

## **Brazilian Fandom’s Perceptions of the Thai Boys Love Series Industry and the Practices of Fanservice and Shipping: Content Analysis of Online Comments on a Fansubbing Platform**

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This article analyzes Brazilian fandom’s perception of the Thai Boys Love (BL) series industry based on online comments on a fansubbing platform. The study employs qualitative content analysis of 423 comments posted during the consumption of the *War of Y* series. Organized by the major category of “industry” and subcategories of “fanservice” and “shipping” practices, the analytical construct is inspired by the “indices and symptoms” model. The results indicate a negative perception of the Thai industry among fans, with correlations made between the fictional narrative and problematic situations in the real world of BL series. Fans’ perceptions of fanservice and shipping practices highlight the complex relationship between fandoms and the industry, disputes over the blame and accountability for “toxic” practices, and the implications for the actors involved. The study contributes to the field by analyzing a type of media flow in South-South relations, which has yet to be fully explored.

*Keywords: Thai Boys Love (BL) series, Brazilian fandom, fanservice, shipping, fansubbing, South-South media flows, War of Y*

This research aims to investigate the perspectives of Brazilian fans who consume Thai Boys Love (BL) series about the industry that produces them. These perceptions are captured through online comments generated by fans while watching the series *War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022), which explores the behind-the-

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scenes aspects of the Thai industry specializing in BL works. Additionally, the article presents a critical reflection on fanservice and shipping practices within the industry from the perspective of the transcultural fandom. The fans engage with this media consumption on the Pifansubs platform, where they can access *War of Y* and other Thai BL works with Brazilian Portuguese subtitles created by fans. Given the sparse production in this field, it is worth noting that this exploratory article serves as one of the few English-language works to discuss the topic and explore the relationship between the media flows of these two countries within the Global South.

We hypothesize that Brazilian fans, possessing profound knowledge not only of the elements comprising the consumed products but also a substantial understanding of their production environment, recognize the existence of the Thai BL industry and its practices. Furthermore, because of their engagement with the researched universe, they have significant considerations about it and are not merely passive consumers.

Thus, the article is structured as follows: (a) literature review, covering the Thai BL series industry, the conceptualization of fanservice and shipping practices, transcultural fan studies from the Global South perspective, and Brazilian fandom's consumption of BL series; (b) empirical context, describing the Pifansubs platform and the four storylines of the *War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022) series; (c) methodology, explaining the analytical construct of content analysis using the "indices and symptoms" model, and the data collection procedures; and (d) discussion of results, analyzing the main category of "industry" in relation to the perceptions of Brazilian fans, along with the two subcategories of "fanservice" and "shipping."

## Literature Review

### ***Thai Boys Love Series Industry and the Practices of Fanservice and Shipping***

The BL series, which focuses on relationships and affective experiences between young and handsome boys, emerged in 2014 with *Love Sick—The Series* (Kusolkulsiri, 2014–2015). Locally known as "ซีรีส์วาย" ("Y series"), in Thailand, this segment of production has quickly become a prominent element of the Thai creative industry and a tool of soft power in the exportation of fictional stories not only with audiovisual productions, but also within the editorial market of "Y novels" (Baudinette, 2023a). Originating from Japanese *yaoi* manga and anime, BL narratives challenge traditional gender roles and often blur the lines between masculinity and femininity, allowing female fans to identify with the male protagonists (Baudinette, 2023a). These roles are traditionally characterized as seme (the active, rational, strong, and older male character) and uke (the passive, emotional, fragile, and younger male character) in the "noble formula" for romantic couples (Baudinette, 2023a; Welker, 2022).

While primarily consumed by women, Thai BL series also attract gay and bisexual men interested in the represented stories (Baudinette, 2023a). These narratives have reached audiences outside Thailand who have a strong desire to consume such plots but lack similar national productions because of governmental, sociocultural, and religious censorial structures (Welker, 2022). The trajectory of BL production in Thailand is notable, starting with the censorship of *yaoi* manga in the early 2000s and eventually leading to the country becoming a key player in the international market (Prasannam, 2019).

In terms of national significance, the Thai BL industry has become the leading producer and exporter of such content, generating revenue exceeding one billion baht between 2020 and 2021, according to the Thai Ministry of Commerce (Torres, 2023). The extent to which these fictions reflect the reality of the local LGBTQIA+ population is debatable, but the discussion of the Thai BL series industry as a soft power in constructing a future "Thai Wave" has been ongoing for years (Potipan & Worrawutteerakul, 2010).

Thai BL audiences actively engage with the actors through "shipping" and "fanservice" practices, obfuscating the lines between fiction and reality (Parnpiamkiat, 2019; Welker, 2022). These practices are essential elements of the Thai BL series fandom, enhancing the fans' experience and fostering a stronger emotional connection between them and the actors. Moreover, these activities create a sense of intimacy, excitement, and community among transcultural fans, allowing them to actively contribute to the ongoing popularity and success of the BL genre beyond Thailand (Baudinette, 2023a).

Fanservice refers to the deliberate inclusion of content or actions (not only within the series) that cater to the desires and fantasies of the fans. It often involves romantic or intimate interactions between the actors portraying the BL couple, both within and beyond the storyline. This can include special scenes, gestures, or real-life interactions that create a sense of closeness and romantic involvement between the actors. Fanservice aims to heighten the emotional connection and excitement of the fans, providing them with the enjoyment of witnessing their favorite BL couples in affectionate situations (Baudinette, 2023a).

Shipping is a term used to describe the act of emotionally investing in a romantic relationship between two characters, either within the series or between the actors portraying them. In the context of Thai BL series, fans who engage in shipping desire to see the characters or actors romantically linked, often surpassing the boundaries of the scripted narrative (Baudinette, 2023a). They may create their narratives, scenarios, or even artworks that depict the characters or actors as a couple. Shipping fosters a sense of community among fans, who discuss and share their shipping preferences and creations on various platforms, such as social media or fan forums. It allows fans to express their support for the BL couple and their aspiration for a deeper romantic connection, extending the enjoyment of the series beyond its original storyline (Baudinette, 2023a).

### ***Transcultural Fandom Studies and Media Flows in the Global South***

In the context of global media-audience interaction no longer being a novelty, studies on transcultural fandoms remain relevant in presenting a reading that goes beyond local or regional media landscapes. These studies view transcultural fans as subjective, diverse communities united by common interests in media consumption, as well as affinities for affection and intersectionality, engaging in constant mutual exchanges with their object of admiration (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Morimoto, 2017, 2021).

Regarding the dispute of meanings between the terms transcultural and transnational, there is a preferential shift toward using the former over the latter (Chin & Morimoto, 2013, p. 93). In other words, while signaling an epistemological (and methodological) preference for the term "transcultural," the authors also highlight the possibility of convergence and dialogue between transcultural and transnational terminologies as a form of operability. Moreover, Morimoto (2017) argues that the distinction between

transnational and transcultural is not clear-cut, as transnational fan studies inherently intertwine with transcultural perspectives.

With these confluences in mind, it is also necessary to consider emerging studies that highlight transcultural fandoms through the lens of global media flows in the South-South relations, emphasizing that non-English speakers/non-Western fandoms should not be "considered peripheral in relation to 'mainstream' fan culture" (Chin & Morimoto, 2013, p. 98).

The consumption of media works in South-South flows requires an understanding of the role of fans' subjectivities in intercultural communication between works and diverse fandoms. These fandoms may not share the same sociocultural background as the place where the media products originated and were initially circulated. According to Iqani and Resende (2019), "Southern audiences are voracious consumers of media narratives produced in the global north as well as locally and regionally produced images. But there is also a south-south flow in discourses and fandom, which requires deeper theorization" (p. 11). Thus, assuming that "[m]edia and cultural configurations are inherently transnational" (Iqani, 2016, p. 5), it becomes crucial to understand the empirical context of South-South relations in the consumption of Thai BL series by the Brazilian fandom. Thus, assuming that "[m]edia and cultural configurations are inherently transnational" (Iqani, 2016, p. 5), it becomes crucial to understand the empirical context of South-South relations in the consumption of Thai BL series by the Brazilian fandom.

Furthermore, the inception of fan studies in Brazil dates back to 2002, marked by the earliest research on fandoms in digital environments (Amaral, Mombach, & Muller, 2022). Since then, the field has been evolving in the country, albeit somewhat disjointedly, hindering the formation of a robust discourse (Costa, 2019). A survey conducted by Amaral et al. (2022) on fan studies in Brazilian scholarly journals revealed that the first articles on the subject appeared in 2004, with significant growth observed since 2014, peaking in 2016. However, it is essential to note that Brazilian fan studies are intertwined with Brazilian reception studies (Jacks, 2011; Lopes, Borelli, & Resende, 2002), particularly concerning the concept of active audiences. This perspective views the audience as active participants in media reception, engaging in interpretation, meaning construction, and content interaction. Consequently, the study and analysis of audience activity have deep roots in Brazil within cultural studies, shaping the analytical approaches often rooted in methodologies linked to the concept of transmedia reception (Santana, 2017).

### ***The Consumption of BL Series by Brazilian Fans***

The only in-depth research we have so far that presents a possible view of the Brazilian fandom dedicated to the consumption of the Thai BL series is the work of Igor Leonardo Torres. Torres (2023) takes a sociodemographic approach to identifying Brazilian fans through anthropological research analyzing fan practices, especially those connected to fanservice and shipping, within social networks like Twitter and Telegram. Torres's (2023) research on the affective, moral, and political aspects of fandom practices shows that the majority of the respondents are aged 19–24, followed by 13–18-year-olds and 25–30-year-olds (pp. 84–85). Cisgender women are the most prevalent gender identity across all age groups, but other identities, such as cisgender men, nonbinary, transgender men/women, and bigender, are also represented in the survey. The majority of respondents identified as nonheterosexual ("bisexual," "homosexual,"

"pansexual," etc.), with Black and Brown respondents being the most common racial identity, followed closely by White respondents. A minority of respondents identified as Asian, Indigenous, or mixed race.

In addition to the groups studied by Torres (2023) on Twitter and Telegram, Brazilian fan communities dedicated to consuming and discussing BL series are distributed on other social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, forums, and several fansubbing platforms, reaching thousands of Portuguese speakers who are dedicated to enjoying Thai productions. Currently, Brazilian fans exert a certain influence in the realm of Thai BL production, as evidenced, for example, through GMMTV's social media posts, where the company showcases the popularity of certain BLs in Brazilian Twitter trends. Additionally, several BL actors have either already participated in or are planning fan meetings in Brazil (such as Jeff Satur's visit to São Paulo in July/2023; Boun, Earth, and Santa's appearances in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Fortaleza at the end of September and beginning of October/2023; and First and Khao's visit in São Paulo in December/2023).

However, because of the predominant consumption of Thai BL series occurring online via unofficial platforms, official audience data in Brazil remain elusive, given that we are not dealing with a mainstream audience for this type of production (unlike other international productions consumed by Brazilians, as shown by Costa, 2019). Greco and Pontes (2024) note that between 2016 and 2020, 83% of the subjects studied in Brazilian fan studies were foreign products, with only 17% being Brazilian. Furthermore, series were the most analyzed media genre.

### **Empirical Context**

#### ***The Pifansubs Platform***

The Brazilian platform Pifansubs is a noncommercial platform rooted in fan culture. It aligns with the practices of fandoms, where fans collaboratively produce and share knowledge, experiences, skills, and competencies (Borges & Sigiliano, 2019; Urbano, 2020). The platform exemplifies fansubbing dynamics in the Global South, where fans translate, subtitle, and distribute audiovisual content from other countries (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). It emphasizes the value of discussing transcultural fandoms beyond the English-speaking world and highlights the concept of "fan labor" (Morimoto, 2017, p. 283).

Pifansubs is accessed by Brazilian fans of East and Southeast Asian productions, particularly BL series and other queer-related films. According to its website, the platform emerged in 2019, but it is possible to find previous versions of this fansubbing service even in the Blogspot era around the mid-2010s. Pifansubs releases new episodes shortly after their original broadcast and provides an archive search feature for complete series. The platform also maintains a presence on various social media accounts, including Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, integrating itself into the fansubber community.

By offering accessible and specialized work from fandoms, it contributes to conversations and exchanges of ideas among fans (Urbano, 2020). It is part of a broader media ecosystem of Brazilian fansubbing platforms dedicated to queer Asian content, including Meow Fansub, P'Tieris Fansub, Lianhua Fansub, and Rainbow Subs (Andrade, 2021). These platforms foster discussions, comments, and

engagement from fans on each episode and production, nurturing connections, affections, and literacy about these cultural products.

### ***The War of Y Series***

*War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022), a Thai BL series directed by Cheewin Thanamin Wongskulphat, premiered on August 2, 2022, and concluded on December 13, 2022. It consisted of 20 episodes divided into four narrative arcs. The series explores the hidden world behind the cameras of the Thai BL series industry, shedding light on the production process. *War of Y* was initially discussed on the fansubbing platform, sparking conversations about the Thai BL series industry among Brazilian fans. Officially, it was available for streaming on the AISPlay multiplatform entertainment service (OOT TV).

The first narrative arc follows a newly paired BL couple who must perform intimate scenes, attend events, and engage in fan service to satisfy audience expectations. The second narrative centers on two actors in a relationship both on and off-screen, whose bond is tested by escalating conflicts between their managers, ultimately leading to their separation. The third story takes place in a reality show where aspiring BL actors compete in singing, dancing, and acting to secure a role. The final arc revolves around an on-screen couple bound by a contract prohibiting them from dating, but when one secretly starts a relationship with a woman, complications arise.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Content Analysis: Coding Process, Analytical Construct, and Data Collection***

This study uses content analysis based on the reflections of Krippendorff (2019) and Sampaio and Lycarião (2021). Thus, as a foundational methodological path, content analysis serves to explore Brazilian fandom's perceptions of the Thai BL series industry. This effort is based on analyzing online comments<sup>2</sup> made by fans and triggered by the consumption of the work *War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022)—a metalinguistic portrayal of the behind-the-scenes workings of Thailand's BL industry.

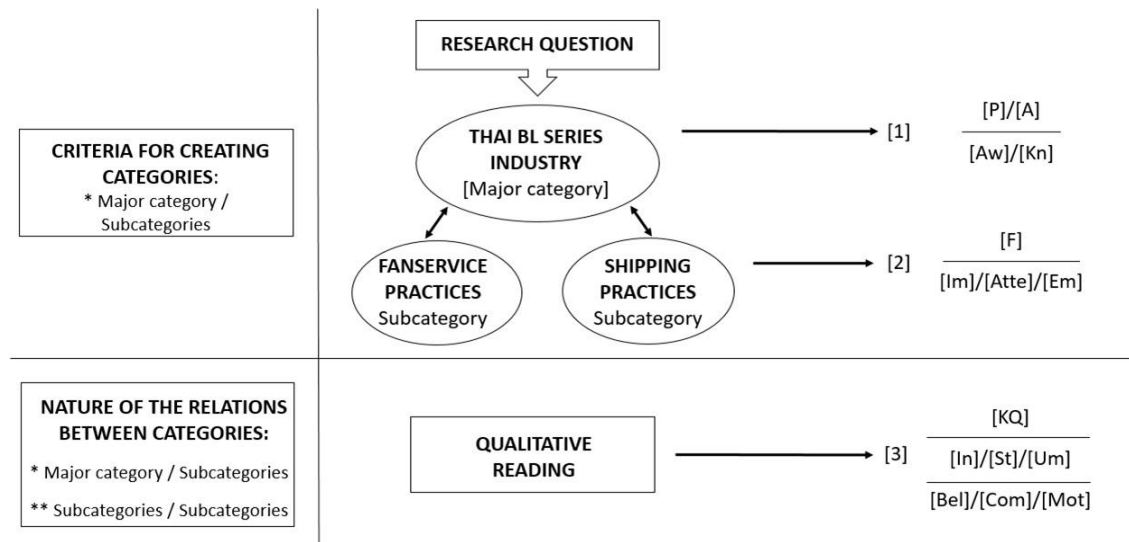
Part of the coding process is the creation of a codebook containing all the guidelines indicating the "alphanumeric codes," "variables," and "categories" (Sampaio & Lycarião, 2021, pp. 39–40) for uniformly collecting data among coders (available at [www.arts.chula.ac.th/west/spanish/cb/](http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/west/spanish/cb/)). The analytical construct is inspired by the "indices and symptoms" model, widely applied in mass communication research, using three of the five "indices" (or "symptoms") mentioned by Krippendorff (2019, pp. 65–66). Building on the Peircean logic discussed by Krippendorff (2019), "an index must be causally connected to the event it signifies, as smoke indicates fire" (p. 65). Hence, this research relies on online comments on the platform as an index that reveals the unique perceptions of the Thai BL industry within the Brazilian fandom.

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<sup>2</sup> The selected comments used to illustrate the analysis have been translated from Brazilian Portuguese to English.

The data analysis framework follows Krippendorff’s (2019) criteria to examine comments within the context of transcultural fan studies, focusing on the Brazilian fandom’s engagement with Thai BL series and industry awareness. The primary criterion for establishing the major category involves discerning the *presence* (P) or *absence* (A) of discussions about the existence and peculiarities of the Thai BL industry, indicating the fandom’s *awareness* (Aw) or *knowledge* (Kn) of this industry. Subsequently, the *frequency* (F) of symbols, ideas, references, or topics within the comments determines the *importance* (Im), *attention* (Atte), or *emphasis* (Em) placed on them, leading to the creation of subcategories reflecting thematic extensions of the major category. Specifically, the analysis prioritizes subcategories based on the frequency of appearance, identifying fanservice and shipping practices as prominent themes in the Brazilian fandom’s perceptions of the Thai BL industry.

Additionally, a qualitative examination explores the ontological relations between the major category and its subcategories, as well as comparative insights between subcategories. This qualitative analysis involves scrutinizing the kinds of *qualifications* (KQ) used in statements, such as adjectives or hedges and other descriptions, to gauge the *intensity* (In), *strength* (St), or *uncertainty* (Un) associated with *beliefs* [Bel], *convictions* [Con], and *motivations* [Mot] related to the discussed symbols, ideas, or references. Ultimately, the focus lies on understanding the nature of relationships within and between categories, as reflected in the types of qualifications/disqualifications and the frequency of mentions characterizing perceptions of the Thai BL industry within the Brazilian fandom’s comments (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Analytical construct—inspired by the “Indices and Symptoms” model (Krippendorff, 2019).**

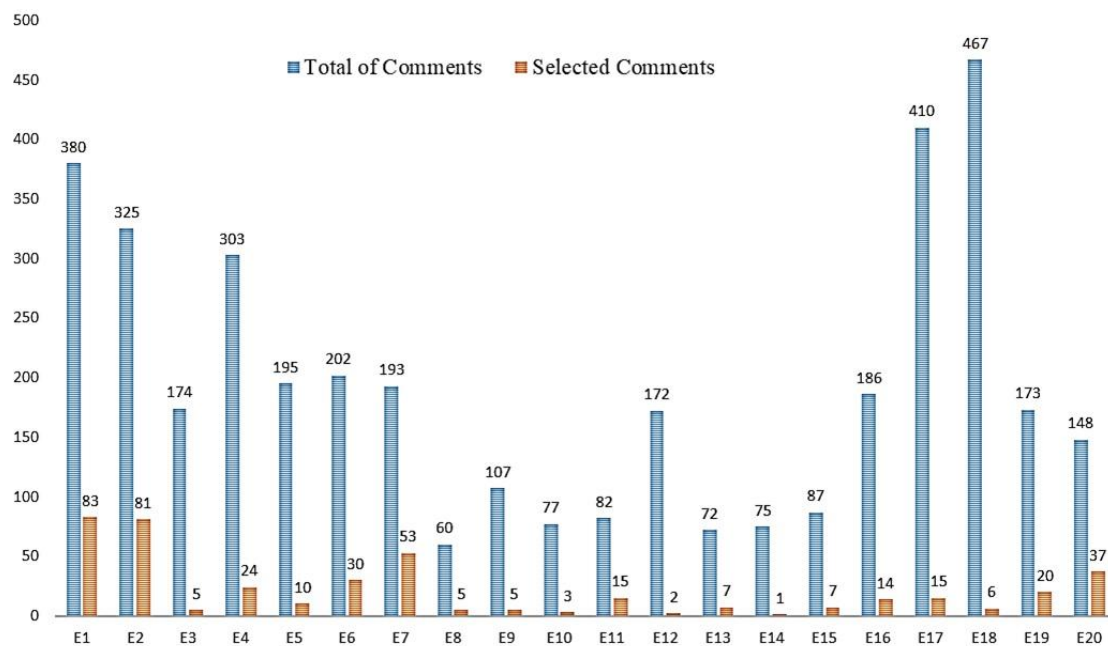
Regarding data collection, following a nonprobabilistic purposive sampling in which the researchers combine theoretical-methodological discussions on the field with their own judgment to select and filter the online comments that are good sources of accurate information, three points stand out: (1) the last update of the collected data took place on April 21, 2023; (2) a total of 3,888 comments were collected from the

platform (respecting the anonymity of the commenters regarding names, nicknames, and gender); (3) after the filtering process for the three “indices” mentioned in the analytical construct, the final number of comments selected for the analysis is 423 (available at [www.arts.chula.ac.th/west/spanish/sc/](http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/west/spanish/sc/)). Additionally, details about the data collection process (including, for example, the guidelines for identifying a comment made by Brazilians compared with other Lusophone speakers) and the mechanisms to ensure replicability, validity, and reliability of the data collected are specified in the codebook.

## Discussion of Results

### *Brazilian Fandom’s Perceptions of the Thai Boys Love Series Industry (Major Category)*

Concerning fan engagement in discussing perceptions of the Thai BL industry, the analysis indicates varying levels of engagement across the series’ seasons. The initial narrative arcs generated the most comments, with episodes 6, 7, 19, and 20 also garnering significant attention. The final episode spurred further debate with an on-screen tweet questioning the authenticity of the series’ stories, prompting critical reflection within the fandom. Notably, the comments encompass a wide range of content, from detailed analyses to casual conversations and recommendations for other series. This organic variety justifies the quantitative difference between the total number of comments and those specifically addressing perceptions of the Thai BL industry (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Distribution of comments per episode.**



The comments made by the Brazilian fandom on the fansubbing platform reveal it to be a space for social interaction and the exchange of emotions, desires, fantasies, consensus, disagreements, and even instances of verbal aggression, hate speech, prejudiced remarks, and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights. However, it is primarily a space that showcases fans' media competence (Borges & Sigiliano, 2019). This means that the Brazilian fandom's perception of the Thai BL industry is informed by the understanding that the works, narratives, actors, and processes of identification and projection associated with these productions originate from a distinct industry per se. Fans possess a prior understanding that there is a specific logic of production and media circulation that shapes the final product of their transcultural consumption. As a result, within the media flow of South-South relations (Iqani & Resende, 2019), spanning from the production site to the consumption site, the Thai BL industry exists and serves as a subject for critical reflection within the Brazilian fandom.

In relation to Index 1, the major category is shown here by the repeated presence of the term "industry" (mentioned 108 times) in the analyzed comments. There is, then, an awareness or knowledge of the existence of the Thai BL series industry as such, as an element reinforcing the understanding that transcultural fandoms possess a criticalness toward their object of consumption with a significant level of complexity and expertise (Morimoto, 2017, 2021). Some of the comments refer to this issue, saying, "I think that this BL will open our eyes to see that this industry is not just a 'pink [world]' where everything is wonderful" (personal communication, 2022) and "Loved this episode so much, plus it says exactly how the industries that make bl really are" (personal communication, 2022).<sup>3</sup>

Even the use of the term BL (mentioned 197 times) sets the tone of specificity that the fandom adopts when discussing these works; that is, there is no confusion or careless interchange between "BL" and terms like "dorama" or "lakorn/lakhon," for example. Rather, fans make preferential use of the term BL to separate these narratives from other works of Asian serialized fiction. In a specific way, as the comments show, there are even direct mentions to "Thailand"/"Thai" to qualify that they are talking about an environment in which the BL industry discussed is the one belonging to the country in question and is therefore different from other contexts, such as South Korean, Taiwanese, Japanese, Filipino, or Chinese BL series.

In the correlation between Thai works and the Brazilian fandom, interesting elements of Thai colloquial and digital language have emerged. Fans use expressions like "Sawasdee" (the most common form of greeting in Thai), "Tharn's Wife" (a reference to a character from another famous BL series, portrayed by Thai actor Mew/Suppasit Jongcheveevat) and "P" (short for "Pi," meaning "older sibling" and used mostly as an address term with someone older than the speaker) in their nicknames, and occasionally use "5555"<sup>4</sup> as a way to express laughter in their social media exchanges. There are also discussions about

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<sup>3</sup> In accordance with identity protection principles, we have chosen not to disclose the user's name. Similarly, due to the unofficial nature of this fansubbing platform and its involvement in the unauthorized distribution of third-party content, the exact posting date of the comment is unavailable. Only the year is shown on the platform.

<sup>4</sup> In the Thai social media environment, people type the number 5 (repeatedly) to express laughter due to the sound the numeral makes in their language (similar to "ha," hence "5555" = "hahaha").

the actors' nicknames and how certain names resemble the word "woman"<sup>5</sup> in Thai. These exchanges indicate the expertise of the transcultural fandom on the subject and highlight the unique intercultural communication facilitated by South-South media flows (Iqani, 2016). Additionally, the fandom possesses knowledge about specific topics in Thailand, including legislation on equal marriage rights for same-gender individuals and ongoing discussions about a harassment case in the audiovisual industry reported by the Thai press in November 2022.

It is also possible to identify correlated terms that connect to the word "industry," such as "BL world" (mentioned 18 times), "BL universe" (4 times), "BL environment" (2 times), "Y industry" (2 times), "artistic field" (5 times), "companies" (7 times), "backstage" (39 times), or even the expressions "behind the cameras" (24 times), and "behind the lens" (3 times). The dispute between the terms "reality" (62 times) and "fiction" (12 times) or even "truth" (57 times) presents an interesting premise: The work made many fans wonder about this question and not always come to a consensus (Morimoto, 2021) about their perceptions of the Thai industry. Comments such as "If this was really the reality behind BLs, they wouldn't show it; this BL industry revolves around the convincing acting of the actors and the fans' shipping of the couples" (personal communication, 2022) and "The series is showing exactly what no other series has shown so far: the truth of what really happens inside BL's abusive industry" (personal communication, 2022) can illustrate fans' perceptions of this disputed issue.

There is, in this dispute of meaning, another fact: There are those who prefer not to continue watching the series to deliberately avoid learning about the "dark" version of the industry. In this context, some fans report "discomfort" or "anguish" because of the themes dealt with in the narrative. Put another way, even though some comments specify that generating discomfort is the "true intention" of the series, this experience is closely linked to a fiction that, according to other comments, deviated from the "commonplace" and managed to "break the clichés" of Thai BL stories, which almost always depict romance between handsome young men on a college campus (Baudinette, 2023a).

The Brazilian fandom's media competence is closely linked to their critical understanding of the production and distribution processes within the Thai BL industry. Fans often use endogenous references from within the BL narrative universe to comment on the industry. This includes direct mentions of other Thai BL works, real scandals in the industry, comparisons between the work and the lives of real actors, and the use of images and memes featuring actors or scenes from Thai BL. They also create networks of recommendations for other series discussing the same themes. These actions demonstrate a strong affective connection (Chin & Morimoto, 2013) between fans and the consumed object, extending beyond the need for comparisons with the local Brazilian media landscape. The limited incidence of direct comparisons between the Thai BL industry and Brazilian works such as telenovelas and series suggests that the Brazilian fandom is deeply engaging with the Thai BL industry on its own terms. Fans even go as far as citing specific Thai companies involved in producing and showcasing the series, using qualifying and disqualifying terms to express their extensive knowledge of the original context of these productions.

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the actor in question is Phuwin Tangsakyuen. Therefore, "Phuwin" sounds similar, in the commentator's view, to the word "ผู้หญิง" (phu ying), "woman" in the Thai language.

This indicates an ongoing and deepening intercultural bond between the Brazilian fandom and the Thai BL industry.

The Brazilian fandom perceives the Thai BL industry negatively, viewing it as a toxic, conflict-ridden environment that generates unpleasant situations for the professionals in the industry, such as actors, directors, producers, and agents. Specifically, the industry is criticized as a direct fomenter of fan service activities that avowedly serve to generate greater shipping practice in fans.

Regarding the comments that register a negative view of the Thai industry, it is also possible to notice two major KQ that express this perception, from adjectives such as "rotten" (20 times) and "toxic" (12 times). With less comparative incidence, it is also possible to see terms such as "disgusting" and "cruel" and popular expressions that characterize/describe the industry as a space that is "cobra comendo cobra" (a "dog-eat-dog" world) or a "Chernobyl" environment full of "toxicity." The use of these (dis)qualification terms reveals the intensity of their criticisms toward the industry. "Jesus Christ, it's a succession of crap happening. Rotten industry. If you don't have a decent agent, you're screwed," and "This industry is maddening. A toxic place," are comments that can exemplify some fans' perceptions of this matter (personal communication, 2022).

Overall, two vital elements of the fandom's perception stand out: (A) the connection between the themes criticized in the fiction and real cases of controversies in the Thai industry; and (B) the issue of this being a supposedly homophobic environment in relation to gay actors versus straight actors participating in the series.

The first element (A) addresses moments of much debate (especially in the comments section of episodes 2, 6, and 7) about cases involving the persecution of straight actors who suffered hate from fans who did not accept that they had girlfriends and, thus, destroyed the image of the "perfect shipping" between the actors off-screen (fans mention actors such as New [Thitipoom Techa-apaikhun], Nanon [Korapat Kirdpan], and Tay [Tawan Vihokratana]). There is, still in the interrelation between the first and the second element (B), a clear empathy of fans toward gay actors who openly work in the industry (mentioning names like Fluke [Natouch Siripongthon] and Earth [Katsamonnat Namwirote]) and other lines that directly question how it is possible to exist homophobia in a space of media production precisely intended to present romances between boys. These intersections between the fictional universe presented in the series and the real cases cited by fans act as an attempt to solidify the argument of the Brazilian fandom when it comes to their perception of the BL industry in Thailand.

As for the specific perspective, a deeper exploration is significant to understand how fanservice and shipping practices are perceived, criticized, and even performed by the Brazilian fandom. This understanding can be achieved through a qualitative reading of the comments within the major category and its subcategories, considering their interrelations (Index 3). Through these specificities (subcategories), it becomes possible to understand, for example, the high incidence of such terms as "actor(s)" (mentioned 223 times) and "couple(s)" (44 times) as part of the most heated discussions.

***Specificities I: Brazilian Fandom's Perceptions of Fanservice Practices (Subcategory)***

As a specific part of the Brazilian fandom's perceptions, the issue of fanservice practices by the Thai BL industry was a recurring theme in the comments selected for analysis. The high frequency of the term "fanservice" (mentioned 36 times), through the lens of Index 2, highlights the significance this topic has for fans. Thus, their attention or emphasis on fanservice practices is the first point to note, as it shows a recognition that fanservice exists as a practice produced by the industry. In their comments, fans explicitly addressed this discussion by saying, "The faker it is, the more it sells. This is the entertainment industry," "This phrase is the best description of Thai fan culture," and "Oh my God! There's some fanservice lately that's way out of line. While I see some happy fans, I wonder why the actors submit themselves to this kind of fanservice" (personal communication, 2022).

Another highlight is that, in the wake of the previous reflection, fans can differentiate or understand that the Thai industry has specific know-how to produce fanservice through its actors and events in which they participate, as already anticipated by Baudinette (2023a). In this way, the comments allude to how Taiwan's BL industry, for example, tries to copy the same mechanisms of Thailand's market. Another noteworthy aspect is that fans perceive toxicity in the industry as it forces fanservice that is at times out of line. Likewise, fans who encourage or "buy" that kind of fanservice are also considered "toxic" (misogynistic stereotyping of "ridiculous" fans is noted in some comments).

However, there is room for dissent, even if sparse, when compared with the total number of times that the term "fanservice" appears in the comments. In this dispute of meaning, two essential elements need to be pointed out: Comments that clearly specify that the most problematic issues of fanservice are strictly the fault of the "industry," and comments that choose to place some problematic fanservice situations and its negative peculiarities under the direct or indirect blame of "fans." There is also a very sui generis separation in the perception of how the "fandom-industry" relationship in fanservice practices oscillates. In other words, it is possible to describe a mix between blame and criticism of the "other" (this other being a type of "toxic fan," mentioned 7 times), detached from the lived experiences of the author of the comment that directly exempts themselves from practices considered problematic or even to distance themselves from the "hate speech" present in the comment section. However, to a lesser extent, there is also evident self-criticism or "self" accountability, manifested as a kind of reading in which commenters perceive themselves as part of the "problem." This means they are aware that their role in the fandom can also involve practices considered problematic, particularly in relation to the consumption of fanservice performances by their favorite actors.

A significant point of contention in the discussions revolves around the perception that actors are seen as the clear "victims" of "forced" fanservice practices by the fandom. This common ground leads fans to compare the fictional plot with real cases of BL actors who engage in fanservice because of either fan pressure or their own supposed "naivety" about the industry's encouragement of such practices.

The use of qualifications like "honesty" or "gullibility" in reference to the actors indicates a prevalent belief in their innocence, as they emerge as the primary objects of affection for the fandom (Morimoto, 2017, 2021). However, it should be noted that there are exceptions where some fans do not separate the

actors from the problematic issues in the industry and do not believe that they are "unaware" of these practices in their daily lives.

***Specificities II: Brazilian Fandom's Perceptions on Shipping Practices (Subcategory)***

Shipping by itself is not listed as a "toxic fan practice" in most prominent literature on the topic (e.g., Hills, 2018; Proctor & Kies, 2018). However, scholars and fans have debated the ethics of real-person shipping (Baudinette, 2023b). Patricia (2011), a contributor to the K-pop blog Seoulbeats, argued that shipping is a "potentially harmful activity" to the idols in question, as the pressure from shipping can distort and ruin their relationships (para. 4). Although Baudinette (2023b) reported fans in the Philippines strongly disagreeing with such views on the basis that fans understand that they are involved in "fantasy play," disassociating shipping from "reality," in our study, there is a blaming of fans who do not draw the line between "fiction" and "reality." When shipping escalates into pressure, harassment, or requests for "absurd" fanservice, the culture can become toxic, causing psychological harm to the actors.<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, even more pronounced than the fanservice debate, in terms of frequency from Index 2 (subcategory), the discussion about "shipping" practices (mentioned 74 times) occurred more homogeneously in almost all the comments about the episodes (except episodes 10, 12, and 14). In this sense, comments such as "Man, I will never see BL series or shipping the same way again" (personal communication, 2022) and "If there is one thing the BL industry has proven time and time again, it's that shipping is always more important than the individual people involved in the shipping [practice]" (personal communication, 2022) are notable expressions of how fans perceive this issue.

Comparing the empirical material with the discussions by the aforementioned authors on "toxic fans practices," it becomes evident that there is alignment with their perspective on how the tenuous line separating represented fiction from the lived reality of fans is intertwined with expressive emotions that do not always correspond with aspects deemed "positive" in relation to the object of fandom or among its fans. This alignment underscores the argument that fan practices are not simply black-and-white but are influenced by a range of affective responses and personal experiences. This suggests that the conflict between "blame the other" and "self-accountability" among Brazilian fans highlights contradictions intrinsic to BL fandom, particularly about actors who perform their shipped couples. In other words, while the "harmfulness" or "negativity" of these fan practices may be debated, they cannot be considered apathetic or devoid of multiple meanings in their idiosyncrasies.

There is a unified consciousness of the existence of shipping as a practice performed by the fandom. However, interpretations of this practice's description—particularly in terms associated with the negative perception of the Thai BL industry—often diverge in the comments. As with the fanservice issue, a split arises between the "self" and the "other" in how the problems and the particularities of shipping in the BL universe are evaluated:

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<sup>6</sup> See report of overzealous shippers sending angry and, at times, hateful messages on social media to the female actor portraying the character of their rival "ship" in Bothe (2014, p. 9).

(A) There is a blaming of the “other” as the fan who is “ridiculous,” who does not know the difference between “fiction” and “reality,” and who, therefore, has a “violent love” toward the actors who are the object of the shipping.

(B) As for the consciousness of the “self” as part of the fandom and, therefore, possibly also responsible for a more “toxic” and “harmful” type of shipping, it can be seen in comments that try not only to signal the problem but, in a certain way, place the discussion as part of their lives and daily practices in the transcultural consumption of the series.

As to the affective crossings that corroborate the fandom’s experience of consumption (Torres, 2023), three elements can be highlighted as centralizing the reading and performativity of the shipping practices within the Brazilian fandom in the analyzed context, namely: (1) Speculation: Despite acknowledging the problematic nature of shipping practices within the fandom, fans continue to engage in speculating about the romantic relationships between actors from the series *War of Y* (Wongkulphat, 2022) and other works. They question whether these actors are actually couples and if their feelings extend beyond their professional roles; (2) Hope: Despite criticisms and discussions that address the issues surrounding shipping practices, fans still hold onto hope that their favorite shipped couples are real. They continue to engage in shipping despite the possibility of doubt about the authenticity of the relationships between idolized actors; and (3) Disillusionment: Some fans express a sense of disillusionment (or even disappointment) with the series, as it “destroys” their favorite shipped couples or prompts them to reconsider the practice of shipping. These comments reflect self-criticism and regret, emphasizing how the consumption of transcultural fandoms involves complex stages of reflection on the act of consumption and the objects being consumed (Morimoto, 2017).

The use of these qualifications in the comments linked to speculation, hope, and disillusionment suggests a significant projection of uncertainty that causes fans to directly problematize their beliefs and even the motivations that lead them to consume Thai BL.

Finally, as the most relevant insight gathered from fans’ perceptions of shipping practices, it is imperative to note the dispute over meaning between shipping fictional characters within a narrative context versus shipping real-life actors from the BL industry who may or may not maintain the image of a couple outside of their roles in appearances on social media, fan events, advertisements, and so on.

This is where the unique specificity of shipping practices in the BL universe comes into play, combining the production and engagement logic of fanservice with the “affective response” (Baudinette, 2023a) of fans encouraged to continue shipping their favorite actors. Some say they are aware of the separation between the represented characters and the actors who play them. Therefore, their shipping practices connect only to the fictional context. Even in these comments—often as an attempt to absolve themselves of any perceived guilt for toxic shipping practices—commenters acknowledge that some fans may still struggle to distinguish between “reality” and “fiction.” Conversely, the selected comments highlight that shipping, despite being criticized for its “excesses” and “abuses,” primarily revolves around the actors themselves rather than the characters they portray. This aligns with Baudinette’s (2023a) analysis, emphasizing the unique nature of shipping in the BL industry as a means of affective bonding between

transcultural fandoms and the consumption universe that extends beyond fictional narratives. The comments suggest that even years after a series concludes, Brazilian fans express their desires for the actors to form a romantic couple in their personal lives, evident through their posts and public appearances.

In this way, even the authors of the comments that say they know how to separate the character from the actor, during the discussion of other episodes, end up producing shipping practices specifically directed to "couples" of actors like Mew and Gulf (Suppasit Jongcheveevat and Kanawut Traipattanapong), Ohm and Nanon (Pawat Chittsawangdee and Korapat Kirdpan), Zee and Nunew (Pruk Panich and Chawarin Perdpiriyawong), among others. Therefore, we highlight four results that outline the specificity of the Brazilian fandom's perceptions regarding shipping practices: (1) Evaluation of "real" or "fake" shipped couples: Some fans legitimize or reject certain shipped couples based on their perception of whether the relationship between the actors is "natural" or "forced" by the industry. However, these classifications are not necessarily clear or well-defined by the fans'; (2) Actors as possible "victims" of a "forced" shipping: Just like in the fanservice discussion, there is again empathy directed at actors as potential victims of shipping practices considered toxic. And, as in the previous discussion, it is notable that the critical selectivity of the fandom seems, many times, to give room for the solidarity directed toward the actors without, however, locating them as part of the industry perceived as negative; that is, the actor continues to have an immaculate image, sometimes as a "victim" and other times as "naïve" when it comes to the "dark" side of the universe of consumption; (3) Actors as "manufactured" products: Even though they continue the process of segregating the actors in relation to the negative perception of the Thai BL industry, it can be observed, however, that in rare moments comments appear characterizing the actors as "products" of this industry and are, therefore, liable to be "manufactured" for fans' consumption; and (4) Nonacceptance of "intruders" who may "disturb" the shipped couple: To reinforce that shipping practices are not directed at the characters, there are comments that signal the complete rejection of "third parties" (other actors or actresses) who may, even in the fictional context of the narratives, destroy the image of the perfect shipped couple established by the fans.

Finally, the question of shipping as a "choreographed" phenomenon created by the BL industry arises. Undoubtedly, this is the point that dialogues most directly with the discussion by Baudinette (2023a) about how BL industry fanservice fosters shipping practices from a "staged homoeroticism." On at least two occasions, it is explicitly mentioned that perceiving actor couples and idols as "real" is actually a process of "choreographing" created by the industry to "manipulate" fans' emotions.

These data suggest that there may be an opportunity to observe how fans perceive and interpret certain concepts and how researchers may observe and analyze ethical considerations in the study of transcultural BL fandoms. The intersection of these two perspectives could provide valuable insights into this complex and rapidly evolving cultural phenomenon.

### **Limitations**

There are two limitations to consider in this research. First, the negative perception of the Brazilian fandom toward the Thai BL industry could be influenced by the specific narrative approach of the *War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022), which offers a critical view of the industry. In other analytical scenarios where works

do not have such a metalinguistic angle that directly reflects and critiques the BL universe, this perception may be softened or even reinterpreted. It is important to note that the study's nonprobabilistic purposive sampling is limited to the analyzed comments, so the results cannot be generalized to the entire Brazilian fandom of Thai BL series. Second, the comments about the perception of the Thai BL industry may be pervaded by the fans' exposure to other BL works from different nationalities, not exclusively Thai. Therefore, when discussing this topic, it is pivotal to consider the variety of non-Thai works consumed by fans, as well as their significant preference for Thai BL series. This preference is evident in the results, as fans frequently name Thai works and actors.

### Conclusion

Regarding the research question on the Brazilian fandom's perception of the Thai industry, the qualitative content analysis of comments revealed that fans hold a negative perception of the production environment, considering it a toxic place where artists often face serious issues that remain hidden behind the scenes, not necessarily reflecting the cheerful world depicted in BL series. Several significant themes emerged from the analysis of comments in the qualitative reading (Index 3), including the following:

1. The fandom recognizes the Thai industry (Index 1) as a distinct institution with its own production and media circulation methods, showcasing fans' media competence in understanding specific aspects of the Thai industry's political and sociocultural landscape.
2. Fans incorporate BL terminology and engage critically with real-life industry cases, demonstrating their critical thinking during transcultural consumption and participating in the debate about the "reality versus fiction" present in *War of Y* (Wongskulphat, 2022).
3. The internal citation network within the BL series universe and the extensive (and almost exclusive) references to them during the conversations highlight the need to analyze the level of endogeneity in the fandom's transcultural consumption experience.
4. Despite the fandom's media competence and critical outlook, many fans choose not to engage in discussions about the industry's negative aspects. This may be a form of denial or a way to avoid discomfort, allowing them to consume the series purely for entertainment.
5. The discussion about fans' empathy toward gay actors and the importance of combating homophobia within the Thai BL industry emerged as a prominent theme.
6. Fans are aware of fanservice (Index 2) practices within the industry, and there is a dispute between blaming the industry and accepting self-accountability for fueling fanservice.
7. Actors are seen as primary victims of perceived toxic practices, and shipping (Index 2) is recognized as a fundamental part of the transcultural consumption process.



8. There is a separation between "toxic fans" and "good fans" in acknowledging and debating these practices, which reflects their stance on whether to be involved or not in the discussed problematic situations.
9. Subjective readings of shipping involve elements like speculation, hope, and disillusionment about the authenticity of shipped couples.
10. Shipping focuses more on actors than on characters, with evaluations of "real" or "fake" couples and concerns about disrupting shipped relationships.
11. The industry often encourages shipping through "choreographed" practices to maintain fan engagement.
12. The fansubbing platform is not only a website for alternative collective consumption of audiovisual works but also a space for interaction and creation of digital sociabilities among fans.

Overall, these findings shed light on the intricate dynamics between the Brazilian fandom and Thai BL series, emphasizing the significance of studying media flows and transcultural consumption phenomena in a South-South global context. It highlights the need to move beyond the prevalence of studies focused solely on the Global North and its asymmetrical relations toward the Global South.

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