, typically around 35 baht (1 US dollar).

The latter group consists of enthusiastic fans who published both original and fanfiction, often through handmade processes in the early years. One notable example is *Dead Wind*, a handmade Yaoi novel

published by a former member of a pioneer fan group, ACHO, in 1999. According to the ex-member, they wrote the manuscript themselves and produced a limited run of approximately 250 copies using a copy machine. The book cover was hand-drawn, and the binding was done at a copy shop rather than a formal printing press. *Dead Wind* was sold at a relatively high price of 110 baht. This handmade approach was typical for Yaoi novels produced by fan groups.

However, the Yaoi market gradually expanded as the number of Yaoi fans increased. Since 2000, several Yaoi bookstores have emerged in Bangkok, such as *Y are Us*, *Mod Dam*, *Ozone*, and *That's Y*. These bookstores, mostly located in Siam Square, provided spaces for Yaoi fans to access Yaoi publications in physical locations. They also published popular content, consisting of pirated Japanese manga and novels. However, due to societal attitudes at the time, the sale of Yaoi manga was not as openly accepted. Bookstores often treated Yaoi manga with discretion, placing them in inconspicuous areas (TingThingsThink 2021).

The rise of internet platforms played a crucial role in supporting the production efforts of fan groups and catalyzing the growth of Yaoi publishing in Thailand. In the early 2000s, various web boards such as *Exteen*, *Raikhowphot*, or *Fu*, which catered to Doujinshi manga enthusiasts,<sup>9</sup> and *SQ28*, *Saphan*, or *Lesla*, which served the LGBTQ+ community,<sup>10</sup> became popular. These online communities provided spaces for members to connect, share their passions, and exchange diverse content, from pirated international manga and original novels to fanfiction and Doujinshi manga. Beyond facilitating cultural exchange, these platforms enabled fans to gauge market demand and preferences within the community while serving as incubators for potentially publishable content. Interviews reveal that many founders of pioneering Yaoi publishers gained experience in self-publishing through these web boards.

While professional publishers launched Yaoi manga at a massive scale through commercial printing houses, passionate fans self-published their favorite works through handmade production due to limited economies of scale and publishing experience. Around

2000, commercial book printing required minimum orders of 1,000-2,000 copies to achieve break-even, constrained by offset printing technology's reliance on metal plates. This minimum order volume far exceeded demand within the early Yaoi fiction market, compelling fans to adopt handmade production methods centered primarily on copy shops.

Figure 1 shows a sample of a handmade Thai Yaoi novel from the first half of the 2000s. *Sweet Baby*, written by Zax and self-published in 2004, sold for 200 baht. The cover page of *Sweet Baby* features handwritten illustrations, and the entire book was printed from copy machines or printers in low quality. According to this research investigation, this handmade production existed until 2004.

Alongside the growth of Japanese culture fan communities, an informal market for Yaoi publications showed signs of early expansion since 2001. These events featured diverse content, including manga, animation, games, doujinshi, and cosplay. Major players in the popular culture industry-initiated pioneer events such as "Vibulkij Comic Party" (by Vibulkij), "Boom Japanese Festival" (by Nation Edutainment), and "RO Fun Fair" (by Asia Soft), which began at least as early as 2002. Over time, various events appeared, driven by engagement from diverse fan groups, including "Cartoon & Animation," "Comic Market Thailand," "Doujinshi Festival," "Comic Party," and "Capsule Event" (Propops, n.d.). While there is no explicit evidence that Yaoi culture had established its fan events during this period, Yaoi manga and fanfiction were present at many doujinshi events, integrated with other aspects of Japanese culture.

Since at least 2004, Yaoi publications have gained public attention, even though they are viewed with suspicion. A report by *Phuchatkan Raiwan* highlighted the growth of the Yaoi publishing market with a headline reading, "Thuathon Lae Phuenthi Khong 'Gay' Nai Lok Wannakham [Identity and Space of Gay in the Literature World]." The article used the term "Gay" instead of "Yaoi" and labeled Yaoi novels as "Wannakham Chaikhop" (periphery literature) because "society still views this type of literature as morally and

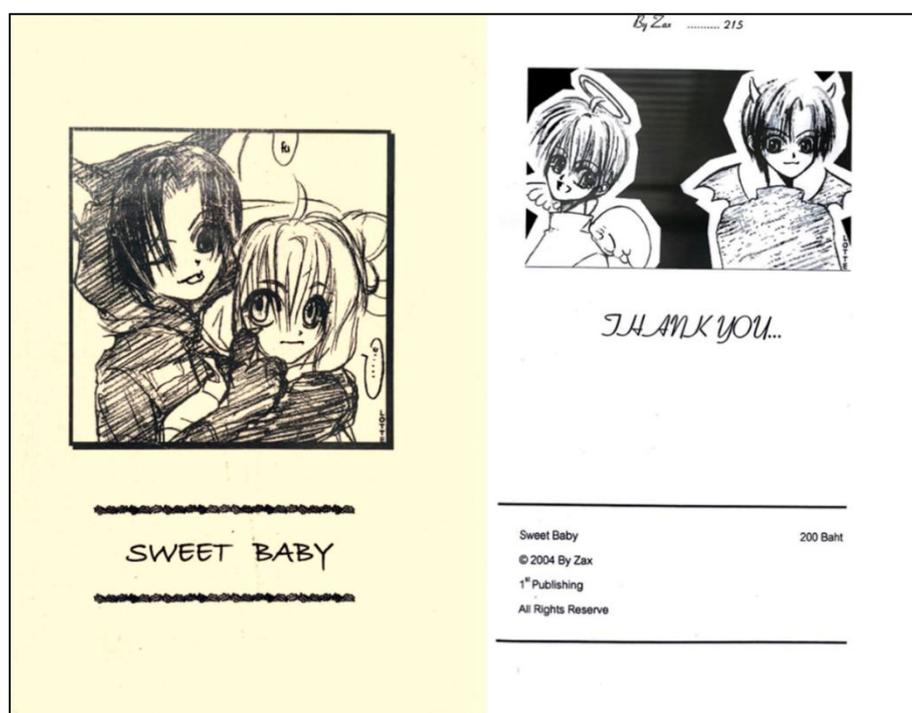
<sup>9</sup> Interview with an editor of Hermit Books in July 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with an editor of Saphan Publishing in July 2023.

ethically prohibited due to its “abnormal” sexual expressions.” Despite this, the report acknowledged a booming market for Yaoi, predicting continued growth for 5-10 years, and noted the increasing visibility of gay storylines in TV series, suggesting a shift toward greater societal acceptance (Phuchatkan Raiwan, 2004).

During this pioneering period, writers who were Yaoi fans cultivated their creative skills and business practices through emerging internet platforms. Web

boards served as virtual communities, facilitating communication and strengthening relationships that evolved into social capital. This social capital was then utilized to produce tangible products outside these virtual spaces, even when initial profits were minimal. Some writers and fans continued their roles as Yaoi novel producers and later became professional publishers.



**Figure 1** Cover and credit pages of *Sweet Baby*, a handmade Thai Yaoi novel, published in 2004  
**Source:** Zax (2004)

## 2. 2 *The communities of underground Yaoi culture (2005-2012)*

As Yaoi publications gained popularity in the mid-2000s, government officials increasingly inspected them as improper media, particularly Yaoi manga. This intensified after the Black Hole incident in 2005, leading to police raids and several bookstore closures. Despite crackdowns, resilient producers returned to trade more cautiously. Many bookstores adapted by implementing membership systems to screen outsiders, using questionnaires that filtered out state officers. Only registered members could conduct transactions and receive orders in concealed areas like shop backs. This ensured only trusted individuals accessed content while

providing protection against police action. Sellers remained vigilant, ready to quickly evacuate books during raids. This membership screening system was also adopted on web boards to maintain online Yaoi community privacy and security against external threats.

While on-ground trading for Yaoi publications faced tight monitoring, the online world offered new opportunities for survival and growth. General web boards gradually transformed into specialized communities for writers, creating nurturing environments for amateur authors and havens for Yaoi fans. The rapid development of online publishing communities was fueled by the emergence of specialized writer websites like Dek-D, Thaiboyslove (Loa Ped), Tunwalai, and Joylada. Initially established

in the 2000s, these platforms evolved to cater specifically to writers, offering a dedicated space for the growth and exchange of Yaoi content.<sup>11</sup>

The rise of specialized novel writer websites facilitated communication and online publishing among Yaoi fans. This period marked the emergence of amateur publishers who began producing their own fanfiction or original novel based on writer websites. These amateur publishers established themselves either as individual writers using pen names like Nigiri-Sushi, TRomance, Indigo, and Jubjib, or as groups under publisher names such as Nabu Publishing, Hermit Books, Bakery Book, Zynestras ( NaNA Naris) , 2belovebook, or Raikrob. These amateur publishers are considered pioneers of the current generation, as many continued their activities well until the global popularity of Yaoi culture, unlike earlier publishers that quickly faded within 3 to 5 years.

The advancement of printing technology significantly bolstered Yaoi publishing activities among fans, particularly in the latter half of the 2000s. The introduction of digital offset printing technology revolutionized the industry. This new technology utilized a computer-to-printer system, eliminating the need for separate metal plates and allowing for smaller print runs of hundreds of copies, which perfectly suited the needs of the Yaoi community. One of the most popular print shops for Yaoi fans during this period was “Rabbit Printing,” located in northern Bangkok.<sup>12</sup> As digital printing became more widespread, it gradually replaced the handmade production process at copy shops.

During this period, creators began by uploading their work to writer websites, and if they gained popularity among online fans, they often expanded into publishing physical books. These amateur publishers leveraged newly developed online channels and print-

on-demand technology (POD), typically producing 300-500 copies at a time. Furthermore, the quality of printed books had significantly improved, with more visually appealing covers and interior pages thanks to advances in POD. Front covers featured either sharp, printed graphics or beautifully drawn images of male protagonists, enhancing the books’ attractiveness.

Figure 2 shows a sample of early digitally printed Thai Yaoi novels. *One Night Gigolo*, written by Jasmine, was sequentially posted on the internet until 2003. It was officially published by Majo Novel in 2005 with beautiful color illustrations on the cover page, high-quality paper, and proper page layout arrangement. Majo Novel does not indicate the price of this novel, but other Yaoi novels with this quality standard sold for around 200-300 baht during that period. *One Night Gigolo* exemplifies the late 2000s Thai Yaoi publishing standard, which nearly matched current quality. However, both *Sweet Baby*, mentioned in Section 4.2.1, and *One Night Gigolo* lack ISBN registration, suggesting both publications operated outside official state authorization.<sup>13</sup>

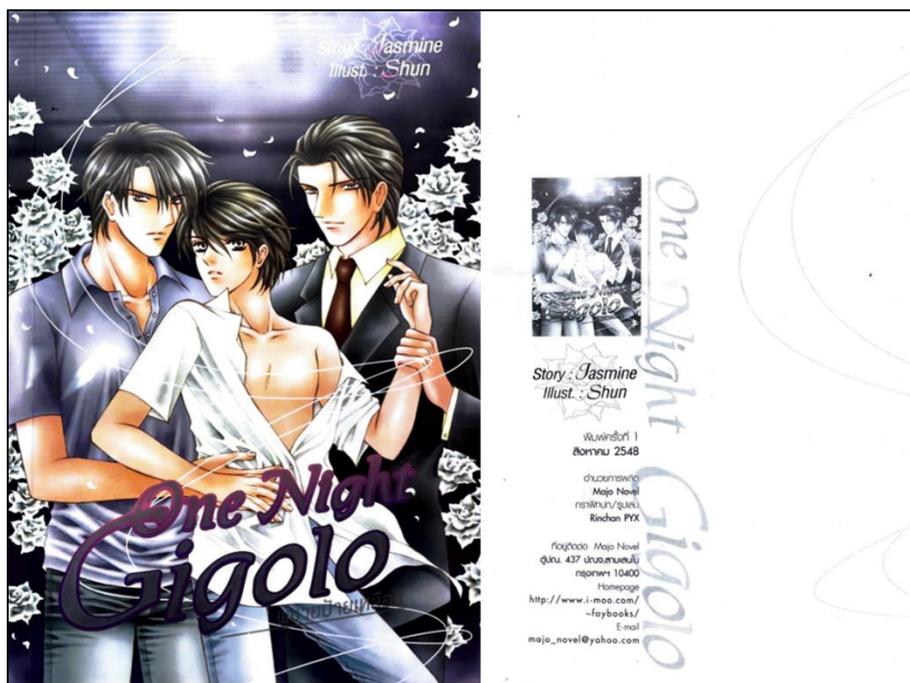
Moreover, while severe police raids prompted caution among bookstores, they did not significantly affect the semi-public events attended by passionate fans. Fan market events served as physical channels for online creators to showcase and sell their books. Despite government suppression after the 2005 Black Hole incident, fan events continued to operate. These evolved into more diverse gatherings, including Comic Market, Comic Party, Comicon Road, Capsule Event, and Comic Season (Propops n.d.), which featured varied content such as cosplay, manga, J-Rock, doujinshi, and Yaoi publications. This research identified a specific fan market event focused on novels, known as “Fiction Market.”

<sup>11</sup> Interview with editors of Hermit Books and Nabu Publishing in July and November 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with an editor of Hermit Books in July 2023.

<sup>13</sup> While *Sweet Baby* was published in 2004, this paper does not suggest that digital printing technology

advanced abruptly within one year. Adoption may have depended on several factors, particularly the producer's capital. Individual amateur writers like Zax may represent late adopters of handmade production, whereas Majo Novel represents early amateur publishers adopting digital printing technology.



**Figure 2** Cover and credit pages of *One Night Gigolo*, Thai Yaoi novel published in 2005  
**Source:** Jasmine (2005)

**Table 1** Registered booths at fiction market (2013-2018) by genre

Genre	#3	#4	#5	#6	Mini#1	Mini#2	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	Total
	Jan 13	Sep 13	Mar 14	Oct 14	Mar 15	Nov 15	Apr 16	Oct 16	Mar 17	Nov 17	May 18	
Korean Fan-Fic	80	-	-	102	-	47	-	39	37	-	19	324
Dojin	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	0	-	5	5
Yaoi-Thai	2	-	-	12	-	14	-	16	19	-	33	96
Yaoi-Translate	0	-	-	0	-	0	-	4	1	-	0	5
Gift	18	-	-	18	-	6	-	4	4	-	4	54
Other	2	-	-	2	-	3	-	3	3	-	3	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>500</b>

**Source:** (BL Market 2013, 2014b, 2015a, 2016, 2017, 2018)

**Note:**

- 1) Korean fanfiction booths featured content related to popular K-pop boy bands such as EXO, Super Junior (SJ), TVXQ or B2ST.
- 2) Data for the 4th, 5th, 7th, and 10th Fiction Markets, as well as the 1st Mini Fiction Market, is not available.
- 3) Fiction Market event was rebranded as BL Market in 2018.
- 4) “Other” indicates booths operated by the event’s organizers.

Fiction Market is a marketplace where passionate fans showcase and sell their creations, including fanfiction, original novels, and character-themed gifts. Although the exact starting year of this event is unclear, it likely began in the late 2000s. Most vendors are amateur publishers and writers with self-publishing

experience, typically selling their work through online communities. In addition to books and gifts, this event also features K-pop idol cover dance performances, predominantly by young teenage boys. In 2012, the market hosted around 70 booths and was held twice a year in small event halls, initially at the Thai Chinese

Chamber of Commerce and later at Saint Louis Hospital. The entrance fee was 60 baht, while booth fees are 500 baht. Fiction Market attracts several thousand attendees, highlighting its popularity and the strong demand within this niche community (BL Market, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a).

In the early years of Fiction Market, K-pop fanfiction was the dominant content sold rather than Thai Yaoi novels. Table 1 illustrates the genre distribution of booths at these events. At the 3rd Fiction Market in 2013, K-pop fanfiction dominated with 80 booths (80%) compared to only 2 booths (2%) dedicated to Thai Yaoi novels. However, by the 11th Fiction Market in 2018, this trend had reversed. K-pop fanfiction booths had declined to 19 (30%), while Thai Yaoi novels surged to 33 booths (52%). These shifts reflect the evolution of original Thai Yaoi novels in Thailand during the 2010s<sup>14</sup>.

The event organizers exercised caution regarding government inspections, which was evident in Fiction Market's rules. Initially, the organizers prohibited the sale of Yaoi manga, NC manga, doujinshi manga, and even translated Yaoi novels. They also required attendees to present ID cards to verify their age if they wished to purchase Yaoi products, which were generally restricted to individuals over 18 years old. This cautious approach aimed to prevent the event from being classified as a pornographic gathering. However, over time, the organizers allowed the sale of translated Yaoi novels and Doujinshi manga (BL Market, 2015b).

This approach significantly impacted the Thai Yaoi publishing transformation. Aware of legal risks and societal norms, Yaoi fans and amateur publishers began self-regulating content, establishing rating standards and avoiding scrutinized materials like erotic manga illustrations, which were more conspicuous than

text-based novels. Until 2018, Yaoi manga, including doujinshi, were often prohibited and difficult to circulate publicly, even in semi-public spaces like Fiction Market. This led to cultural production transformation, slowing Yaoi manga development while allowing Yaoi novels to thrive. Online communities and platforms like Dek-D played crucial gatekeeping roles, guiding Yaoi culture's shift from manga to novels. Early Yaoi novel writers carefully negotiated religious norms and political ideologies, generally avoiding themes challenging Buddhist principles or critiquing the monarchy until student protests erupted in the 2020s.

During this period, government suppression pushed Yaoi culture online, where it flourished through improved website communication. Growing fan bases and POD advancements sparked market expansion. Semi-public fan events became profitable marketplaces worth millions of baht, attracting thousands of attendees. Amateur Yaoi writers and publishers transformed cultural knowledge and social networks, or social capital, into economic capital via these channels. Consequently, social constraints prompted a shift from Yaoi manga to novels, broadening Yaoi culture's mass market reach by the mid-2010s.

### ***2.3 The popularization of Yaoi publishing (2012-2015)***

The publishing field became less restricted, leading to the emergence of Yaoi publishing in the mass market. As online and semi-public markets continued to grow, amateur Yaoi publishers such as Nabu Publishing and 2belovebook<sup>15</sup> successfully entered the National Book Fair in 2012, achieving significant sales success. This success triggered a boom in Yaoi publishing in subsequent years (Nabu Publishing, 2012; 2belovebook, 2012).

Publishing. Its work concentrated on original Yaoi novels but demonstrated diverse cultural interests, including Japanese-style cosplay to promote sales at the National Book Fair, publishing Chinese-themed novels by Thai writers, and Thai Yuri novels. Its representative writers include Muggle, Aki Kaze, Alaia, and Silence Forest. 2belovebook became inactive in 2021, making it unavailable for interview.

<sup>14</sup> However, this does not imply that K-pop culture had more influence than Japanese culture in the 2000s. Events like Comic Party, Capsule Event, or Comicon Road were primarily centered around cosplay of Japanese anime and games. This study selects Fiction Market as a representative example due to the availability of data.

<sup>15</sup> 2belovebook is one of the pioneering Yaoi publishers, founded by Yaoi fans and writers alongside Nabu

Before their National Book Fair debut, amateur Yaoi publishers aimed to expand through physical channels, however major chains like SE-ED, Naiin<sup>16</sup>, and B2S<sup>17</sup> hesitated to accept Yaoi novels. Most 2000s fan events occurred in Bangkok, making rural showcasing difficult. While online orders existed, delivery fees were high. Until 2014, Yaoi publishers distributed their products to standalone bookstores in department stores and Siam Square, including Toonzone and That's Y, and local bookstores in provinces like Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Chonburi, Khon Kaen, Ubon Ratchathani, and Nakhon Ratchasima (Nabu Publishing, 2013).

Recognizing demand beyond online, amateur publishers sought National Book Fair access. This event, organized by the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT), is a major marketplace for professional publishers. Securing booths requires PUBAT membership, which needs existing member recommendations, a requirement that restricts new entrepreneurs without publishing backgrounds.

Nabu Publishing entered by initially selling Yaoi novels at Chomromdek Publishing's booth. This succeeded through social capital built within Yaoi online communities. Rather than approaching the owner, Botan, directly, Nabu's editor contacted Botan's daughter through Yaoi online communities.<sup>18</sup> In October 2012, Nabu began selling at Chomromdek Publishing's booth (Y18) and operated its own booth at the March 2014 fair (Nabu Publishing, 2014a). 2belovebook entered simultaneously, while Hermit Books began at Saphan Publishing House in March 2013 and then established its own booth in 2016 (2belovebook, 2012; Hermit Books, 2016). The debut

of Yaoi novels at the National Book Fair generated considerable attention, resulting in long customer lines that left staff with little rest during the early years.<sup>19</sup>

As the market recognized the profitability of Yaoi novel, their distribution expanded into major retail channels. Nabu Publishing began with Book Friend (Nabu Publishing, 2014b), followed by B2S (Nabu Publishing, 2015) and Naiin (Nabu Publishing, 2016). Specialized marketplaces for Yaoi novels, often labeled with the letter "Y" in their event names, emerged starting in 2014, such as Ydisplay, One-Y-day, BL Extra Fair, and Gen-Y Trade Area. Yaoi novels also appeared at provincial marketplace events like the Korat Night Book Fair, Udon Thani Book Fair, Isan Book Fair, Southern Book Fair, and Independent Book Fair (Sapda Rannhangsue Isara), and even university-hosted events such as the CMU Book Fair. This broadening presence of Yaoi novels in public spaces indicates their growing acceptance within Thai society.

Nevertheless, how did this boom of Yaoi novels emerge just a decade after the 2005 purge of Japanese BL manga? Beyond the Yaoi fan community and publishing developments, I propose that crucial external support from the broader publishing industry facilitated this phenomenon. A shift in the publishing industry's attitude toward LGBTQ+ content has played a pivotal role in supporting its growth in the domestic mass market, at least since 2008.

Unlike government officials, PUBAT did not actively enforce censorship requests related to LGBTQ+ publications, including Yaoi contents. PUBAT's neutral stance became particularly evident after Paiboon's crackdown in 2007, which led to raids on erotic manga and books at the National Book Fair. In response, since 2008, PUBAT has negotiated with the metropolitan

<sup>16</sup> Naiin Bookstore is a major bookstore chain owned by Amarin Corporation, a large Thai media conglomerate. Amarin Corporation operates three main businesses: 1) producing printed works and book retail; 2) exhibition organization and multimedia advertising services; and 3) television content production. Naiin Bookstore operates approximately 100 branches, primarily located in major shopping malls across the country.

<sup>17</sup> B2S is a Thai lifestyle bookstore chain operated by Central Retail Group. It offers a wide range of products,

including books, stationery, art supplies, educational toys, IT gadgets, and gifts. B2S operates around 130 stores primarily located within department stores of Central Retail Group.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with an editor of Nabu Publishing and Bakery Books in November and December 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with an editor of Nabu Publishing in November 2023.

police to alter their approach. Rather than seizing sellers at the fair, authorities would collect suspicious books for investigation and request a prohibition only if the content was deemed improper. An interview with Charan Homtientong, the former president of PUBAT (2013-2015), and committee members from 2008 reveals that the association has consistently maintained a neutral position, ensuring that political issues do not interfere with freedom of expression within the publishing industry.<sup>20</sup>

Further evidence of the industry's shifting stance is the movement supporting free speech led by small publishers. Following the 2006 coup, a network of small publishers became active advocates for freedom of expression. This movement had a notable impact in November 2012 when SE-ED, Thailand's largest bookstore chain, declared it would cease accepting literature with homosexual content. The decision suddenly faced backlash from small publishers, writers, and readers. Saphan Publishing and other individuals publicly condemned SE-ED's policy and pledged to withdraw their support from the bookstore chain. They also created a Facebook page titled "Khatkhan Khokamhnot Mai Chamnhai Nhangsue Chai Rak Chai/ Ying Rak Ying Nai Rannhangsue SE-ED" (Opposition to SE-ED Bookstore's Ban on Books Depicting Homosexual Relationships) to mobilize online resistance.<sup>21</sup> In response, SE-ED issued an apology, stating that its intent was to regulate pornographic content, not to discriminate against sexual diversity (SE-ED, 2012).

This publishing industry support aligned with the social climate toward the Thai LGBTQ+ community that Jackson (2011) described. During the late 2000s, while the globalization market offered Thai queer people some autonomy from heteronormative state control, they remained tolerated but marginalized. Public incidents of discrimination and condemnation against queer individuals continued to occur. These incidents prompted activists and NGOs like Bangkok

Rainbow to initiate campaigns protecting LGBTQ+ freedom of expression and legal rights. The successful boycott of SE-ED chain bookstores exemplified this liberal tendency.

In addition, beyond the publishing industry, the easing of inspections on LGBTQ+ themed publications also contributed to the Yaoi novel boom. Although the exact reasons for this shift are not entirely clear, evidence suggests that Thai authorities began to alter their focus around 2010. This change was influenced by the political climate following the 2011 coup, during which the monarchy and military junta became more sensitive and prioritized political issues (Prachatai, 2023). With limited resources, the metropolitan police may have chosen to concentrate on these charged issues, resulting in reduced scrutiny of the Yaoi novel.

Interviews with the editor of Saphan Publishing, whose books were raided at the 2008 National Book Fair, reveal that unless content related to homosexuality and pornography becomes publicly scandalous, such as in the Black Hole incident of 2005, or receives direct orders from high-ranking officials, the metropolitan police generally prioritize other issues. This was evident in the 2007 case involving Paiboon, where direct intervention led to a crackdown on Japanese manga at the 2007 National Book Fair. However, in the absence of such orders, enforcement of laws concerning erotic publications has tended to be more lenient, especially after Paiboon's resignation from his political position in 2008.<sup>22</sup>

Another critical shift occurred within the Cultural Surveillance Division, which, since 2013, has redirected its focus from traditional printed materials to digital media and social networks. This change reflects the growing influence of digital platforms and the need for more stringent regulation of online content. Consequently, printed materials, including Yaoi novels, have faced less scrutiny, allowing for greater freedom in publishing<sup>23</sup>. This contrasts with the simultaneous reemergence of Yaoi culture in the physical world

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Charan Homtientong, the former president of PUBAT in October 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with an editor of Saphan Publishing in July 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with an editor of Saphan Publishing in July 2023.

<sup>23</sup> This conclusion is drawn from the content of a memorial book on the 10-year anniversary of the Cultural Surveillance Division, written by its director,

during the same period, indicating an acknowledgement of the evolving landscape of content creation and consumption.

The combination of these external factors and the growth of Yaoi communities have made Yaoi novels a potentially profitable product in the mass market. As a result, not only amateur publishers from online communities but also professional publishers, such as Deep, EverY, and Sense Books, have entered the Yaoi publishing field since 2015. Deep, a subsidiary of Sataporn Books, a large publisher known for romantic novels and TV drama adaptations, has joined the market. Jamsai, a pioneer in teenage novels that started selling books through online channels in 2000, has been early involved with Yaoi communities and eventually established its own brand, EverY, in 2015. Sense Books, a newcomer established in 2015, has also made a mark in the Yaoi market, consistently issuing popular titles.

As a result, this paper argues that Yaoi novels' mass market emergence (2013-2015) directly enabled the standardization of Yaoi series production in 2016. While *Love Sick the Series (2014)* stands as a milestone in Thai Yaoi series, the period from 2009 to 2016 saw film producers experimenting extensively to establish successful formats for Yaoi content. Early attempts to cultivate same-sex shipping culture among fans included *Sengped (2009)*, *Timeline (2012)*, *Hormones: The Series (2013-2015)*, *Love O-net (2014)*, *WIFI Society (2015)*, *Club Friday The Series (2016-2017)*, and *Senior Secret Love (2016)*. These productions employed diverse strategies, adapting internet stories, creating short films or single-episode dramas with secondary homosexual protagonists (Sub-Yaoi content), or remaking previous gay films with heightened romantic and brighter tones.<sup>24</sup> After *Sotus* achieved breakthrough success in 2016, the industry standardized Yaoi series production around novel adaptations, with more than half of success series adapting popular published works. This approach benefits from built-in fan engagement, as devoted novel readers eagerly

anticipate adaptations, though significant deviations from original novels often spark criticism.

Following the domestic and international success of Yaoi series such as *Sotus*, *TharnType (2019)*, and *2gether (2020)*, the Thai government formally recognized Yaoi culture and implemented policies promoting it as national soft power.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the transformation of Thai Yaoi publishing from underground manga to popular novels, focusing on the economic, political, and cultural dynamics within the publishing field from 1994 to 2015. The development of Thai Yaoi publishing reflects the dynamic interplay between censorship, fan communities, and shifting social values in contemporary Thailand. This study reveals that Yaoi culture, initially marginalized under conservative social norms, negotiated a complex developmental path characterized by societal resistance and fan-driven adaptation strategies. Although targeted by censorship during the 2000s, Yaoi publishing persisted and transformed into popular novels in the mass market by 2013. This transformation laid the foundation for Yaoi series standardization since 2016.

The transformation of Yaoi publishing exemplifies how marginalized cultural practices can negotiate legitimacy within restrictive socio-political contexts. The findings reveal that Yaoi manga and novels were prohibited not solely for their homosexual content but primarily because of their explicit erotic content. Socio-political constraints significantly shaped the Yaoi publishing field, demonstrating how external forces historically influenced Yaoi publishing's growth and development.

Compared to the early rise of Japanese BL manga in the 1990s, socio-economic shifts in the 2000s provided Yaoi publishers greater freedom to produce and distribute novels with less interference. The emergence of online platforms, digital printing, and

---

Latda Thungsuphachai (Thungsuphachai, 2010), and from tracked activities posted on the Facebook page of the Cultural Surveillance Division during 2012-2015 (Cultural Surveillance Division, n.d.).

<sup>24</sup>Club Friday and Rak Ching Ping Goe are radio and television programs featuring secret love stories, including homosexual relationships. Popular stories from these programs were adapted into short films or single-episode dramas during 2013-2016.

social media facilitated new forms of participation, enabling amateur creators to publish, distribute, and engage with fans. These digital affordances empowered marginalized voices and established online Yaoi communities that subsequently manifested in physical spaces through fan events. These changing circumstances provided crucial foundations enabling fans to navigate the political and social constraints.

Passionate Yaoi fans, acting as amateur writers and publishers, successfully accumulated cultural knowledge and publishing expertise. They developed a deep understanding of the genre and its audience, while extensive networks with fans and industry partners strengthened their social capital. With publishing industry support and relaxed censorship, amateur Yaoi publishers gradually expanded, securing economic capital for production and transforming Yaoi novels into profitable cultural products. These developments signified both the resilience of Yaoi communities and the progressive normalization of queer representation within Thai media.

The transformation of Yaoi publishing from underground manga to mainstream novels following the National Book Fair significantly influenced the film industry. This paper argues that Yaoi novels' mass market rise (2013-2015) laid the foundation for Yaoi series standardization in 2016. While film producers experimented with diverse production methods during 2009- 2016 to generate same- sex couple shipping culture, the success of novel-based adaptations led to production standardization. This development highlights the significance of publishing culture and fan communities. Fans function not only as consumers, but as active creators driven by passion, with the publishing field serving as their primary entry point — an aspect often overlooked in contemporary Yaoi media production discourse.

Future research should investigate the impact of other media influences, such as K- pop and Thai television programs, on Thai Yaoi culture. Additionally, interviews with the Cultural Surveillance Division could provide insights into the censorship relaxation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving Yaoi's popularity in Thailand.

### Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

The author used Claude ( Anthropic) and Grammarly AI for English language editing and grammar correction only. The author reviewed all content and takes full responsibility for this publication.

### CRedit author statement

The author would like to thank Saphan Publishing, Nabu Publishing, Bakery Books, and Hermit Books for their kind cooperation during the interview investigations.

This paper was supported by the Ratchadapiseksompotch Fund, Chulalongkorn University.

### References

- Bakery Book. (n.d.). *Bakery Book Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/Bakerybook/?locale=h\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/Bakerybook/?locale=h_TH)
- Baudinette, T. (2019). Lovesick, the series: Adapting Japanese 'Boys Love' to Thailand and the creation of a new genre of queer media. *Southeast Asia Research*, 27(2), 115-132.
- Baudinette, T. (2023). *Boys love media in Thailand: Celebrity, fans, and transnational Asian queer popular culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- BL Market. (n.d.). *BL Market facebook page*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MiniBLMarket/>
- BL Market. (2012a). *Booth booking information*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DAvabk6fd/>
- BL Market. (2012b). *Entrance ticket information*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19hRBkNb4y/>
- BL Market. (2013). *Updated information of booth layout and book list*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/16rJSpaisb/>
- BL Market. (2014a). *Fast book promotion for fiction-market#5*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=568796056537368&set=a.313182645432045>.
- BL Market. (2014b). *Booth layout of Fiction Market#6*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1E>

- BL Market. (2015a). *Booth layout of Mini Fiction Market#2*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/1GN1DpEZhg/JKT75RUj/>
- BL Market. (2015b). *Booth Booking Rules for Fiction-Market#7*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/MiniBLMarket/posts/pfbid0iAn4C2vNXfvoso7jt2Mu2GEVrmj7xDHekbhBexwFYpfTd9iq5eG6puWk1YJXoPDFI>
- BL Market. (2016). *Booth layout of Fiction Market#8*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/yrqp5RefGMm7XMAA/>
- BL Market. (2017). *Booth layout of Fiction Market#9*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/14NpoKM2ZNNW/>
- BL Market. (2018). *Booth layout of Fiction Market#11*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Yj8veDyQH/>
- Bunyavejchewin, P. (2022). *The queer if limited effect of boys love manga fandom in Thailand* (pp. 181-193). In Welker, J. (Ed.). *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*. Honolulu, Thailand: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bunyavejchewin, P., & Sukthungthong, N. (2021). *Lok Khong Wai* [World of Y]. Phatumthani, Thailand: Thammasat University Press.
- Cultural Surveillance Division. (n.d.). *Cultural surveillance division Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/CMe.FanPage/?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/CMe.FanPage/?locale=th_TH)
- Duengwiset, N. (2015). *Kansuksa Gay Nai Sangkhom Thai: Ha thotsawat Khong Kansang Khamru* [Understanding Gay Identity in Thai Society: Five Decades of Knowledge Formation]. Retrieved from <https://anthropology-concepts.sac.or.th/articles/6>
- Fujimoto, Y. (2015). *The evolution of BL as "playing with gender": Viewing the genesis and development of BL from a contemporary perspective* (pp. 76-92). In McLelland, M., Kazumi, N., Sukanuma, K., & Welker J. (Eds.). *Boys love manga and beyond: History, culture, and community in Japan*. Mississippi, United States: University Press of Mississippi.
- Hermit Books. (n.d.). *Hermit Books Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/HermitBooks/?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/HermitBooks/?locale=th_TH)
- Hermit Books. (2016). *Hermit Books in the 44<sup>th</sup> National Book Fair*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=965251740189696&set=a.349287165119493>
- Hiramatsu, H. (2023). *Thai BL Dorama heno Michi: "LGBTQ Dorama" kara BL Dorama heno Eborushon* [The Path of Thai BL Drama: An Evolution of "LGBTQ" Drama into BL (Y) Drama]. *The Journal of Thai Studies*, 23, 31-43.
- Indigo. (n.d.). *Indigo's Fiction Facebook page*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/IndigosFiction>
- Jackson, P. (1995). *Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand*. Bangkok, Thailand: Bua Luang Books.
- Jackson, P. (1998). *Male Homosexual and Transgenderism in Thai Buddhism Tradition* (pp. 55-90). In Jackson, P. (Ed.). *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists* (edited by Winston Leyland). San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press.
- Jackson, P. (2011). *Capitalism, LGBT activism, and queer autonomy in Thailand* (pp. 195-204). In Jackson, P. (Ed.). *21<sup>st</sup> Century Markets, Media, and Rights*. Hongkong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Jasmine. (2005). *One Night Gigolo*: Bangkok, Thailand: Majo Novel.
- Jiararattanukul, Y. (2007). *YAOI: Manga by women for women* (Master's thesis). Thailand: Chulalongkorn University.
- Jiemvijuck, C. (2017). *Johnny's Otaku in Thailand Under the Influence of Japanization* (Master's thesis). Thailand: Chiang Mai University.
- Jirattikorn, A. (2025). Reclaiming youth and desire: Alternative civility and Japanese middle-aged women's fandom of Thai boys' love dramas. *Asian Studies Review*, 1-19, DOI: 10.1080/10357823.2025.2525143
- Khaosod. (1997). *Chinchang Hyaplon Dekthai Khlanghnak* [Chinchan the obscene manga]. Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri

- Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254006060>
- Khaosod. (1998). *That Katunlamok* [Porn Manga Slave]. Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254113839>
- Khaosod. (2006). *Poetchai Saoyaoi Khlang Katungay* [Deep Interview with Gay Manga Obsessed Girl]. Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254902622>
- Krungthep Thurakij. (1997). *Katunlamok Phaingiap Khong Yaowachon* [Porn Manga: Silent Hazard for Youth]. Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254006064>
- Loetwitchayarat, N. (2017). *Huachai Wai* [Heart of Yaoi (Y or Wai)]. Bangkok, Thailand: Bunbooks.
- MGR online. (2007a). *KatunX Phlo Ngansupdanhangsuehangchat* [Porn Manga Makes an Appearance at the National Book Fair]. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/qol/detail/9500000039763>
- MGR online. (2007b). *Chab Katungei Thi Ran "Moddam" klang Siam* [Gay Manga Seized at "Moddam" in the center of Siam.] Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/crime/detail/9500000142437>
- MGR online. (2008). *...of Siam*. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/live/detail/9510000006932>
- MGR online. (2012). *Muea SE-ED hyakbean Nhangsue Phetthisam!?!* [When SE-ED prefers to ban third gender books!?!]. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/live/detail/9550000149720>
- Morris, W. (2025). *Alabama libraries could stop children from seeing books that "positively depict" transgender people*. Retrieved from <https://www.al.com/news/2025/09/alabama-libraries-could-stop-children-from-seeing-books-that-positively-depict-transgender-people.html>
- Nabu Publishing. (n.d.). *Nabu Publishing Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/Nabupublishing/?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/Nabupublishing/?locale=th_TH)
- Nabu Publishing. (2012). *Let's meet Bacteria and her new fiction* (Sep 9). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/1FQRNdVNN2/>
- Nabu Publishing. (2013). *Announcement (Oct 13)*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/16w6Zm9UHe/>
- Nabu Publishing. (2014a). *Nabu in the 42<sup>nd</sup> National Book Fair (Mar 20)*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=728935500485256&set=a.127977290581083>
- Nabu Publishing. (2014b). *Cooperation with Book Friend (Dec 20)*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=871731116205693&set=a.127977290581083>
- Nabu Publishing. (2015). *Now sell at B2S (Jul 10)*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=978872852158185&set=a.127977290581083>
- Nabu Publishing. (2016). *Meet Nabu at Naiin Siam Paragon (Aug 29)*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17Joayf2rn/>
- Nigiri-Sushi. (n.d.). *Nigiri-Sushi Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/NigiriSushiNovel/?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/NigiriSushiNovel/?locale=th_TH)
- Phuchatkan Raiwan. (2004). *Thuathon Lae Phuenthi Khong "Gay" Nai Lok Wannakham* [Identity and space of Gay in literature world]. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254725611>
- Pongpakai, N. (2001). *Kansuesanrueang Kamsamphanrawangphet Nai Katunyipun* [Communication for sex education in Japanese comics] (Master's thesis). Thailand: Chulalongkorn University.
- Pongsapitaksanti, P. (2023). The development of Thai Boys' Love (BL) Drama: Characteristics, Production Process and Its Influences. *The Journal of Thai Studies*, 23, 19-29.
- Prachatia. (2009). *Gay Pride Yomthoi Lhang Rak Chaing Mai 51 Khang Angsiaphap Mueang Watthanatham* [Gay Pride event in Chiang Mai canceled following opposition from 51 protesters]

- who cited concerns about the city's cultural reputation.] Retrieved from [https://prachatai.com/journal/2009/02/20089?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://prachatai.com/journal/2009/02/20089?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- Prachatia. (2023). *Ruamkorani Tamruat-Thahan Paingannhangsue Yuet-Ruebut Buk Samnakphim* [Summary of the case: Police and military raid bookstores at the National Book Fair and invade publishing houses]. Retrieved from <https://prachatai.com/journal/2023/03/103424>
- Prasannam, N. (2019). The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction. *Plaridel*, 16(2), 63-89.
- Prasannam, N. (2023). Authorial Revisions of Boys Love/Y Novels: The Dialogue between Activism and the Literary Industry in Thailand. *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 49, Doi: 10.25911/PJHM-E120
- Proprop. (n.d.). "All Gallery." Retrieved from <https://proprops.com/gallery/all>
- Raikrob. (n.d.). *Samnak Raikrob Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/raikrob/?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/raikrob/?locale=th_TH)
- Romchapa, T. (2003). From "Katoey" to "Gays": History of male homosexual in Thai society. *Journal of Letters*, 32(1), 12.
- SCB EIC. (2025). *KhaiKhwamlap Lakhonwaithai Hetdaichuengtit Trenlok* [Unlocking the Secret of Thai Yaoi Dramas: Why They Have Become a Global Trend.] Retrieved from <https://www.sceic.com/th/detail/file/product/9687/h3fuc83e5r/In-focus-BL-GL-20250107.pdf>
- SE-ED. (2012). *Letter explaining the standards for distributing romantic and erotic literature books*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/share/16ebeRVTUb/>
- Shimauchi, S. (2024). Inter-Asia referencing and orientalist consideration of the transnational fandom of Thai boys' love drama in Japan. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 25(3), 386-405.
- Thairath. (1997). *Katunlamok Rabatkhaow Wat* [Porn Manga Found Circulating in Temples]. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center. Retrieved from <https://db.sac.or.th/clipping/th/news/read/254005474>
- Thuenglukthuengkhon. (2005). *Lhumdam:Thokrueng Katun* [Black Hole: Discuss on Cartoon.] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8MU0Mj5CWQ>
- Thungsuphachai, L. (2010). *Nhueng Thotsawat Haeng Kanfaorawang Thang Watthanathum* [1<sup>st</sup> decade of cultural surveillance]. Bangkok, Thailand: The Cultural Surveillance Center.
- TingThingsThink. (2021). *Poed Tamnan Saow-Wai* [Unveiling the Legend of the Ancient Yaoi Girl]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/avg8iAGjSSY?si=Ce698epW-cEUx-4F>
- TRomance. (n.d.). *TRomance's Fic Facebook page*. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/TRomanceFic?locale=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/TRomanceFic?locale=th_TH)
- Vichayawannakul, O. (2016). *Women and the creation of boy love novel* (Master's thesis). Thailand: Thammasart University.
- Vinitphol, R. (2023). Cultural Hybridity in the Context of Boys' Love Culture: The History of Thai Boys' Love Reimported to Japan. *The Journal of Thai Studies, The Japanese Society for Thai Studies*, 23, 3-17.
- Visitkul, C. (2000). *Attitudes of male teens towards violent Japanese comics in print and electronic media* (Master's thesis). Thailand: Chulalongkorn University.
- Welker, J. (2022). *Boys Love (BL) Media and Its Asian Transfigurations* (pp. 1-16). In Welker, J. (Ed.). *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*. Honolulu, United States: University of Hawaii Press.
- Yuwanakorn, L. (1990). *The analysis of translated Japanese comic book content for youth* (Master's thesis), Thailand: Chulalongkorn University.
- Zax. (2004). *Sweet baby*. Thailand: Zax (self-publish).
- Zynestras. (n.d.). *Zynestras ♥ Y Novel Facebook group*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/zynnovel/2belovebook>. (n.d.). *2belovebook Facebook page*. Retrieved from

[https://www.facebook.com/tobelovedbook/?local\\_e=th\\_TH](https://www.facebook.com/tobelovedbook/?local_e=th_TH)

2belovebook. (2012). *Meet the new Boy's Love series at the National Book Week at booth J08* (Sep 24).

Retrieved from

<https://www.facebook.com/share/19JfYD8k43/>