

Ethical Identities in Contemporary Thai Literature: A Study of S.E.A. Write Award Works in 21st Century

Xue Huayu & Parichart Kluensuwan

Abstract: This article investigates the ethical dimensions embedded in contemporary Thai literature, a topic that has received limited attention from the ethics research community. Focusing on 24 works awarded the Southeast Asian Write Award (S.E.A. Write Award) in 21st century, the study employs a framework of ethical literary criticism to analyze the ethical identities of characters within these works. The analysis identifies three key ethical facets: the human experience in society, the interplay between human and animal factors, and the implications of scientific choices. These dimensions illuminate the complex ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in modern Thailand. Furthermore, the article examines the dual identities of Thai and Chinese characters, enriching the discourse on cultural conflicts. The findings reveal that these awarded novels not only convey profound ethical teachings characteristic of Thai literature but also provide valuable insights for advancing research in ethical literary criticism.

Keywords: ethical literary criticism; S.E.A. Write Award; ethical identity; Thai literature

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标题：泰国现代文学中的伦理身份研究——21 世纪东盟文学奖作品为例

内容摘要：在 21 世纪，泰国文学尽管没有受到伦理研究学界的广泛关注，其中蕴藏的伦理教诲意义却与文学伦理学批评的核心要义有异曲同工之处。本文以文学伦理学批评理论为指导，以 21 世纪 24 部获得“东盟文学奖”的作

品为研究对象，重点分析泰国现代文学作品中人物的伦理身份。通过对“自然人”“动物人”“科学人”三种伦理身份的特别关注，本文重点阐释了泰国文学中的具有双重族裔身份的在泰华人，陷入人性与兽性伦理选择的人，以及经过科学选择的克隆人三种人物形象，揭示当代泰国人面临的复杂伦理困境。此外，本文还探讨了在泰华裔的双重身份，丰富了关于两国文化冲突的论述。泰国“东盟文学奖”作品不仅体现了泰国文学深厚且独具一格的伦理教诲特性，其研究还有望为文学伦理学批评研究开拓研究思路，拓宽研究领域。

关键词：文学伦理学批评；东盟文学奖；伦理身份；泰国文学

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Ethical literary criticism began to emerge in the Chinese academic community in the early 21st century. In 2004, Chinese scholar Nie Zhenzhao first proposed methodology of ethical literary criticism in his article “Ethical Literary Criticism: New Exploration of Literary Criticism Methods.” This is a critical method that reads, analyzes and interprets literature from an ethical perspective, in which Nie “attempts to see the relations between literature and society, the relations between authors and works, and the relations between readers and literary works from an ethical perspective” (Nie and Shang 5). After 20 years of vigorous advocacy and practice by Chinese and foreign scholars, ethical literary criticism has constructed a complete theoretical system, and its influence has gradually expanded internationally. Its reinterpretation of British and American classics has refreshed the traditional cognition of scholars in literary research, set off a new trend, and represented a new trend in literary criticism research.

The Southeast Asian Write Award (S.E.A. Write Award) was established in 1979 and is currently the largest regional literary award in Southeast Asia. As the founding country of the S.E.A. Write Award, the influence of this literary award in the Thai literary world far exceeds that of other member countries, and is known as the “weather vane of Thai literature.” Dhanate Vespada, a contemporary scholar who has served as a member of the S.E.A. Write Award jury for nearly 20 years, pointed out that “the S.E.A. Write Award is almost dominant in Thai literature. It is almost hard to imagine that there has been any work—an important work that has not been selected to compete for the S.E.A. Write Award” (Xiong 139). S.E.A. Write

Award had three major purposes at the beginning of its establishment, and used them as the basic criteria for selection, namely “humanitarianism, creativity, and controversy.” “Humanitarianism” is ranked first. The so-called “humanitarianism” is to pay attention to the lifestyle, spiritual realm and ideological connotation of the people living on this land, and these elements are closely related to the ethical teaching attributes of literature. Literature not only has aesthetic value, but also bears social functions in terms of ethics and morality. Thailand’s literary tradition has long had the slogans of “art for life” and “literature for the people.” Even though it has been controversial among some writers and critics, the basic trend of literature being rooted in reality and playing a role in reality has not changed. Unlike the gradual revival and revitalization of the literary world brought about by the gradual relaxation of the domestic political atmosphere in Thailand in the first 20 years, the S.E.A. Write Award in the second 20 years, in the context of economic disasters and scarred society after the bursting of the prosperous bubble, has shown strong social criticism and strong ethical attributes. Since the beginning of the 21st century, as the host country, Thailand has won a total of 24 works so far. The specific winning works are shown in the appendix.

There are three points for the novelty of the research. Firstly, the approach used here, ethical literary criticism, is novel in the sense that it is specific application to Thai literature. And with its focus on the moral aspects of literature, the approach can provide unique perspectives, compared to traditional literary analysis methods. This can illuminate aspects of Thai literature that might be overlooked. Secondly, due to the dynamic shift of the current cultural, economic, political contexts that contribute to changes and problems related to ethical aspect of Thai culture embedded in Thai literature. Thirdly, as a Chinese scholar, the author can provide the reflection on ethical issues in Thai literary from a foreign critical lens. This allows readers to see how Thai culture presents itself to foreigners, which can be similar to or different from the writers’ and Thais’ understanding, especially when dealing with ethical matters. These three reasons make it insightful and useful to apply ethical literary approach to examine perspectives of contemporary Thai literature. It is also expected to prove the feasibility and particularity of studying Thai literature from the perspective of ethical literary criticism, and expand the applicable research field of ethical literary criticism.

1. Ethical Identity of Human in Society

According to Nie Zhenzhao, “Ethical Literary Criticism focuses on the analysis of the characters’ ethical identities” because “almost all ethical issues are often related

to ethical identities” (“Ethical Literary Criticism: Its Fundaments and Terms” 21). In the background of Thailand in 21st century, many characters in modern Thai literature display some diverse ethical identities that are different from those that are typical in other works. For example, Thai-Chinese, with dual ethnic identity, is always the special kind of characters in S.E.A Write works.

Why we choose Thai-Chinese as the study focus of human in society? Firstly, one of the most important literatures in Thailand is Thai-Chinese literature. It appears to the researcher that nearly all of Thai literary novels are deeply influenced by foreign culture. Chinese culture is one of the most important cultures that collide and integrate with Thai culture. Historical records show that “from the Taksin to the early Bangkok period (up to Rama V), Thailand maintained close trade relationships with China” (Chaloemtiarana 161). Secondly, with the increase of the number of Chinese in Thailand, the problem of ethical identity has become more and more apparent. Many Thai-Chinese are afraid of falling into spiritual dilemma of being rootless and without source, which reflects the deep anxiety of Thai-Chinese writers in the context of the world’s multicultural environment. There are two S.E.A Write works in 21st century written from the perspective of Thai Chinese, telling the ethical anxiety and dilemma of Thai Chinese from the perspective of collective and individual, in other words, from the perspective of Thai-Chinese family and Thai-Chinese females, in the context of the new century.

1.1 Thai-Chinese Family

One of the S.E.A Write literatures on the ethical identities of Thai-Chinese is the 2018 winner of the novel *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*¹ by Veeraporn Nitiprapha, which traces family memories through the perspectives of grandmother Si, grandchildren Dao and the black cat. Every member of the immigrant family strives to find their roots, or to find an important fulcrum that can support their lives, and they all have their own beliefs and principles. The five children of the immigrant family have always struggled, torn and integrated in their original families, individual emotions and identity. This is the second time that Veeraporn Nitiprapha has won the S.E.A. Write Award. She has won the award once in 2015 for *The Blind Earthworms in the Labyrinth*, striving to make new breakthroughs in creative themes and artistic forms. There are two creative points in her second awarded work to show the dilemma of ethical identities of Thai-Chinese family.

Firstly, the author uses the perspective of magical realism to coldly see through

1 See Veeraporn Nitiprapha, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat*, translated by Kong Rithee, Bangkok: River Books, 2022.

the various joys and sorrows of a Chinese family. This style can be seen from the title clearly. “Black Rose Cat,” partly named for “the swirl of overlapping patterns on its back, cascading from jet black to the shade of glowing particles of sand, each hue seeping into one another as if painted by watercolours” (Nitiprapha, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* 34). This is a fitting analogy for the structure of the book, whose chapters—ringed with foreshadowings—meld like ripples of rain in water. This novel begins slowly with the pace of a tropical afternoon when a boy named Dao explores “a melange of tattered, warped memories” (Nitiprapha, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* 16), ones he thinks perhaps were never his own but were given to him by someone else. His world is one of stories told to him by a grandmother who has disappeared from a house where he lives with his mother, a woman whose presence is spectral. Only when he enters the Rain Room does he ever see anyone else, a girl within a large mirror who looks oddly familiar to this boy who has never left his house and has never met a stranger. Dao is a vessel for memories. He’s the last of what was meant to be a family dynasty, begun by Tong, a man from China whose body is covered with “black freckles like lightless stars...burnt-out constellations” (Nitiprapha, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* 21). Tong’s success in his adopted country makes it possible for him to buy the big house near a pond covered with pink lotus blossoms, next to a forest of acacia trees that fill the air with blankets of yellow pollen. Through his house Tong’s children come and go, leaving only their stories behind. Their stories float through the house and into Dao’s mind like curls of smoke, defying linear rules of time or place. This writing methods makes readers switch between sentimentalism and rationalism, so that readers have a further awareness and alertness to the illusion beyond the subjective consciousness.

Secondly, the author attempts to think about individual life in the context of overall history, and blending the broken family into broken history. Although the novel tells the story of a Chinese immigrant family, it observes national history, family history, and personal history from a traditional and unique perspective. From the time of King Rama VI (1910-1925) to King Rama IX (1946-2016), this immigrant family rises and falls with the tide of history. The patriarch of the family, the grandfather of Dao, “leads his family through World War II, apocalyptic flood, anti-Chinese riots, and era-defining rebellions and coups. His children and grandchildren live on through the giddy years of the Vietnam War and Thailand’s bloodied politics of the 1970s” (Nitiprapha, *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* 10). The image of the Chinese created in this novel is also a concentrated reflection of the various changes in the image of the Chinese in Thai literature as it

moves into the new century, and a reflection of the history of that period.

The novel *Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat* talks about memories of memories. The author describes, in moving detail, Great-Grandpa Tong's feelings of being unmoored, yearning for his ancestral homeland while building a life in his adopted country. The dilemma of ethical identity of Thai-Chinese talked about in the story is a microcosm of the living conditions of Chinese people in Thailand.

1.2 Thai-Chinese Females

The other work in the S.E.A Write literature on the ethical problems of Thai-Chinese is the 2023 award-winning work *Family Comes First*,¹ which involves 11 short stories related to Thai Chinese females. The author is Narispong Rakwattananon, a young Thai man of Hakka and Cantonese descent, who tells the various ethical issues caused by the dual ethical identities of Chinese in Thailand.

One of ethical problems is about identity anxiety of Chinese. For example, in the story "The Fallen Words," a son witnessed Chinese words slowly floating out of his mother's body one by one, and the fallen words gradually disappeared from her memory. This worry about the loss of Chinese culture reflects the panic and confusion of the gradually blurred ethical identity of Chinese in Thailand in the process of cultural integration. As the author himself, who also has a dual identity of Chinese and Thai, he also deliberately used paratexts (such as the use of colors and Chinese calligraphy illustrations) in his creation to deepen the reader's impression. This is undoubtedly a response to the identity anxiety of Chinese in Thailand.

Another ethical problem is about the oppression under Chinese traditional culture reflected in *Family Comes First*. In several short stories, the author tells how the traditional Chinese culture of favoring sons over daughters oppresses women in the new era when new and old customs collide. For example, in "Birth Mothers," when the daughter-in-law is pregnant, the child seems to belong not only to her and her husband, but also to her mother-in-law, blurring the boundaries of the real biological mother; for example, in "Tears Flow Like Waterfalls," a sister devotes her life to taking care of a mother, but the mother can't remember her, but keeps calling for her brother who unfortunately disappeared in the waterfall many years ago, and in "My Dear Sister," the brother becomes the object of the sister's resentment because he constantly receives praise, warmth and love from his family, while the sister is ignored in her own home. Although the women in Narispong Rakwattananon's works have been abroad for many years, they are still deeply bound by traditional Chinese feudal ideas. Like a kite, they can neither get rid of

1 See Narisapongse Rakwattananont, *Family Comes First*, Bangkok: Salmon Books, 2021.

the influence of their inherent cultural and ethical identity, nor integrate into the unfamiliar local culture, and are in a state of blurred and chaotic ethical identity. At the same time, because most immigrants have been away from China for a long time, they also show cultural lag and discontinuity that does not match the speed of Chinese social development.

Professor Nie said, “the task of literature, accordingly, is to depict how ethical relationships and moral order undergo changes, examine their consequences, and ultimately provide experience and lessons emerging from human life for the progress of human civilization” (“Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory” 190). In the works of the S.E.A. Write Award, it is obvious to see the ethical dilemma of natural human in the changing social ethical environment. The complex ethical dilemma of characters in modern Thai literature, especially in the works of the S.E.A. Write Award, are partly reflected in the dual identities born in immigrant families. It is with different ethical identities that these characters in Thai literary works make different ethical choices, showing the distinctive ethical characteristics of Thai literature in the new century and providing readers experience and lessons.

2. Sphinx Factor in Human and Animal

Apart from the discussion on ethnic ethical identities, there are endless works containing animal elements in S.E.A. works in 21st century. Thai writers connect animals with human society, reflecting the exploration and attention to the human and animal nature of people in modern society.

According to Nie Zhenzhao, the evolution of human civilization experiences three stages of natural selection, ethical selection and scientific selection. Biological selection is the first decisive step in the transition from ape to man, but what truly differentiates human beings from animals is the second step—ethical selection.¹ This is the three-stage theory of human civilization. Similarly, Thai writers use different ways to depicts the image of human beings as a kind of animals to remind people of the difference of animal and human beings. There are three different types of S.E.A. works about animal and human beings.

2.1 Animal Factors in Human

Many postmodern works try to use animals as metaphors for human society, reflecting the contradictions and conflicts between the human and animal factors in modern society under the background of the new era.

For example, Jadet Kamjorndet’s *That Night of the Year of the Tiger and*

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, “Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3 (2021): 383-398.

*Other Animal Stories*¹, which won the award in 2020, is also the author's second award. The last winning work was *The Morning Sun is Too Hot to Sit Sipping Coffee* in 2011. After nine years, Jadet Kamjorndet's artistic style has also changed. "*That Night of the Year of the Tiger and Other Animal Stories*" combines the characteristics of animals and humans, and sees through the animality of humans and the humanity of animals. At the same time, the author also tries to challenge traditional writing techniques, seeking breakthroughs in the plot, number of characters and length of short stories, and also uses animals as metaphors to mock the lifestyle, thinking mode and values of the entire society.

Another example is Veeraporn Nitiprapha's *The Blind Earthworms in the Labyrinth*,² which won the award in 2015, is a novel based on a love triangle story. It compares young people struggling with their inner confusion to earthworms looking for a way out in a winding maze. The author's peculiar narrative style makes readers feel like it is real and the truth may exist in many forms. The multiple narrative techniques of these two novels have certain literary historical significance, especially the weakening of the omniscient perspective, which has changed the traditional narrative tradition in the past and foreshadowed the arrival of individual narrative in a relatively three-dimensional posture. The strengthening of individual narrative in literature reflects the enhancement of individual significance.

The third example is the short story collection *The Unorthodox Lion*³, which won the award in 2017, was written by Jidanun Lueangpiansamut, the youngest writer to win the S.E.A. Write Award that year. This work creates an imaginary world, and the content reflects people's various choices about lifestyles, raising questions from different angles, including the good and evil of human nature, the fairness of the regime, authoritarianism, etc., challenging readers' inherent ideas. At the same time, the author uses metaphorical narrative strategies to embed traditional Thai folk tales that are familiar to readers into the novel, and also fictionalizes characters and scenes that do not exist in the Thai social context. The narrative technique is avant-garde and the language is concise and profound.

2.2 Human Factors in Animals

There are also works that compare the animal world to human society, showing disappointment in human society. For example, the magical realist work-the novel

1 See Jadet Kamjorndet, *That Night of the Year of the Tiger and Other Animal Stories*, Bangkok: Pajonphai Publishing, 2020.

2 See Veeraporn Nitiprapha, *The Blind Earthworms in the Labyrinth*, translated by Kong Rithdee, Bangkok: River Books, 2018.

3 See Jidanun Lueangpiansamu, *The Unorthodox Lion*, Bangkok: Words Publishing, 2022.

The Story of Defun by Siriorn Kaewkan¹, which won the award in 2021. This work tells the legend of a family that makes a living by killing tigers on the southern Andaman coast. About 112 years ago, since Defun's great-grandfather, they began to settle in the rich forest and gradually formed a small tribe called "Rainforest Tribe," but by Defun's generation, they no longer live in their hometown, and Defun has lost his memory. He only roams in the forest with tigers all day long. Later, Defun returned to his hometown, only to find that it had become cold and cruel. Everything was caused by the power struggle and the law of the jungle within the tribe. The tribe was dispersed and withered in the constant slaughter, and Defun also suffered a mental breakdown. After a hundred years of history, no one remembered the legendary family of the past, and no one even dared to be sure that this brave and fearless family had ever existed. This novel constructs a distorted and painful history with magical realism, and awakens the reader's memory of history with a heavy and calm brushstroke. The cruelty and coldness of human society further highlights the simplicity and humanity of the animal world.

2.3 Half-human and Half-animal

There is a Thai writer portrayed a half-beast, half-human figure — the dwarf to show the reality of dreams and the illusion of reality in their stories, and explore the deep psychological space of personality.

Awarded in 2012, Wipas Srithong's novel *The Dwarf*² is about a young man named Kerk, who is a drop-out medical student, just like the author. One day when the years were peaceful, Kerk had a nightmare. In the dream, he wanted to catch people to play in his building. His target was not wide, that is, people with short stature. He treated the captured dwarf as a guest of honor and did not hurt the dwarf. The only thing he did was to deprive the dwarf of his freedom. Kerk's good friend from school days, Piqui, a young man who had just lost his wife, and Nud, a young female artist, also participated in this incident. The three young people tried to find the meaning that was beneficial to themselves from the dwarf. Although the dwarf who was kept in captivity had good living conditions, he still longed for his own freedom.

This novel has a novel concept. It concerns the deep psychological space of modern people through the construction of extreme stories. In the spiritual dilemma of boredom, loneliness, solitude, confusion and despair, individuals yearn for interpersonal communication, spiritual communication and the establishment of self-worth, but finally find a solution by imprisoning others in dreams. Even if it is extremely hypocritical on the surface and provides the best treatment for the

1 See Siriorn Kaewkan, *The Story of Defun*, Bangkok: Pajonphai Publishing, 2021.

2 See Wipas Srithong, *The Dwarf*, Bangkok: SM-Thai Publishing House, 2020.

prisoners, it still cannot cover up the extremely alienated and inhuman behavior of controlling others, as well as the naked violence and trampling in modern interpersonal relationships. Because of the convenience of bullying the weak and the unsuppressed evil in human nature, the most precious qualities and natural rights of the individual have disappeared, that is, freedom. The most absurd thing is that people with human form are taken over by animal factor, while dwarfs who are regarded as animals still retain their human factors.

Professor Nie uses the concept of “Sphinx factor” to analysis this kind of half-beast, half-human figure. “The feature of the Sphinx’s combination of a human head and an animal body implies that the most important feature of a human image lies in its head, which stands for the reason of human beings emerging in the evolutionary process. It also points to the fact that human beings evolved from animals retaining features common to animals. With this in mind, I name this feature the ‘Sphinx factor.’ It is composed of the human factor and the animal factor. The human factor refers to ethical consciousness embodied by the human head, which results from human being’s biological selection in the evolution from savagery to civilization; while the animal factor suggests human beings’ animal instinct mainly under the influence of primitive desires” (Nie, “Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection” 388). The author chose the dwarf as the main character, like the Sphinx, wandering between humanity and animality, reflecting the mental state of half-human and half-beast in modern society. In the end, the reader asks, is this a dream or reality, which is also a question worth pondering.

According to the three-stage theory of human civilization, from the source, the historical starting point of human civilization began in the natural selection stage, developed through the ethical selection stage, and finally entered the scientific selection stage and ended. The three stages of natural selection, ethical selection, and scientific selection have an inherent logical connection and are a whole, but they are different in nature and mission. Natural selection uses evolution to solve the problem of human form, ethical selection is using teaching to solve the problem of human essence, and scientific selection is using technology to solve the problem of human scientificization. Humans emerged in the process of evolution and are new species selected by nature. The biggest feature of the newly emerged humans is that they are completely different from other animals in form, but they are no different from other animals in essence. They are in uncivilized ignorance, so they need to develop towards civilization through ethical selection.¹ About the way to

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, “Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3 (2021): 383-398.

civilization, Thai writers try to give their own answers, which is also in ethical way.

3. Human by Scientific Choice

While advocating humanism, the S.E.A. Write Award also encourages innovation and controversy. In the new era, in addition to the emergence of many works on realistic themes, new themes are also emerging in Thailand. Among them, it is worth mentioning that the rise of science fiction themes shows the ethical choices of mankind between technology and morality and religion.

Regarding the concepts of “scientific selection” and “human by scientific choice,” Nie Zhenzhao explained in a recent interview, clarifying the difference between “scientific selection” as a stage of human development and “scientific choice” that constitutes this stage. He used cloning as an example to explain: “Cloning is the result of scientific choice, but it does not belong to the scientific choice of the scientific selection stage” (Liu and Nie 15). *Human Cloning* tells the story of “human by scientific choice.”

The novel *Human Cloning*¹ by Wimon Sainimnuan, which won the award in 2000, is the first science fiction work in the S.E.A. Write Award. The Original name “Amata” is a Pali word meaning “immortal,” “deathless.” This word (amata, skt. amṛta) denotes in classical Indian mythology a drink that implies immortality. It was used by the Buddha in his first sermon (Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta) to describe the goal of his teachings, the way to Nirvāṇa: “Listen! Immortality is found” (Schlieter 189). The novel describes a business tycoon, Prommin, who is obsessed with having several clones of himself, who will serve as organ donors for his aging tycoon. A Western scientist, Dr. Spencer, helps him realize this plan. He personally raises one of the clones, Qi Wan, as a father, and tells him that he is a clone when he reaches adulthood, and takes away his various organs. The clone Qi Wan is forced to accept. But another escaped “clone brother,” a devout Buddhist named Aolachun, believes that the heart is the organ of consciousness. In order to avenge Prommin, he persuades Dr. Spencer and Prommin not to take away the clone Qi Wan’s individual organs, but to transplant Prommin’s brain into his own body to save the clone Qi Wan. Dr. Spencer does so; Prommin’s brain is transplanted into Aolachun’s body, and Qi Wan gets his own complete body. After the operation, Prommin is reborn, and Aolachun is sacrificed. The book focuses on two major issues: religion and science, ethics and science.

3.1 Science and Religion

1 See Wimon Sainimnuan, *Human Cloning*, translated by Gao Shurong and Fang Ying, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2002.

As a Buddhist country where all the people believe in Buddhism, it is natural that certain Buddhist doctrines are contained in Thai literary works. When scientists appear, the conflict between Buddhist doctrines and technology is inevitable. In the book *Human Cloning*, the author uses a lot of debates to show the conflict between Buddhism and science. As pointed out in the announcement of the Southeast Asian Literature and Art Selection Committee: “It adopts the form of debate between the secular and religious in the East” (Sainimnuan 198). This debate is quite fierce and sharp, and it is a tit-for-tat rebuttal. Although there are many debates, it is not boring and empty preaching, but full of wit and humor, with no lack of examples and humor, vivid and sharp, and logical reasoning. It makes people read it with interest, and it does not feel monotonous and empty, and it is boring. The debate between the protagonist Prommin and the clone Aolachun and Professor Spencer, as well as Prommin’s several press conferences are all examples of debates, and they all have a moving effect. For example, topics such as the functions of the heart and brain, whether thoughts and emotions can be regenerated, rebirth and immortality are all areas where Buddhist teachings are completely different from scientific research.

3.2. Ethics and Science

The issue of human cloning can be said to be a topic at the forefront of science. The author took the lead in conducting an in-depth discussion of it in the novel, and even some specific technical issues were described in detail. The novel analyzes and describes the changes and developments in the thoughts and feelings of the cloned people in a profound and vivid way, thus bringing readers into the emotional world of a 22-year-old cloned person. All these show that the author is quite keen on the future development of mankind, the latest scientific and technological achievements, and the deep exploration of human nature. As Professor Nie Zhenzhao said, “under the influence of science, everything is undergoing tremendous changes, whether it is literary creation or literary research” (“The Scientific Turn of Humanities Studies” 565). It can be seen that Thai writers adapt to the development of the scientific era and provide their own thinking.

In addition, the author combines the exploration of this new topic with the exposure and criticism of the darkness of reality. The concern with common people of Thai writers is stated by a scholar in International P.E.N. Thailand Centre in the book *Thai P.E.N. Anthology: Short Stories and Poems of Social Consciousness*: “the rich Western-educated protagonist has had to take leave (of) the literary stage to make way for the neglected school-teacher, the village doctor, the poverty-stricken farmer and the underprivileged of society” (12). It is worth mentioning that this kind of concern is not a modern phenomenon. As early as the 1970s, the Thai

academic community voiced the call for “‘literature for life’ (wannakham phuea chiwit), which they defined as literature that served the interests of the common people and promoted social justice and progress in the hope of changing the society for the better” (Limapichart 41). Thai writers have always recognized and practiced the ethical educational function of literature and its role in reflecting social reality. The author makes readers feel that the issue of human cloning is not a problem in the distant future, but an imminent problem that urgently needs to be seriously considered and properly solved. This is the key to the strong awakening of the work, and it is also the reason why the work has far-reaching significance and great value.

This work shows the contradiction between religious beliefs and science and technology, the conflict between modern morality and primitive barbarism, and also writes about the interweaving of love and hate, the interweaving of good and evil human nature, the confrontation between persistence and compromise, the opposition between freedom and confinement, etc. The characters are fighting fiercely in the novel from body to mind. *Human Cloning* maps the possible contradictions in the future into the characters of the novel, cleverly satirizing social chaos, constructing the story in a meticulous way, with more three-dimensional characters, and the story and characters fit closely. Deep descriptions and discussions are always unforgettable. Good works always pursue certain common issues, such as the texture of society and the complexity of human nature, such as how to be immortal and what is eternal. However, this work uses a fantastic conception to integrate humanistic thinking with technological elements, and presents the longing imagination in a transcendental posture, depicting the spiritual choices made by human beings in the new century surrounded by science and technology. However, Prommin’s selfish choice made by using high technology will inevitably bring emotional tearing and intense pain. The author is obviously skeptical about this, so he conveys deep self-doubt and shock in the clone Qi Wan. In science fiction imagination, whether people can get real sustenance and enlightenment from utopia, and whether they can be sublimated in the future, these are all questions raised by the author in a wonderful science fiction form. In the view of literary ethics criticism, “text has three basic forms: brain text, material text and electronic (digital) text,” and “brain text” is a special biological form unique to the human body, which is the perception and understanding of things stored in the form of memory by the human brain.¹ Although Prommin has the biological form of natural selection and ethical selection, the animal factor controls the human factor and eventually leads to destruction. As a product of scientific

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014, 270.

selection, the clone Aolachun has the ethical consciousness to distinguish between good and evil after possessing the biological brain text unique to humans, and finally becomes a true Buddhist.

The anthropologist Herbert Phillips argued that Thai writers can be “the most sensitive, reflective, articulate...members of Thai society” (3). In the face of increasingly complex social reality, Thai writers in the new century use their sensitive hearts to see through social reality, and use new perspectives and new themes to travel in the space of surrealism and imagination. As Nagavajara said, “The problems besetting contemporary Thai society are so complex as to defy any straightforward, black-and-white representation” (74). How should modern Thais choose between ideals and reality, technology and human relations, desire and humanity? Thai writers are trying to give their own answers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Thai literature in the new century shows a rich blend of national identity and ethical complexity. Contemporary works are increasingly exploring themes like science fiction and moral choices, reflecting the significant changes in society. Among the characters of Thai literary works, whether it is the Thai Chinese with multiple identities, the half-human, half-beast Thai lower-class people, or the new-age Thais with a high-technological and religious background, they all embody strong ethical characteristics. Thai writers in new century express their great concern for ethical issues in Thailand. Although the study of ethical literary criticism in Thai literature is still developing, through the analysis with ethical literary criticism, it has the potential to enhance our understanding of these stories and their broader relevance to Southeast Asian literature. It is with the hope that this exploration will inspire future writers to engage with ethical questions, contributing to a more thoughtful and meaningful literary tradition.

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Appendix: (English Translation)

Year	Author	Work
2000	Wimon Sainimnuan	<i>Human Cloning</i>
2001	Chokchai Bundit	<i>Souvenir From Faraway Land</i>
2002	Prabda Yoon	<i>Pen in Parentheses</i>
2003	Duanwad Pimwana	<i>Changsamran</i>
2004	Rewat Phanpipat	<i>Reminiscence of the River</i>
2005	Binlah Sonkalagiri	<i>Princess</i>
2006	Ngarpun Vejajiva	<i>The Happiness of Kati</i>
2007	Montri Sriyong	<i>Kawiniphon</i>
2008	Vachara Sajasarasin	<i>Things We Forget</i>
2009	Uthis Haemamool	<i>The Brotherhood of Kaeng Khoi</i>
2010	Zakariya Amataya	<i>No Women in Poetry</i>
2011	Jadet Kamjorndet	<i>The Morning Sun is Too Hot to Sit Sipping Coffee</i>
2012	Wipas Srithong	<i>The Dwarf</i>
2013	Angkarn Chanthathip	<i>The Fifth Chamber of the Heart</i>
2014	Sanek Sangsuk	<i>Venom and Other Stories</i>
2015	Veeraporn Nitiprapha	<i>The Blind Earthworms in the Labyrinth</i>
2016	Phalang Phiangphirun	<i>The City of Outsiders</i>
2017	Jidanun Lueangpiansamut	<i>The Unorthodox Lion</i>
2018	Veeraporn Nitiprapha	<i>Memories of the Memories of the Black Rose Cat</i>
2019	Angkarn Chanthathip	<i>On The Way Back Home</i>
2020	Jadet Kamjorndet	<i>That Night of the Year of the Tiger and Other Animal Stories</i>
2021	Siriworn Kaewkan	<i>The Story of Defun</i>
2022	Palita Phonpradapphet	<i>Until We Lie the World's Embrace</i>
2023	Narisapongse Rakwattananont	<i>Family Comes First</i>