

EXPLORING HOMOPHOBIA IN 21ST-CENTURY TAIWANESE VAMPIRE LIGHT NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

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Vampire literature employs the portrayal of an immortal demon as a literary device to provoke social fears and anxieties among readers. The characteristics of the Taiwanese vampires have evolved from being horrific figures of the undead to vampires in fiction that are artistically crafted and reveal multifaceted perspectives regarding non-normative gender and sexuality. Due to their liminality, vampires are frequently employed to unveil complex issues regarding homosexuality and bisexuality. Although images of vampires in Taiwanese literature have been widely discussed, relatively few studies have examined “homophobic” perspectives. This paper therefore explores the relationship between vampire figures and homophobia in 21st-century Taiwanese vampire novels, with a focus on two Taiwanese light novels that address discrimination against homosexual and bisexual polyamorous relationships: Heitao’s *Gen wo qi yue ba! Xixie guigongzi* and Muji’s *Li Taibei waisong*. Through the lens of Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection (1982) and David Halperin’s queer theory (1995), the vampire is regarded as “the abject” that problematises binary opposition. They are the queer outsiders, who dwell at the periphery of society and provide a metaphorical representation of the “other” that embodies homosexuality and bisexuality. Because they are abject, vampires are not cast off but rather controlled through a monogamous relationship, thus unveiling the implicit manifestations of homophobia linked to homosexual/bisexual polyamorous relationships in contemporary Taiwanese society.

Keywords: Vampire; homosexuality/bisexuality; heteronormativity; homophobia; Taiwanese society

1. INTRODUCTION

“Every age embraces the vampires it needs.”

(Auerbach, 1997, p. 145)

As the epigraph by the scholar Nina Auerbach suggests, vampires have evolved over time. Vampire narratives also illuminate the variability of non-normative gender and sexuality. Physically, the homoerotic act of bloodsucking is a metaphor for non-genital sexual intercourse that deviates from “normality” (Tringali, 2016), and vampires in fiction across cultures possess this ambiguous characteristic. Judging from the enigma of otherness, vampires are creatures with dual genitalia, thus carrying the status of hermaphrodites (Muskovits, 2010); the character of the vampire therefore addresses cultural anxieties concerning deviant sexuality (Phelps, 2021). Confronting vampires in the fictional world requires grappling with the threat of

otherness associated with gender and sexuality (Carvalho, 2009). As vampire narratives have appeared extensively in Taiwanese literature since the beginning of the 21st century, the portrayal of vampire marriage goes parallel with homosexual marriage in Taiwanese society, which have faced strong opposition from many legislators and much of civil since 2003 (Han & O'Mahoney, 2019). The opposition to non-normative marriage has acted as an enabling force for Taiwanese vampire literature to emerge as a popular genre among adolescents. These texts entail homosexual relationships that operate outside the dominant discourses of heteronormativity. Significantly, there are contemporary texts such as *qing xiaoshuo* (this literally means "light novels" and indicates a genre of light reading) that employ the vampire trope as a means of understanding the complexity of non-normative sexuality and its relation to cultural anxiety. According to Hong (2020), the popularity of Taiwanese light novels has been linked to teenage lust, with the evolution of gender and sexuality no longer based on binary opposition. The turn of the 21st century has marked an increase in the production of Taiwanese light novels, with themes ranging from conventional romance to homosexual love. The latter type of love is vulnerable to patriarchal wrath, as not conforming to the norms regarding gender and sexuality is likely to provoke strong opposition, metaphorically represented by the homophobic hunt in vampire narratives. Taiwanese vampire light novels, which are the focal points of this research, are therefore not merely a genre that romanticises adolescents' sexual relationship with the undead but also represents the queer love that flourishes amidst the opposition in a patriarchal society.

Contemporary Taiwanese scholars such as Chen (2016), Lin and Ye (2017) and Lin (2018) agree that Taiwanese light novels are influenced by the culture of Japanese anime and manga. The genre explicitly contains anime and manga elements that have been popular among Taiwanese adolescents. Chen (2016), for example, argues that light novels are primarily written to unleash male readers' suppressed lust and psychological stress, while Lin and Ye (2017) claim that the genre variably portrays young adolescents' complicated sexual relationships, which challenge the traditional concept of gender identity. As such analyses attempt to demonstrate, Taiwanese light novels are linked to the satisfaction of adolescent sexual desires. These novels emerge as a prolific genre delineating the quest for adolescent romantic relationships that reflects rapidly changing postmodern notions of masculinity and femininity (Chen, 2020; Hong, 2020).

Scholarly criticism has also made significant contributions to the understanding of the literary genre of vampire narratives. Most studies have concentrated on the negative images of vampires, who commit evil against human beings (Liou, 1996; Zhu, 2014). However, 21st-century Taiwanese vampires have undergone permutations, and the prolific genre of Taiwanese light novels reveals a homophobic violence inherently embedded within vampire narratives. This violence stems from cultural anxiety about gender variance in contemporary society (Liu et al., 2003). The vampires provide a symbol for any kind of sexuality that transgresses heteronormativity. One distinct example is the "unidentifiable" sexuality tied to the vampire's body. To elaborate on the issue, this paper discusses the depiction of vampiric sexuality in two Taiwanese light novels, Heitao's *Gen wo qi yue ba! Xixie guigongzi* 跟我契約吧！吸血貴公子 (Heitao, 2013) (hereafter *Gen wo qi yue ba!*) and Muji's *Li Taibei waisong* 裏台北外送 (Muji, 2023a). Rather than analysing the generic features of vampire narratives, this study explores vampiric sexuality and its relation to homophobia, thus eschewing the traditional interpretation of the vampire trope as a mere symbol of evil, greed, sexual desire and debauchery (Cheng, 2021; Wang, 2016). Instead, this study focuses on how vampires are associated with gender anxieties. It also departs from the fields of cultural and social studies (Kao, 2000; Wu, 2012) and instead examines the ways in which the authors depict the violent hunting of "lesbian" and "gay" vampires as hostile reactions to deviant behaviours within society. The two texts that form the focus of this study suggest that homosexuality/bisexuality needs to be controlled through monogamous relationships.

To clarify these issues, it is important to first understand the background of Taiwanese light novels and the concept of non-normative sexuality embedded in the vampire figure, and this information is covered in Section 2. The methodology of the research is articulated in Section 3, which is followed by an analysis of the novels in Section 4. Lastly, the conclusion of the research, its limitations and suggestions for future research are addressed in Section 5.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vampires have haunted human culture for centuries and have emerged as representations of cultural fears and anxieties (Phelps, 2021). Vampire tales vary greatly across cultures; legends about vampires are found in multiple sources ranging from religious texts and oral folk tales to paranormal films and fictional narratives (Mcfadden, 2021). The vampire trope provides compelling allegories that draw attention to anxieties linked to immortality, non-normative desire, class struggles and intense social anxieties. Their existence is linked to humanity's passion for conquering ageing and death, exploring forbidden sexuality,

defying societal norms and discriminating against the “other” (Hobson, 2016). Because vampires exist in a state of liminality, they blur the boundaries between life and death, day and night, and masculinity and femininity. In some cases, a vampire proliferates within the social and cultural context to represent unexplained events and insinuations about a guilty past (Williamson, 2007). In the medieval period, vampires were monsters that embodied man’s fear of death or fear of the world after death. In European folklore, the early modern vampire was a grotesque, wandering creature akin to a malevolent monster feeding on human blood and flesh (Hobson, 2016). Contemporary vampires, on the other hand, reflect images of diluted masculinity and possess highly seductive personalities (Zurutuza, 2016). Although the conception of the immortal has evolved over time, vampires have captivated a wide range of audiences and have become an inseparable part of human culture. Even in the digital age, when science has prompted rapid technological and cultural change, vampires still pervade contemporary fiction, cartoons, films and local news, suggesting an everlasting fascination in the civilised societies to which they belong.

Within Gothic literature, Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula is the iconic figure of the ultimate vampire, and remains so in the minds of contemporary authors, who employ, to some extent, Dracula’s multifaceted aspects to reconfigure their 21st-century vampires to reflect the ongoing evolution of social issues. According to Anastasiadou (2019), contemporary vampires are not portrayed as horrific and grotesque but rather as more humanised figures that function as contemporary consciousness rather than the abominable monsters of the past. Although it is difficult to trace the history of Taiwanese vampire literature as well as the influence of Count Dracula in Taiwanese vampire light novels due to a lack of systematic research on this genre, Taiwanese vampires, along with their counterparts worldwide, share the features in common with Count Dracula, notably monstrosity, liminality and queerness.

According to Hobson (2016), vampire narratives unpack issues of cultural anxiety concerning masculinity and femininity. Contemporary Taiwanese vampire narratives address a variety of issues related to sexual identity and gender diversity within Taiwanese society. Male vampires exhibit new forms of masculinity that differ from hegemonic masculinity. Their appearance is stereotypically described as white or extremely pale, with slim bodies and smooth, healthy skin distinctively effeminate qualities, which reflect evolving images of masculinity. These vampire figures not only represent the reconceptualisation of masculine identities but also create objects of desire favoured by a wide range of readers, including heterosexual females and/or homosexual males. Such narratives also support the commonly held concept of queerness in a heteronormative society (Martin, 2003). Conversely, female vampires are associated with the reiterations of lesbian relationships; they are portrayed as metaphors for abnormal lust or *bianzhong qingyu* – the threat of lesbian power to the heterosexual world that has permeated Taiwanese fiction since the 1990s (Chen, 2000; Martin, 2003; Xu, 2003). At the beginning of the 21st century, the vampire trope enjoyed growing popularity as a symbol of homosexual desire and provided an icon that challenged and transgressed social taboos in Taiwanese society. The emergence of the appealing vampire in Taiwanese fiction (and particularly in boys’ love fiction) has not only attracted large adolescent audience but also revealed the status of homosexuals and the hardships they encounter (Wang, 2016). Just as the portrayal of Taiwanese vampires has been dynamic, multifaceted aspects of gender and sexuality also exist within these narratives.

Vampire narratives unpack cultural anxieties about gender. Investigating non-normative identities in Taiwanese light novels therefore, conveys significant messages about the conception of gender and sexuality in Taiwanese society. Early vampire tales exposed fears of interracial marriage and threats of sexual violence against the vulnerability of middle-class female adolescents, such as in Mo Yan’s *Aishang xixiegui* (Mo, 2005). Some early vampire stories also featured interracial marriages between werewolves and vampires, such as Wu Kanglü’s *Dang langren aishang xixiegui* (Wu, 2007), to accentuate social awareness of otherness, while also highlighting non-normative marriage and sexuality. This approach further emphasises the concept of the cultural other, particularly the marginalised and the homosexual. A thorough investigation of the vampire romance novel reveals that the sublimity of the hypermasculine image has played an important role in characterising the protagonist vampire and provides a novel approach to featuring masculine dominance through the power of the immortal.

Throughout the development of Taiwanese light novels, women are often portrayed as brave, witty and willing to sacrifice their lives for their beloved vampires. Many do not easily fall prey to the vampire. Some also possess special abilities to target the vampire, such as Zhu Xiaoxiao in Mingyue’s *Tongji! Xixiegui zhengtai* (Mingyue, 2012). Female vampires frequently possess a deviant nature and forsake conventional gender roles or lead polyamorous lives. They are thus depicted as femme fatales who take pleasure in deadly seduction. Female vampires provide a perfect metaphor for cultural anxieties about dangerous women and female sexual perversion. However, these figures carry a cautionary message about strong women, with the dangerously beautiful female vampires in Ling Jing’s *Xixiegui* (Ling, 2022) being punished for their defiance of the patriarchal order. Even in the film industry, female vampires are associated with fears of the loss of cultural

identity. *Don't Worry About Vampire* is an allegorical comedy about self-identity and cultural preservation directed by Chen Ho-yu that tells the story of a female vampire whose beauty threatens Taiwan's cultural identity and transforms the protagonist's hometown into an unrecognisable place as human-vampire relationship peace treaties transform society. To protect his hometown, the protagonist must defeat the vampire (Ramachandran, 2024). Clearly, the vampire plays a key role in addressing perceptions of gender and cultural identity as well as sexual norms, along with the ways they are enforced to present constructions of masculinity and femininity. In deviant portrayals of vampires, the narratives reject the ideals of normative gender and sexuality.

Although many academic works have discussed vampires in contemporary Taiwanese literature, relatively little of that work has discussed homophobia within vampire narratives. Instead, much emphasis has been placed on the representation of homosexual identity. Why has homophobia within these narratives been neglected? After all, homophobia has long been present in the history of homosexuality in Taiwan. This study suggests that the presence of vampires in *Gen wo qi yue ba!* and *Li Taibei waisong*, apart from embodying homosexuality or bisexuality, is associated with homophobia, an ineradicable phenomenon deeply rooted in Taiwan's heteropatriarchal society.

3. METHODOLOGY

An exhaustive investigation of vampire fiction on the Bokelai website reveals that Taiwanese vampire novels can be traced back to the beginning of the 21st century. However, many of these novels were translated from Japanese. Starting in the 2010s, there have been numerous light novels portraying human-vampire relationships, including Heitao's *Gen wo qi yue ba!* (Heitao, 2013) and Muji's *Li Taibei waisong* (Muji, 2023a), which portray the theme of homophobia as the vampires are subject to discrimination for their polyamorous relationships. This paper examines these two novels and explores the relationship between the vampires and the dismantling of the subject, as well as the symbolic order with which they engage. The vampire disrupts binary oppositions and is regarded as the unidentified entity that threatens the symbolic order of humankind, thus leading to the collapse of meaning. The vampire is, therefore, considered "the abject" that problematises binary opposition. To guide the discussion of this complicated issue, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horrors* (1982) and the concept of abjection provide the theoretical framework for this research. The theory of abjection clarifies the status of the vampire (the abject), which lies between the subject and the object; its liminality essentially disturbs identity, challenges cultural borders and even complicates temporal existence. It simultaneously enhances both seduction and repulsion, triggering desire and apprehension. Paradoxically, the abject induces a *jouissance*, a kind of pleasure drawn to that which is abject, just as many audiences enjoy watching or reading horror fiction. In addition to Kristeva, Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) and the concept of abject maternity are used here as a supplementary critique of the characterisation of the vampire in the construction of female monstrosity.

In its examination of vampiric queerness and its relation to social anxiety, this research was inspired by David Halperin's *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995) and Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1997). This paper seeks to show that Taiwanese authors craft contemporary vampires who are portrayed as queer heroes/heroinies rather than as grotesque, ravenous and violent monsters. According to Halperin (1995), the term "queer" does not signify any natural state or refer to a determinate object; by definition, it is what opposes the norms. Moreover, there is nothing to which it necessarily refers. Auerbach (1997) further explains that vampires represent freedom from activities and especially from sexuality. After all, they cannot liberate themselves from their queer shadow:

Like the Phantom of the Opera, the queer dwells underground, below the operatic overtures of the dominant: frightening to look at, desiring, as it plays its own organ, producing its own music.

(Auerbach, 1997, p. 184)

Following this line of interpretation, the vampires in the two Taiwanese texts are perfectly presented as queer outsiders. No matter how they are cultivated, socialised and humanised, they are considered another race, unable to emancipate themselves from this inferiority, which stems from their perpetual liminality. By combining queer theory with the theory of abjection, the present analysis of the vampires not only helps to clarify the differentiation between immortal and mortal society but also makes evident the barriers that heteropatriarchal society erects to segregate male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, human beings and monsters, and the subject and the abject in the two texts.

In addition to these issues, this paper also explores homophobia as reflected in the two texts. Although the two novels were published over a long span of time, the surge of vampire novels during this period is

relevant to contemporary struggles in society to express repressed homosexual desire (Wang, 2016). As a marginalised yet highly popular genre among adolescents, vampire novels portray many vampire characters that embody “non-normative” sexuality. The vampire hunts presented in the two novels remind us that homophobia, to some extent, still prevails even in contemporary Taiwanese society where LGBTQ equality has been legitimised for decades. The turbulent hunts reveal to readers that vampires must be destroyed so as to restore moral values regarding gender and sexuality (Durocher, 2016; Tyler, 2017; Uygar, 2013; Walters, 2021).

These two texts provide a cultural medium for challenging the traditional concept of gender and sexuality, which helps to clarify evolving the concepts concerning masculinity and femininity diversely embedded through vampire narratives. Throughout this study, translations of Chinese quotations as well as textual analysis belong solely to the corresponding author; the exceptions are some interpretations of the source text for which references are cited.

4. VAMPIRES AND MONOGAMY IN THE TWO NOVELS

Taiwanese light novels present contemporary readers with multifaceted issues concerning gender and sexuality. Research on what the genre depicts may overlook significant narrative elements that reveal societal anxieties embedded within the genre. The manifestation of horror through the vampire trope stems from how these narratives are linked to human concerns about gender and sexual deviance and how authors use paranormal elements to explore this phenomenon.

4.1 Gay vampires and monogamy in Heitao's *Gen wo qi yue ba!*

Heitao is a female Taiwanese author who is passionate about writing romantic light novels. Except for a short introduction about her job, a fashion designer, who dreams of becoming a successful writer, no further information about her life or her gender identity is provided. On the Bokelai website, *Gen wo qi yue ba!* is her only searchable work. It is one of the many Taiwanese vampire novels from the early 21st century and reflects gender-related issues in a contemporary society where conventional values have evolved. The novel was published in 2013, but as homophobia still persists in Taiwanese society, the novel continues the concept of “otherness” that has endured in Taiwanese vampire literature since the 1990s (Wang, 2016). Rather than depicting the vampire figure as a symbol of desire, greed and debauchery, Heitao approaches the topic of homosexuality through the characterisation of queer vampires residing in a medieval castle obscured from view by vampire witchcraft in the heart of Taipei city. The castle becomes a place of abjection in which time and space, reality and illusion, as well as life and death, blend with each other. It symbolises “the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). A queer relationship is quite apparent at the beginning of the novel, with a description of a bathing scene in which the vampire protagonist Heisamo, a Heisaqiaoliya descendant, has his clothes removed and is carried naked to the bathtub by his vampire butler Karl. This homoerotic act exhibits the protagonist's effeminacy, as described in the following quote:

卡爾沒一會功夫，已經把黑薩摩全身脫光光，並且快速抱著他，讓他舒適地泡入溫熱的大浴缸裡...看著指頭泡過頭而逐漸變皺泛白，他才緩緩從浴缸裸身出來。卡爾立即上前開始擦拭黑薩摩那濕淋淋的裸體。

[In no time, Karl had stripped Heisamo naked, and quickly carried him, letting him soak comfortably in the large warm bathtub... watching his fingers gradually become wrinkled and white after being soaked for a long period of time, Heisamo slowly got out of the bathtub naked. Karl immediately stepped forward and started wiping Heisamo's wet naked body.]

(Heitao, 2013, pp. 50–51)

The nakedness of a male body is vividly evoked, and the scene accentuates the intimate relationship between the two male vampires in which Heisamo expresses a near-feminine passivity. This is even more explicit through the intimate bond between Heisamo and another young vampire. A homosexual relationship is clearly highlighted when Guanren, a gay vampire in love with Heisamo, visits and forms a clingy connection with him. Superficially, Heisamo himself appears to be heterosexual, but in reality, his masculine appearance has been sanitised of sexual queerness, which continues to lurk in the domestic sphere:

他露出你好笨的表情，然後緊挨著黑薩摩的身邊問：「可以用餐了嗎，小黑黑。」...黑薩摩一手推著黏人精，一臉瞪著站在旁邊的卡爾...黑薩摩放棄繼續推也推不掉的黏人精，頭也不抬地指示著管家：「卡爾，去大門迎接，叫小馬可來吃飯，冠人，給老子坐好！ 吃飯了。」

[His face showed an expression like "You're so stupid", then he clung on to Heisamo and asked, "Can I have dinner, Xiao Heihei?" ... Heisamo pushed the clingy phantom away with one hand and glared at Karl, who was standing next to him. ... Heisamo decided to give up pushing the clingy phantom that could no longer be pushed away, and instructed the butler without raising his head: "Karl, go to the gate to greet him, and invite Little Mark to come to dinner. Guanren, sit down properly! It's time for dinner."]

(Heitao, 2013, pp. 50–51)

This scene illuminates both a male homosocial and homosexual relationship in a vampire family, which supports what Primuth (2014) posits, that homosexuality has long been a part of vampire stories in popular culture. It is evident that the vampire family is not strictly gendered. Heisamo and his acquaintance's intimate relationship nonetheless illustrates homoeroticism within the vampire community. Here, vampirism is employed to explore gender diversity in a non-binary world. As the description above suggests, the vampire family mimics a patriarchal model in which women are no longer sexual objects for men. Gendered expressions thus possess significant flexibility compared to human society. However, how these vampires express their sexuality threatens human norms by rejecting heteronormativity. Homoeroticism is likely tied to vampirism because vampires themselves are physically queer. According to Auerbach (1997) and McGunnigle (2005), vampires are viewed as androgynous or non-binary in sexuality; their sexual prowess thus poses a threat to heteronormative culture. The author further reveals that homosexuality is linked to Heisamo's family history, as Heisamo, his butler and his acquaintance have led a deviant life for centuries. This relationship has, however, endured in a private domestic sphere until Heisamo is able to find a suitable woman to marry.

According to the ancestral rules of the Heisaqiaoliya clan, vampires are only allowed to suck blood from people who are "willing" to sacrifice their blood to them. The blood donor must also be willing to become the vampire's spouse in order to maintain a lifelong monogamous relationship. Any other form of marriage is prohibited and considered a violation of the ancestral rules. These rules reflect the hierarchical relationships among vampire family members, similar to those in Taiwanese families. Much of this behaviour is linked to Confucian concepts, where every family member is expected to obey their parents and respect their elders. On the one hand, this reflects parental involvement in children's marriages, which is an important obligation. On the other hand, it underlines the cosmic law of yin and yang, which entails binary oppositions between male and female to which all family members must adhere (Chang, 2019). Heisamo has therefore made countless attempts to search for the ideal woman to satisfy his bloodlust through the power of a bite that is analogous to vaginal intercourse. If Heisamo cannot find his blood donor, his prenatal instinct will go awry and make him rampantly kill people. If this occurs, he must be hunted down and slaughtered by humans, as Karl narrates:

「我看過尋找不到供血契約者的吸血族，因為要讓自己活下去，長期吸食供血者以外人類的血，最後發狂成了嗜血狂魔，濫殺人類後導致被人類獵殺」...「一旦濫殺人類，宗教體系下的獵血族師團一定發動追殺，就像大批蟑螂一樣。」

[I've seen vampires who could not find a blood donor. In order to survive, they drank the blood of other humans for a long period of time. Finally, they went crazy and became bloodthirsty monsters. They killed humans rampantly and were hunted by humans. ... Once humans are killed indiscriminately, the vampire-hunting divisions under the religious system will definitely launch a hunt for them, like a swarm of cockroaches.]

(Heitao, 2013, p. 51)

Karl emphasises that vampires must be in a monogamous relationship, otherwise they will go insane. These rules date back to ancestral times and function as the norms to which vampires of the Heisaqiaoliya clan must adhere. Karl reveals that the appearance of the vampire wreaks havoc on human society, because the monster represents the terror of the unidentified, which endangers human life and must be eradicated. The vampire hunt, therefore, is radically associated with the slaughter of the other to restore societal norms. Symbolically, it underlies the killing of the sexual deviant to restore heteronormativity.

It is apparent from Karl's speech that the vampires themselves are fully aware of their queerness, which will eventually bring calamity to their race. The vampire, therefore, functions as a figure onto which the dominant culture projects its fears and anxieties. In this contemporary era, the vampire becomes a deviant onto which people can specifically project their anxieties regarding gender and sexual norms. Here, the author employs the vampire figure as a tool to defy human power. Men, who are viewed as the most dominant species on earth, face a dreadful monster of deviant sexuality with sharp hidden fangs. According to Auerbach (1997), the vampire's mouth is the common metaphor and tool of oppression that terrorises human masses. Sucking blood thus means not only killing prey but also colonising humans and making them vampires. The true horror lies in the liminality of the fangs functioning as both a fatal weapon and the "phallus" of a sexually deviant monster (Kimberley, 2009).

When Jingyu enters Heisamo's castle, she is appalled by the truth that her beloved Heisamo is a vampire standing among scattered animal corpses in a secret room. This scene depicts what Kristeva (1982) postulates as the horror within, much like a person's skin that "no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's own and clean self but..., gave way before the dejection of its content" (p. 53). Entering Heisamo's castle resembles the experience of entering a maternal womb, confronting "the horrors of maternal bowels" and finding that the subject lacks its "own and clean self" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 53). The animal corpses further embody "the abjection of waste that turns into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 109). Jingyu suddenly faints and falls prey to Heisamo, who is on the verge of madness as his instincts have become uncontrollable. The text employs the type of erotic scene that frequently pervades vampire literature and describes a damsel in distress on the brink of violation, not through penetration of the vagina but through long teeth:

黑薩摩的嘴角緩緩牽動...靜雨來不及說痛，對方就發了狂的開始撕裂靜雨身上粉紅色的小禮服，盤起的髮絲因為劇烈晃動而混亂落下，棕色長髮如瀑布般的散落在雪白的床單上，他的舉動快到讓靜雨連抗拒的動作都沒有，她腦子一片空白，害怕的淚水模糊了視線。

[The corners of Heisamo's mouth moved slowly...before Jingyu had time to express her pain, he went crazy and started tearing apart Jingyu's pink mini dress. The coiled hair was messed up due to the violent shaking, and the long brown hair poured like a waterfall on the snow-white bed sheets. His movement was so fast that Jingyu could not even resist. Her mind went blank, and her vision was blurred by tears of fear.]

(Heitao, 2013, p. 110)

Here, Heitao is able to present Heisamo's predation on Jingyu such that she is sexually victimised. This is a symbolic rape scene, as is often seen in conventional vampire texts that is used to explore the vulnerability of a woman's body under irresistible hypnotic power. The fangs stand in metonymically for reproductive tool. The scene highlights non-normative sexuality, which subverts heterosexuality that primarily relies on vaginal intercourse. This is the queerest of vampiric activities that go against human norms.

Strange though it may seem, Jingyu feels empathy for the villainous monster's enduring suffering. She ultimately decides to sacrifice herself to Heisamo's bite during his fight with Karl, when Heisamo is driven by his aggressive instincts. Fortunately, Jingyu's blood suddenly revitalises him and eventually calms his aggression. According to Kristeva (1982), blood is a bodily substance that obviously disturbs a person's subjectivity more than other fluids; it is a signifier of abjection which makes "the collapse of the border between inside and outside" (p. 53). It also "threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate" (p. 71). The exchange of blood in this scene can be interpreted as a social transgression for an innocent woman like Jingyu, as well as the collapse of social boundaries between humans and monsters. In this way, Jingyu too becomes indistinguishable from Heisamo. As a sign of uncleanliness, the exchange of blood signifies that Jingyu is losing her subjectivity and is being re-created as a semi-demon in the end of the novel.

Heisamo successfully escapes the horrifying vampire hunt. He eventually builds a family behind the mask of a heterosexual relationship. Monogamy in this context is a social tool employed to control non-normative gender and sexuality by forcing a gay or bisexual vampire to adhere to hegemonic masculinity and legitimise sexual desire. Although it merely "emulates" heterosexual marriage, the blissful ending reveals that the story is inherently shaped by a heteronormative cultural context. Heteronormativity is thus the ideology that controls the entire narrative, which implicitly highlights that heterosexuality is the dominant sexuality while homosexuality is the other. As a tool for enforcing heteronormativity, the novel depicts Heisamo as a male vampire who is an exemplar adhering to hegemonic and normative attitudes towards masculinity within the heterosexual realm. At the end of the story, Heitao entertains the readers with the conventional conclusion of a vampire romance.

Although Heitao concludes the narrative by controlling the vampire's polyamorous life, abjection continues to haunt human beings. Both the characters and the society in which they reside are contaminated by the presence of the abject, while attempting to sustain the symbolic order and social morals. The results of the imbalance caused by the presence of the abject can be observed when Heisamo wakes up one morning and finds Guanren sleeping naked with him in bed. The scene reveals a hidden secret of Heisamo's sexuality and true identity to Qingyu, Jingyu's sister who is coming to call Heisamo for dinner. Qingyu harshly scolds both of them and expresses her reluctance to accept Heisamo as her brother-in-law. Her words explicitly reflect homophobic messages and simultaneously criticise the non-heteronormative relationship. Jingyu warns him not to sleep naked, otherwise she will sleep in a separate room. Qingyu even expels them from the house because she cannot tolerate "dirty" behaviours. The word "dirty" emphasises the idea that non-normative

sexuality is unacceptable and must be controlled. Jingyu's warnings accentuate the "new" norm – heterosexual traits – to which Heisamo must adhere.

The final scene informs the readers about a gay/bisexual vampire who engages in a conventional marriage. Heisamo and Guanren's relationship affirms the notion of homosexuality embedded in vampirism, while Heisamo and Jingyu's relationship reveals another aspect of a vampire's bisexuality. According to Halperin (1995), homosexuality is an identity without an essence, one that is perceived as "not a natural reality" but "a fantasmatic projection" defined by negation or opposition to everything that the heterosexual is not. In the novel, homosexuality is portrayed as an identity perpetually tied to Heisamo, who is, in every sense, "fantasmatic". Ultimately, Heisamo must choose the conventional relationship. The final scene clearly shows that non-normative sexuality cannot be entirely corrected, so it must be regulated by the monogamous relationship promoted as the norm of patriarchal society.

4.2 Lesbianism and monogamy in Muji's *Li Taibei waisong*

Muji's *Li Taibei waisong* entails more than just romantic love between a lesbian vampire and a young female YouBike rider. Many readers confess that the novel evokes mixed feelings. While introducing the newly published *Li Taibei waisong* on his Facebook fan page, Muji (2023b) states that the novel is written in a satirical style. Xiaoping's search for a job reflects the fact that she is experiencing a loss of identity after graduating from university. It is difficult to conclude that the author, also a recent graduate searching for financial security, identifies himself with Xiaoping. If so, *Li Taibei waisong* is a quite sophisticated work reflecting the author's complex identity. Muji allows readers to see the surreal elements that lurk beneath the shadow of darkness and makes Taibei and the things associated with it literally queer. The portrayals of female zombies, witches, lesbian vampires and homophobic hunts are clearly intertwined with the process of othering and queering in depictions of non-binary gender construction.

While many readers generally believe that the lesbian vampire is linked to fantasy stories, the truth is that the trope is used to unravel homophobic issues through the vampire hunt to accentuate the control of female homosexuals. *Li Taibei waisong* presents the idea that the vampire embodies societal fears associated with lesbianism and that killing a lesbian vampire is akin to restoring peace and social order in a patriarchal society. By creating a protagonist with a queer identity, the novel subverts the conventional binary of gender identity based on a long-established heteronormative ideology, thus challenging the patriarchal discourse that views lesbianism as a deviant sexuality. The author critiques the heterosexual discourse through the complex relationships that appear among multiple female partners, particularly the doll-like lesbian vampire Lili'an, and a YouBike food rider named Xiaoping. Through a queer perspective, Lili'an is not depicted as a butch, and thus assertive or unattractive, but as an ideally feminine woman about whom passers-by do not notice any of the abnormalities associated with vampiric characteristics. This is quite paradoxical. She is superficially "normal" in terms of her appearance, which fits perfectly into societal standards, but she is not, in fact, "normal". Lili'an is actually the abject that a person does not recognise in her identity; she exists beyond the realm of meaning. This exists in a liminal condition that renders her neither alive nor dead, beauty nor horror, subject nor object. The corpse signifies the "downfall in subject and object" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 26), and Lili'an's presence is analogous to the resurrection of the corpse wandering Taibei at night.

Lili'an engages in multiple relationships but particularly targets Xiaoping, who agrees to let her suck blood for fear of receiving a complaint and losing her job due to delivering a blood sachet late one night. Lili'an becomes addicted to Xiaoping's blood and therefore relinquishes the blood of other humans, gravitating to Xiaoping every night when her bloodlust is stimulated. Lili'an frequently hovers over Xiaoping, engaging in a romantic dialogue with an overtly seductive power. Rather than undergoing a dramatic penetration, Lili'an asks her victim in quite a polite manner and views her prey as a source of rejuvenating power – and thus her property. The way Lili'an perceives Xiaoping resembles a woman who is sexually aroused when she sees her targeted lover. She cannot resist the temptation; her bloodlust is intensified by Xiaoping's bodily scent. She thus swoops down to beg for Xiaoping's blood almost every night. In the novel, Xiaoping is the only person nourishing and revitalising Lili'an. When Lili'an's fangs pierce Xiaoping's neck, Xiaoping feels extreme joy, deeply immersed in boundless imagination. This is similar to a joyous moment during sexual intercourse in which physical suffering is replaced by the pleasurable sensations of orgasm:

她痛苦地看著我，然后張開口咬住我的脖子...我們終於碰觸彼此。她立刻再次將我擁入懷裡，用翅膀包覆住我，巨大的衝擊緊接而來，還來不及疼痛，肺部的空氣就全擠了出來。天旋地轉，我幾乎失去意識，身體每個部位都在向內擠壓，下一瞬間又像是要散開。然后翻滾終於停止，我卻躺在地上，耳邊只聽到急促的呼吸聲。

[She looks at me in pain, then opens her mouth and bites my neck... We finally touch each other. She immediately hugs me into her arms again and wraps me with her wings. An excessive sensation strikes

me, eradicating all pain. All the air is squeezed out from my lungs. The world is spinning, and I almost lose consciousness. Every part of my body is pressed down, and in the next moment it seems likely to come apart. Then the rolling finally stops, and I am lying on the ground, with only the sound of rapid breathing in my ears.]

(Muji, 2023a, pp. 379–380)

The way Lili'an drains Xiaoping's blood while flying is analogous to a sexual affair. The long fangs, again, metonymically represent the penetrative genitals through which bodily fluids are exchanged during an orgasm. However, their relationship is even more complicated, because Xiaoping smells her mother's odour when she approaches Lili'an. She even thinks of her great-grandmother, because Lili'an is in fact three hundred years older than her. Here, the text provides a figurative portrayal of the underlying incestuous character of the relationship due to the blurring of gender boundaries:

被一個外表隻有十二歲的小女孩摸頭安慰，實在有點羞恥。不過一想到她的年紀其實都可以做我的曾曾曾曾曾曾曾曾曾祖母了，忽然間有種無與倫比的安心感。她身上有媽媽的味道。

[It is actually a bit shameful to be touched on the head and comforted by a little girl who looks only twelve years old. But when I think that she is old enough to be my great-great-great-grandmother, I suddenly feel an incomparable sense of peace of mind. She smells like mom.]

(Muji, 2023a, p. 36)

Xiaoping's identification of Lili'an with her mother and her great-grandmother reflects not only her sexual desire, but also her necrophilia, which literally marks the shift from conforming with social norms to the redefinition of her sexual relationships. Thus, vampire reproduction in the story caricatures a taboo in which a mother is likely to engage in a sexual relationship with her daughter. According to Creed (1993), Lili'an perfectly embodies the monstrous mother whose female physicality is literally abject. In particular, she is a monster who consumes blood, possesses phallic fangs and breeds with her offspring. The reproduction scene is "the ultimate of abjection"; it is analogous to the moment in which "fantasy is involved: something *horrible to see* at the impossible doors of the invisible the mother's body" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 155). Because vampires reproduce through the power of penetration, Lili'an, representing the mother's body, uses her fangs to penetrate Xiaoping's neck to reproduce beings of the same race. The scene portrays the birth-giving moment that involves "the bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 155). From that moment, their intimacy develops and crosses the boundaries from friends to more than friends. However, their intimate relationship is initially based on materialistic needs; Lili'an's thirst for Xiaoping's blood is initially for the purpose of revitalising herself, while Xiaoping maintains a close relationship with Lili'an due to her quest for a luxurious and comfortable life obtained from Lili'an's immense wealth. Xiaoping once confessed to a fortune-teller, Yichen xiaojie, whom she met at her campus, that she does not want to allow Lili'an to suck her blood as she does not wish to become a vampire. Her statement reflects the inner desire of a girl who does not want to lose her human identity and thus create a distinct binary opposition between the prestigious and the inferior, which further marginalises the role of Lili'an in the story. She once asked Lili'an whether she was a female ghost and received no reply. Her speech explicitly questions a vampire's queer identity, which perpetually exists in the realm of liminality, thus emphasising an identity without essence as purported by Halperin (1995).

Throughout the story, Lili'an adopts a charismatic female persona. She accompanies Xiaoping everywhere and hovers over her. Their relationship grants Lili'an a position of domineering power because Xiaoping submits to Lili'an's authority whenever she is with her, much like an individual loses his or her position when facing the abject. One particular scene illustrating this subordination occurs when Lili'an carries Xiaoping in her arms while flying over the campus. Xiaoping completely depends on Lili'an's strong arms as they soar above the university library. Her vulnerability emphasises passive and submissive feminine characteristics:

但是想像中的墜落感遲遲沒有來臨。我悄悄地睜開眼睛，眼前卻是莉莉安的臉。又一次，理所當然，毫無緊張感的，莉莉安接住了我。她在我開始下墜之前，就用公主抱的方式抱住我，飄在幾層樓高的空中。

[But the imaginary feeling of falling down never comes true. I quietly open my eyes, and in front of me is Lili'an's face. Once again, of course, without any sense of tension, Lili'an catches me. Before I start to fall down, she hugs me, treating me like a princess, flying through the air over the high building.]

(Muji, 2023a, p. 156)

Here, Lili'an is presented as a powerful female character. The physical description of her actions showcases her supernatural strength, which resembles that of the male lover who carries his beloved and protects her from danger in more conventional romance literature. In this scene, the author portrays Lili'an's sublime characteristics, which are contradicted by her femininity in a heterosexual context. However, Lili'an, like other vampires, must be condemned for her deviant sexuality, which has been embraced for hundreds of years. Zhuang Yudiao, a Taiwanese vampire hunter, reveals to Xiaoping the long-hidden truth that Lili'an once married Master Li. Since becoming a vampire, Master Li is physically weak and has become frail and bedridden due to serious health complications. Because Lili'an cannot tolerate his suffering state, she unkindly terminated their relationship to engage in alternative relationships outside her marriage. Zhuang Yudiao further discloses Lili'an's disastrous acts of murdering several of her ex-husbands. Here, Lili'an is portrayed as an insatiable and rebellious wife who not only challenges heterosexual relationships but also rejects the institution of traditional marriage in a male-dominated discourse. Her actions challenge mainstream social conventions and suggest that marriage is merely a phallocentric institution that limits other possible relationships in a heterosexual hegemony (Thobejane & Khoza, 2014). Female sexual empowerment is thus realised through the construction of a lesbian vampire (Thompson, 2016). Lili'an engages in multiple same-sex relationships that act like a double-edged sword and ultimately ruin her life.

She has been hunted by a group of Taoist priests from Mainland China, who seek vengeance against vampires to maintain the restoration of the political power and control of the mainland. According to Zhuang Yudiao, numerous vampires dwell in Taiwan; homophobic messages are, to a large extent, intertwined with political deviance, which threatens political sovereignty. One Chinese Taoist priest claims that right is right and wrong is wrong: the vampire should not exist, because it disrupts societal peace by killing so many people. Lili'an should therefore be convicted for her disastrous actions so as to restore order to society. Here, it is explicitly shown that lesbianism threatens male supremacy in a patriarchal society; female homosexuality is thus regarded as something that disrupts heteronormativity. According to Kristeva (1982), corruption is "the most socialised appearance of the abject" (p. 16). This is why "it is to be excluded from God's territory [...] It must not be displayed but immediately buried so as not to pollute the divine earth" (p. 109). For this reason, the vampires must be removed from Taipei to prevent the pollution of society.

To convince Xiaoping of Lili'an's disastrous acts, Zhuang Yudiao takes her to the graveyard where the corpses of males and females killed by Lili'an are buried. Due to Lili'an's deep regret and melancholy over her destructive acts, she has mourned the dead and visited the graveyard to sweep their tombs for over a hundred years. Lili'an's immoral acts affirm the complexity of the lesbian vampire's narrative, which is not merely restricted to the conventional story of a female monster biting another woman, but reveals the evolution of a lesbian vampire related to bisexuality or other forms of non-binary sexuality. One form of deviant sexuality inherently embedded within Lili'an is that of the transgender lesbian. As stated earlier, the fangs are, figuratively, penetrative genitalia used to exchange bodily fluids. Thus, the fangs further complicate the identity of the lesbian vampire and produce the image of a transgender monster recognising herself going through genital intercourse (Wagoner, 2023). The case of Lili'an supports Auerbach's (1997) notion of the complex representation of lesbian vampires, which, according to queer and lesbian theorists, are in fact multi-gendered. The metaphorical representation of vampirism related to lesbianism thus unveils social anxiety towards the variant forms of deviant female sexuality that have haunted Taiwanese society.

Like other vampires, Lili'an is determined to walk into sunlight and burn herself to ashes due to a morbid self-approach originating from internalised guilt that has tormented her for centuries. It is clear that Lili'an's death is predestined, because she poses a threat to patriarchal law. For this reason, she refrains from sucking Xiaoping's blood. Her physical power dwindles day by day as she awaits the moment of the last judgement. Fortunately, with the help of Zhuang Yudiao, the immortal medicine Xiaoping has taken transforms her into an immortal being. She sacrifices herself to allow Lili'an to suck her blood until Lili'an feels satiated. This intrepid act ultimately saves Lili'an's life. Xiaoping entirely becomes Lili'an's immortal partner, devoting her blood to revitalising her. After being bitten by the vampire, Xiaoping is detached from the symbolic realm and exists in the position of the abject. The influence of the semiotic realm grows stronger as she is compelled to assume the role of the seductress to tempt Lili'an into sucking her blood. This unconscious behaviour can be interpreted as a "projection of lust" towards Lili'an, who nurtures her.

In the final scene, the author purposefully creates a powerful message concerning the acceptance of the lesbian relationship that ultimately overcomes many obstacles to attain a blissful ending. However, it simultaneously constructs a deeply didactic tale about female sexuality: if a woman chooses to inhabit the monstrous role, embracing a lesbian identity and defying patriarchal order, she loses her human identity forever. This irreversible destiny completely transforms Xiaoping into an immortal being that, like the vampire, exists to be extinguished due to her irregularities and deviance (Auerbach, 1997). The narrative structure of the story appears to be primarily constructed as the emergence of a queer monster, her disturbance of societal

order and the probable defeat rather than the triumph of the queer through the re-establishment of patriarchal dominance (Uygur, 2013). The text thus emphasises that, whether figuratively or literally, men always keep an eye on women and remain in power within a heteronormative society. They are waiting to disempower transgressive women who defy patriarchal law. This is an intimidating reality that, although they are unwilling to confront it, still exists everywhere, even in a fictional world.

5. CONCLUSION

Heitao and Muji transform the characters of Heisamo and Lili'an to highlight the sexualised nature of vampires in the 21st century. The portrayal of Heisamo as the hero and Lili'an as the heroine of the stories follows the characterisation of 21st-century vampires in addressing complex issues of non-normative gender and a sexuality no longer based on traditional binary concepts (Heikkila, 2022). Heisamo and Lili'an bring to light the gothic tradition and the amalgamation of liminality, monstrosity and romance, which are reconfigured in the novels for young adult readers (Smith & Moruzi, 2020). However, due to their sexual deviance, their emergence wreaks havoc on a heteronormative society. The vampire hunt metaphorically refers to the homophobic attacks that occur in order to restore gender and sexual normativity. The fluid forms of sexuality exhibited by Heisamo and Lili'an can be perceived as a social critique of the traditional notion of gender and sexuality, which is no longer sufficient to communicate the transformations of sexual orientation and gender identity in contemporary society. Both authors artistically portray their characters as humanised vampires whose thoughts and feelings are evidently reflective of the cultural other dwelling among heteronormative conformists. Following Julia Kristeva (1982), Heisamo and Lili'an can be identified as the "abject", which generally problematises binary opposition. Because the abject lies between the subject and the object, its liminality disturbs identity, challenges cultural borders and even complicates temporal existence. It simultaneously enhances both seduction and repulsion, triggering both desire and apprehension. These abject characters thus always emerge as deviants who stand contrary to the norms. This accentuates the literalisation of the instability of the social status of the abject, which does not conform to either side of binary opposition.

Instead of slaughtering the vampires to restore normativity as presented in traditional texts the two novels illuminate an opportunity for assimilating the queer into normative society through monogamous relationships. This is linked to contemporary concessions regarding the coexistence of homosexuality and normativity. Following the arduous hardships that the vampires encounter, they are ultimately accepted by their partners, who dare to forsake human identity and engage in lifelong relationships. In both texts, monogamy can be seen as a social tool for controlling the abject and strengthening established values in an era of diverse gender and sexuality. It also inherently gestures towards the concept that all relationships should be exclusively monogamous due to entrenched discrimination against homosexual and bisexual polyamorous relationships.

While it is true that Taiwan was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage in Asia in 2019, thus marking a positive reaction to the equality of LGBTQ rights, the unfortunate reality for many queer individuals is that they, like Heisamo and Lili'an, still face significant discrimination. The homophobic hunt continues to haunt Taiwanese society, resembling the bloodthirsty vampire murders in the fictional realm. This discrimination is evident in a horrifying knife crime in Taoyuan City in 2023, where Mr Luo, a middle-aged man, angered by the sight of Mr Lin kissing his friend in the supermarket, shouted, "The homosexuals must die", before slashing a knife at Mr Lin's head. According to the news report, the wounds were relatively minor, but what was more painful was that the victims of this assault had done nothing wrong. Mr Luo's reaction to Mr Lin and his friend resembled the violent response of a vampire hunter when confronting the abject in a fictional scene. Unfortunately, this is merely one example of the hate crimes that occur in Taoyuan City, the majority of which go unnoticed. Discrimination, oppression and violence against LGBTQ groups are pervasive in Taiwan, although the country is a leader in LGBTQ activities and campaigns in Asia. The incident highlights the status of Taiwanese LGBTQ individuals, who are treated, in Kristeva's (1982) terms, like waste (the abject) that must be removed to avoid polluting the divine land. This reveals the paradoxical notion concerning queer individuals in Taiwanese society: while they are permitted to live freely, they are rejected by heteronormative conformists. In many circumstances, LGBTQ people remain marginalised and are subject to sexual abuse, discrimination and oppression. Fear and hatred against the LGBTQ community primarily arise from injustice and bias against them in a patriarchal society. Although Heisamo and Lili'an ultimately lead a blissful life, their struggles, to some extent, remind us of the homophobic perspective embedded within vampire narratives.

Finally, this study suggests that Heitao and Muji create more than just a source of horror or entertainment: they highlight for their readers the social anxieties about fluid forms of gender identity and expression that are identified through the immortal. With an appropriate gender and cultural approach, an in-depth analysis of this vampire literature aids enormously in understanding and recovering the narratives of

sexual marginalisation in Taiwanese society. Welcoming the vampire into our awareness thus resembles embracing the queer, which can contribute to our understanding of the variability of gender and sexuality in a non-binary world.

Issues of gender and sexuality in Taiwanese vampire light novels are abundant but have seldom been fully investigated. Apart from homophobia, the genre further demonstrates sexual and gender identities that are intertwined with political deviance, with *Li Taipei waisong*, in particular, addressing the issue. The emergence of the undead not only unearths the social anxiety surrounding non-normative gender and sexuality but also embodies the otherness connected to identity of Taiwan. This reflects the politics of othering the nation in terms of sexuality. Rather than merely focusing on queer theory, this opens up an opportunity for incorporating theories of representation to further investigate how Taiwanese vampires provide insightful information on the identity of Taiwan and other related issues.

Due to the limitations of the scope of this study, the selected vampire narratives reflect only certain types of gender and sexuality. It would be intriguing to examine other narratives, which would help us visualise a diverse spectrum of gender and sexuality not necessarily grounded in a binary opposition. Moreover, in a period of rapidly evolving understanding of gender and sexuality, it is of the utmost importance to study cross-cultural vampire literature to reveal the different notions of gender and sexuality associated with vampires of various nations and cultures.

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