

STRATEGIES USED IN CONVEYING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POLITICAL HISTORY IN THE NOVEL “DESTINY: FROM SHANTOU TO SIAM” BY S. DEB-RUMPHOEY

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Abstract

The research on Strategies Used in Conveying Knowledge About Political History in the Novel “Destiny: from Shantou to Siam” by S. Deb-Rumphoey proposed to study, via document analysis, strategies and techniques in writing novels that convey political historical knowledge. The researcher employed the qualitative method of examining the texts and techniques used by the author. The results revealed that the author applied 14 strategies in conveying Chinese political history knowledge. These strategies however did not produce the impression that the author was trying to impose knowledge on the reader. On the contrary, the strategies enriched the storyline of the novel. One additional finding showed that the author did not necessary relate the characters’ thoughts with the Chinese political circumstances of the chosen period in the Chinese history.

Keywords: conveying knowledge strategy; history; novel

Introduction

As far as writing technique is concerned, there are a number of definitions: for example; “techniques in writing are simply put as a method of composing a story. Within this concept, elements of style will be interlaced into the story content from the beginning to the end: that is to say composition helps enhance the content to be more colorful, exciting from start to finish.” (Elements of Novels and Short Stories, online. dek-d.com.) Or “Writing strategy is the

method of writing in a specific way belonging to an author. (Style of writing Chapter 4 Method of Writing, 2017.) As for the dictionary of literary terms, the word method or strategy signifies “author's attitude presented in the theme or in the story. Another definition of writing technique refers to the strategy in composing the story. This term was used in literary criticism in the 1930s...” (Royal Academy, 2002, p.123). In this research, the researcher wishes to define the meaning briefly as “a method of presenting content in the author's way”.

Fiction is a form of entertainment that is presented through various strategies with endless creativity. Fiction as a form of entertainment also comes in different media formats other than published books such as TV dramas, movies and online streaming content. There are courses on novel writing, including books on how to write. For example, writing a novel in the Tomyanti style (Wisawanard, 2005). This proves that there are a number of people who are interested in learning the writing techniques.

In academic institutes, courses on writing novels are offered. At the university level, the Thai language curriculum of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University offers courses on fiction, short story, analyses of formulas as well as content and concept. (Bachelor of Arts Program, Thai language branch, Department of Thai, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2018.) At the secondary school level, there are courses on concepts, literature aesthetics of the novels as well as analysis of the novels on the extracurricular reading list. (Ubonlerd, P. An Analysis of non-fiction Thai textbooks at high school level B.E. 2524,1981.)

This research, therefore, aimed at examining novel writing strategies with a view to promoting education and creativity from both writing and reading perspectives. The researcher observed that contemporary novel writing emphasizes more on knowledge dissemination even though they are fiction pieces. It is therefore an encouraging sign that novels are not only for entertainment but also provide knowledge, ideas and essential life values as well.

In fact, the phenomenon of inserting knowledge into fiction writing was not new. But Thai media and the general public may have paid less attention to it because the mainstream media; namely; television, movies and the internet are

overwhelmed with romance or sexually related contents, probably because such subject matters appeal to the public interest and are more accessible to the larger public.

Fiction or Novel was introduced into Thailand long time ago. "Western novels developed around the 18th century whereas Thailand started to obtain this particular novel genre in the 19th century. When "Mae Wan" in 1900 translated the novel *Vendetta* into Thai from Marie Corelli 's original English version, western novels were already introduced a century earlier." (Boonkhachorn, T.,2004, p.10) It is worth noting that the translation of novels into Thai at this early stage tended to revolve around mystery novels which were exciting and adventurous. They aimed to entertain rather than to invoke intellects. The adoption at the beginning of this novel genre may partly contribute to the general stagnation of genre and theme in the Thai novel circle these days. Thai novels generally focus on excitement and adventure, especially romance and sex between men and women. Moreover, today content is more open without gender boundaries. More novels in the Thai market contain romance among people of the same sex; for example, men who love men, in "My friend's father, being my husband," "When a man was pregnant" and "Slut Love Company" etc. (Tunwalai.com, 2023). Women love women theme in "As if Khun Sam's Wife," "My friend's Son, Mother's friend", "Excess of Self Gratification" etc. (Girl Love/Yuri, Readawrite.com, 2023).

The researcher is interested in analyzing the novel "Destiny: From Shantou to Siam" by S. Deb-Rumphoey despite the fact that the novel contains traditional love theme between men and women, though not as a main subject matter. The novel also intellectually portrays a way of life, historical as well as political knowledge. Therefore, it is apt that the novel should be discussed and thoroughly researched as a model or a guideline for the creation of future novels. To say the least, the novel serves to demonstrate that love stories can disseminate historical knowledge. It is important to note that the novel's author did not insert historical background into story merely to create new atmospheric setting to the novel. He did not pursue conventionally to present love stories to please the mainstream market which would have been a market success but failed in terms of creativity.

As for the novel "Destiny: From Shantou to Siam", it has been noted that "...Even though the title sounds as if it were a non-fiction, it's actually a novel based on the history of Chinese politics that took place in the period after the change of government regime from absolute monarchy to the People's Republic of China in the years 1915-1938..." (S. Deb-Rumphoey, 2023, p. Introduction).

The researcher agrees with the statement that this novel has a title similar to a documentary. However, upon thorough reading of the book, it is concluded that the title is appropriate. It is apparent that the author applied the strategy of blending the Chinese historical background with the storyline and plot. Therefore, this novel is outstanding in terms of its content. It should be studied and served as another guideline for the creation of Thai novels with broader perspective.

The researcher wishes to empirically analyze how the author applied strategies of conveying historical knowledge through a story without making the reader feel interrupted like being compelled to watch advertisements while enjoying the drama series. Instead, the author was successful in soliciting the enthusiasm of the reader to learn more about the historical knowledge. At the same time, the inserted history anecdotes are exciting and induce the reader to continue following the story of the novel. It is worth studying how the author raised the richness of the story.

"S. Deb- Rumphoey" is a contemporary writer whose literature works are not plenty but a few of his works were bestowed prestigious literary prizes such as Supa Devakula Literal Prize.

The researcher views that the novel "Destiny: From Shantou to Siam by S. Deb-Rumphoey" possesses qualities which deserve reviewing and this study will serve as a guideline for those who are interested in creativity process as well as for those students in both secondary/high school levels and university level especially in the field of literature study. The researcher's hypothesis revolves around how the author of this novel managed to convey historical knowledge without diminishing the characteristic of fiction as a form of entertainment.

Research Objectives

1. To study the writing strategies in the novel where the transfer of knowledge on political history was apparent: a case study of the novel *Destiny: From Shantou to Siam* by S. Deb-Ramphoey.

Literature Reviews

The study of novel writing strategies is beneficial in at least two ways: on the one hand, author's art of writing or so-called presentation strategies can be discerned, which will be useful for those who are keen on making of fiction. On the other hand, extraction of the strategies from the content helps the reader to fully appreciate the essence of the novel. It can be said that the writing strategies depend largely on an individual's style. Each writer has different writing styles according to their preferences. However, the study of the writing techniques of an individual, in particular the one who is successful in doing so, can serve as an example which will eventually contribute to new applied creative approaches.

The study of writing strategies has been popular topic in the review of fiction through the ages. There have been many related researches on the topic. For example, **Saowaros Mittrapiyanurak** (Mittrapiyarak, S., 1996.) studied Japanese historical literature on the topic of James Clavell's *Japanese Historical Fiction: A Study of the Relationship between Literature and History*. It was found out that, "the author has altered the historical facts to be deviated from the actual events, and has also added certain characters and events that did not really exist in the history to play an important role in the novel. Moreover, the author also inserted a picture of society and cultural traditions of Japan at that time. Whereas **Yongsiri, S.** (2002) whose analytical study of historical novels in the Rattanakosin era aimed, "to study storyline construction, plot, character creation, scene application, and the art of language in order to prove that historical novels in the Rattanakosin period possess distinctive features: praise of the monarchy and reflection of social changes.

It was found out in her study that the Monarchy built up stability, maintained its single authority, formed a unifying force and drove the country towards prosperity and peace." **Naiyana Khрутmuang** (Khрутmuang, N., 2004)

studied “Lanna Historical Novels: Social and Political Reflections.” It was found that, “ in terms of politics, the author presented a picture of power relations interplaying among the kingdoms of Lanna, Siam, Myanmar and Western powers from the era when Lanna was under suzerain of Siam up to the period of transformation to local county government administration. The novel thus reflects the integration of the Lanna Kingdom with Siam. In social perspective, the author demonstrated the relationship within the society of the Lanna people. In the dimension of class and gender, with social structures, beliefs, values and traditions as factors that determined the roles and functions of people in society. In addition, the image of Lanna women as being smart and strong was projected, partly due to the social conditions that encouraged women to play important roles in both their families and society. And partly from the woman author's attitude to women of modern times. Lanna women's characters therefore appeared modern. **Pitchaporn Thiecharoen** (Vidheechaioen,P.,2013) studied narrative strategies and personalities of Queen Suriyothai that appeared in historical fiction on Queen Suriyothai. It was found that, “ the narrative strategy in historical fiction about Queen Suriyothai and her personality traits portraying in various media contained a narrative style and the character of Somdet Phra Suriyothai has modified slightly over time. But the core theme of the storyline has always meant to pay tribute to the heroic deeds of Queen Suriyothai. Her life sacrifice for her husband king and for the country remained intact in every version with only slight change of her character traits.” And **Korphong Namwat** (Namwat, k.,2020) studied strategies of presenting historical knowledge in the novel Genghis Khan by contemporary Thai writer.” It was found that “the author used information from non-fiction books and history combined with his own interpretation and imagination. it was presented through the storyline of life, conflicts and problems that appeared in history.”

From this survey, it can be seen that the study of historical novels often includes Thai historical novels or foreign history related to Thailand. This may be because the researcher is a Thai who tries to understand the Thai society. Their studies tend to focus on content rather than strategies.

Research Methodology

The scope of this study involves the novel "Destiny : From Shantou to Siam" of S. Deb-Ramphoey in 24 chapters. The study applies a qualitative research method. The research results are presented by descriptive analysis; i.e. the researcher distinguishes the methods of imparting Chinese historical knowledge that appear in the novel. The researcher elaborated how the author employed such strategies to achieve the writing goal. The study was therefore processed in the following: 1) Read the novel "Destiny: From Shantou to Siam" by S. Deb-Ramphoey in detail. 2) Analyze strategies for conveying historical knowledge. 3) Demonstrate how reasonably and tactfully the author employed the method of conveying the historical knowledge. As for definition of terminology used in research, the researcher has defined as follows:

Historical knowledge herein after refers to the political history of the People's Republic of China at the time when S. Deb-Ramphoey drew in as a background reference to create the scene and atmosphere of the story.

Methods of writing Herein it refers to the method of composing the novel "Destiny: from Shantou to Siam" by S. Deb- Ramphoey.

Results

It was found out that the author of the novel "Destiny: from Shantou to Siam" applied a variety of 14 strategies in conveying political knowledge in a varied and harmonious manner. Various methods depicted the social events that created an atmosphere surrounding the main and other characters. To cite an example, internal politics and international politics brought about consequences of economic hardship resulting in famine which harshly affected the family of the main character to such an extent that they could not afford to perform proper funeral rites for their deceased grandmother. Consequently, the main character had to sell herself out as a servant in a rich people's household to pay for the funeral rites. Many families were forced to migrate and seek modest livelihood elsewhere. For example, a large number of ships sailed to Siam. Other characters such as Lak Ming, who were obliged to desert his own family in order to work as a soldier doctor in the frontier conflicts and finally he lost his own life in the battlefield without a chance of seeing his own son. However, it

was found that the author used the technique of conveying historical knowledge only as a background to materialize the atmosphere of the story as the story progresses rather than reflecting the ideals or ideologies of the characters.

Discussions

It can be stated that the transfer of historical knowledge in “*Destiny: From Shantou to Siam*” was to create the atmosphere of the story and to justify the actions of the characters accordingly as well as to create sentimentality. However, the reader of the novel rarely had a glimpse of the characters' views on the situation of the country. The expressed political views were minimal or almost nonexistent. Only minor supporting characters expressed their political views and since they were merely minor characters, there have been no intense clashes or arguments. This can be attributed to the fact that the main characters were still young and not qualified enough to form their own political views. Nevertheless, other mature or discerned characters are not assigned (by the author) to express their stances on politics. So, it seems that the author did not venture to pinpoint positions or values regarding political stance of any party, especially on domestic politics. The author only narrated that there was a division of thoughts into 3 factions: a warlord faction in power in Beijing, a nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek, and third faction with the Communist Party in Shanghai (S . Deb- Rumphoey, 2022, p.107).

As for international politics section, the author emphasized his tendency towards values and ideas of China. The tone shown to other countries, such as Japan, was in no way appreciative. And most of it went to supporting characters who did not play a significant role in the story. There was little clash of political ideas. All such methods therefore did not bear much weight to the story.

As the author did not combine explicitly the character's political standpoint into the storyline, therefore the story went on smoothly. the characters lived their lives without surging along the chaotic political situation that the author has described as narrative or atmosphere around the character. It can be said that the historical knowledge was just basic knowledge. However, the author treated this subject very well. For example, there was a story related to the cause of the immigration of Chinese people to Siam. that did not often appear in detail in general fiction. But the story proceeds on the basis of just escaping adversity. starvation which was hardly different from the previous

knowledge that has been said about Chinese immigrants to Thailand. The researcher therefore has an opinion that the storyline is good. But the content lacks concentration.

However, with such tactics, readers could follow along with pleasure. That is, it did not make the reader feel ill at ease during the imparting of knowledge. The important thing was that the author did not express the position through the thoughts of the characters, especially on domestic politics. As for international politics, the author chose a tone that favored China through the point of view or perspective of the characters. There are as many as 14 aspects of imparting political knowledge. The researcher views that "Fah Destiny from Shantou to Siam" is a novel that deserves the thorough study of novel writing strategies. There should be further research on the history of Chinese people in Thailand from other Thai literature, and there should be further studies on other methods of transferring historical knowledge.

New Knowledges

New knowledge gained from this research is the discovery of the art of writing novels with historical background which are realistic as well as non-partisan: the reader does not feel that they are being asked to favor any political ideology. The author achieved this aim with 14 writing strategies.

Conclusions

In terms of methods, it was found that the author used a variety of strategies to transfer historical knowledge harmoniously up to 14 strategies: 1. Through the author's description; 2. Through the main character's point of view; 3. Through the main character's dialogues with other characters; 4. Through the accessorial characters' dialogues with the main character; 5. Through the accessorial characters' dialogues with one another; 6. Through the accessorial characters' dialogues to expose traits of other characters; 7. Through the accessorial characters' conversations to create the storyline ambience; 8. Through the accessorial characters' dialogues to express their political point of view; 9. Through the exchanges among accessorial characters to present their knowledge; 10. Through the reference of legends to express traits of the

characters; 11. Through the reference of ancestor's teachings; 12. Through the contents of correspondences of the characters to the close relatives; 13. Through the newspaper reports with the characters' comments; 14. Through the name branding of the characters.

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