

Abstract

The main objective of this dissertation is, first of all, to articulate social and political account of short story writers as they deal with the 1997 economic crisis, and secondly to abstract their “world views” from these writings.

The study shows that most writers focus on how ordinary people can best survive the crisis. Two different solutions stand out very clearly. One is for those who originally came from the up country to return their own villages and traditional way of life. The other is for those who want to stay on to live within their means under the new reality. Regarding the “plot” that makes up the story, most stories are realistic although some can be identified as romanticized, sarcastic, symbolic or even supernatural. With reference to the structure of the stories, they can be structurally divided into two different groups. The majority of them have intermediate endings. The overwhelming tone of these stories is didactic. The moral of most stories is based on the Buddha’s teachings. In a few cases, literary techniques become less important than the content.

These stories typically show how members of the middle class suffer as they experience the loss of sense of security. It seems that in order to survive, one has to somehow adjust one’s “self” to fit in with the new circumstance. No one can afford to care for anything or any other people except one’s own survival. Their social relationships have turned for the worse. Some stories suggest that Buddhist meditation practice can be used to ease the mind and bring back the vitality of life. However, Buddhism here seems to become a religion which serves a person as an individual rather than a member of the society. The sense of individualism is played up. Most people are concerned with their legal rights.

Life in the rural area and the agricultural economy has been romanticized in many stories. Going back to the country seems to be a good escape even though quite a few stories before the crisis are full of pictures of poverty, drought and hopelessness in the village. Now, villagers seem to be so proud of their traditional values and local wisdom. Globalization seems to have no effect whatsoever on them. Likewise, life in the city has also changes. Before the crisis, people simply have to stay and work in the city. Stories during the crisis show, on the other hand, that now they are free to leave but are reluctant to do so. Big cities have lost their grips on the lives of those who are now suffering economically. The much more powerful force from the outside has arrived.

With reference to these writers’ modes of thinking and values, dualism, pragmatism, relativism and individualism are highly visible. Self-centeredness, for example, is treated as something quite. And happiness is simply perceived as the fulfillment of one’s desires. Naturally, these “values” correspond nicely with the so-

called “neoclassical world view” which underlies the capitalist system of economy. Such a “world view” is also confused with typical Thai’s values, namely “popular Buddhist world view.” Yet, most writers tend to perceive the world and explain life experience of their characters by referring to the neoclassical idea more than anything else.

Regarding the origins of human problems, most writers tend to think that they are from the outside. They are seen as obstacles that have to be overcome. Most writers believe further that one has partial freedom to do what one wants because one is also bound by something else beyond one’s control. Interestingly enough, all writers regardless of whether they are optimistic, pessimistic and realistic in their approach seem to be willing to face life difficulties head on rather trying to escape from them.

All in all, the writers’ world views in this study do not seem to have changed much at all. Possibly, this is partly because they view the economic downturn as merely a financial crisis. Partly, the recent collapse of the Soviet bloc supports the view that in terms of ideology struggle capitalism is ultimate winner. As a consequence, liberalism which is the gist of capitalist system seems to be the only concept one can use to explain the world. Today writers do not feel the urge to find their way out of their present historical horizon. Waiting for “opportunities” within the present system is therefore the best and the only realistic policy presented by most writers. This means that while our writers may be well aware of existing social problems created by the economic meltdown and capitalist system, their writings seem to contribute significantly to the strengthening of the very idea of capitalism itself.