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# The Classic or Banned Book: Research on the Dissemination and Impact of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

*The True Story of Ah Q* is the first complete translation of a Chinese modern literary work to be introduced to Thailand. Its dissemination in Thailand has undergone a transformation, from being considered a progressive literary classic (1952–1958) to being banned for political reasons (1958–1990), and then reclaiming its status as a literary classic (1990–present). This transformation perfectly exemplifies the symbiotic and exclusive relationship between literature and social politics. After more than 70 years of dissemination, *The True Story of Ah Q* has had a wide and profound impact on Thai society, politics, and literary development. It has enlightened people, inspiring Thai citizens to strive for democracy and freedom. It has also contributed to the development of critical literature in Thailand, nurturing a group of progressive intellectuals who fearlessly criticize social issues and further promote the literary movement of “art for life, art for the people” in Thailand. Furthermore, it has provided new creative techniques for Thai literary creation.

## 摘要:

《阿Q正传》是第一部被完整译介到泰国的中国现代文学作品。它在泰国的传播经历了由进步文学经典（1952-1958）到政治禁书（1958-1990），再到回归文学经典地位（1990-至今）的身份嬗变。这一身份嬗变历程完美地诠释了文学与社会政治之间存在的共生与互斥关系。历经70多年的传播，《阿Q正传》对泰国社会、政治及文艺发展产生了广泛而深入的影响，包括：启迪民智，鼓舞泰国民众争取民主与自由；促进泰国批评文学的发展，造就了一批敢于针砭时弊的进步知识分子，进而推动了泰国“艺术为人生，艺术为人民”文学思潮的深入发展；同时还为泰国文学创作提供了新的创作手法。

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## 关键词

《阿Q正传》；泰国；经典  
与禁书；传播与影响

## 1. Introduction

There has been official diplomatic contact between China and Thailand since the Han Dynasty in ancient China (Li Daogang 4; Huang Chongyan & Yu Dingbang 1). And the

long-term official exchanges have greatly promoted the exchange and mutual learning of literature between the two nations.

In the 1950s, there was a literary movement in the Thai literary circle called “Art for Life, Art for the People”<sup>1</sup> (Choishin Bonkayong 15–17). During this time, a large number of works by Chinese modern progressive writers were translated into Thai. One of the most influential works was Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q*. It served as Lu Xun’s first introduction to Thai society and left a lasting impression on the Thai people. At that time, whether it was Thai scholars, writers, or ordinary people, they were all deeply impressed by the sharp language expression and profound thoughts and philosophy in this book. *The True Story of Ah Q* depicts the darkness and pathology of old Chinese society, the limitations and weaknesses of the peasant class, the desperate struggle of ordinary people for survival, and the spiritual victory method (known as the Ah Q spirit), which has resonated with the majority of the Thai population and sparked discussions among progressive individuals and literature enthusiasts. However, the strong political and social criticism reflected in *The True Story of Ah Q* led to its suppression by the political authoritarian regime in Thailand. It was once banned and prohibited from being circulated among the public. The dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand underwent a transformation from being a progressive literary classic to a banned book, and eventually reclaimed its status as a literary classic.

1. Classics VS forbidden books: The translation and dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand shed light on the mutual assistance and conflicting relationship between literature and politics. In the more than 70 years since the publication of *The True Story of Ah Q* in the Thai progressive literary magazine *Wannasin* in April 1952, the translation and dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand has gone through an extraordinary process, with a total of 9 different Thai translations. Based on relevant literature and historical facts, we divide the translation and dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand into three stages: (1) the period of spreading as a classic of progressive literature (1952–1958), (2) the period of spreading as a politically banned book (1958–1990), and (3) the period of rational dissemination as a modern literary classic (1990–present). Each stage of its dissemination in Thailand is closely related to the social and political environment of the time, perfectly illustrating the mutual assistance and conflicting relationship between literature and politics.

### **1.1. The period of spreading as a classic of progressive literature (1952–1958)**

In the 1940s and 1950s, there were significant changes in the political situation in Thailand. On November 8 1947, Thailand underwent another military coup, marking the beginning of a long era of political upheaval and dictatorship<sup>2</sup> (Naron Pompis 2–27). Influenced by the global context and the trends of the time, progressive intellectuals in Thailand began actively exploring the future of their country. In 1950, the first writers’ association was established in the literary community of Thailand, advocating the slogan “Art for Life, Art for the People,” and started translating a large number of progressive foreign literary works. Against this backdrop, the progressive writer Decha Bunchachai translated Lu Xun’s work *The True Story of Ah Q* into Thai. It was published in April 1952 in the Thai progressive literary magazine *Wannasin*. As the first complete translation of a Chinese modern literary work to be introduced to Thailand, *The True*

*Story of Ah Q* was greatly welcomed by the Thai people and sparked the first “Lu Xun fever” in Thailand (Song Presapon, Thamnu Nawayook & Decha Bunchachai 9). The book became a progressive literary classic that Thai progressives eagerly shared and discussed. After reading the story, the renowned Thai writer and scholar Jitr Pumisak developed a strong liking for the character Ah Q. He believed that Ah Q represented a combination of various problems of the Chinese people at that time, and that Ah Q and the Ah Q spirit, not only existed in China but also heavily existed in Thailand (Tibagon 35; Jitr Pumisak). Later, Supa Sirimanont, the founder of the *Wannasin*, recalled the situation of the first publication of *The True Story of Ah Q* and said, “In April 1952, the *Wannasin* magazine, which published *The True Story of Ah Q*, sold out within a week of its release. Monthly magazines are usually difficult to sell, and by the end of the month, there are usually many unsold magazines that need to be taken back. Later, many readers wrote to us hoping that our magazine could publish *The True Story of Ah Q* again, and some even came to my home to discuss the re-publication. . . . Soon after, a Thai version of *The True Story of Ah Q* was published separately. I am familiar with the situation of these two publications because I was one of the people actively recommending the book to Thai readers” (Supa Sirimanont 1–7). From the above recollections of Supa Sirimanont, we can see that *The True Story of Ah Q* was highly popular among the Thai people at that time. However, the widespread popularity and dissemination among the Thai people did not last long. In 1958, Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power through a military coup and abolished the constitution enacted by the parliament in 1932 and revised in 1953. He vigorously implemented a brutal military dictatorship domestically and pursued anti-communist policies abroad. Without any legal basis, the military government arrested progressive intellectuals and writers on the grounds of endangering national security and social stability, and incarcerated them. Additionally, the military government closed down several publishing houses and released a list of banned books and periodicals (known as the Sarit government’s book ban order). Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q* was also included in the list due to its strong political and social criticism (Tanape Ishalun).

### **1.2. The period of propagation as a politically banned book (1958–1990)**

During the authoritarian rule of the Sarit government, various oppressive measures were implemented, causing progressive writers to feel threatened. Many people chose to remain silent, and progressive literature gradually gave way to entertainment literature. The literary scene in Thailand entered a “dark period” that lasted for 10 years (Pairin Srisinthon 62–65). Although the government officially banned the public publication and dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q*, the ban order issued by the Sarit government was not a formal law. In order to resist the government’s ban on books, some progressive intellectuals risked their lives to establish independent publishing houses and published a large number of progressive literary works. During this period, although *The True Story of Ah Q* was classified as a banned book, it was also published multiple times (Sultan Vesutilako; Tanape Ishalun; Muheng Wangst). In order to protect translators and publishers, most of the published versions in this period did not indicate information such as the translator, publisher, and publication date.

After experiencing a long “dark period,” the Thai literary scene welcomed a relatively relaxed and free development space in the early 1970s. After the “10·14 incident”<sup>3</sup> (Banou Piyapan 20–23), the newly appointed cabinet government did not abolish the “Sarit government’s book ban order,” but relaxed the enforcement of the order, and many banned books could be published. From the “10·14 incident” in 1973 to October 1976, it was another golden period for the dissemination of progressive literary works in Thailand. During this period, there was a resurgence of the spread of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand. Several different Thai translations of the novel were published, including *The True Story of Ah Q* translated by Decha Bunchachai in 1973, *Lu Xun and Ah Q* compiled by Ah Yidiegui in 1974, *The True Story of Ah Q* translated by Ah Thitpong in 1974, *Ah Q: Lu Xun’s Famous Novel* translated by Chan Shinshen in 1975, *The True Story of Ah Q* and *Lu Xun’s Short Stories* (including *The True Story of Ah Q*) translated by Ah Pitwatt in 1975 and 1976 respectively, as well as the Thai versions of *Lu Xun’s Short Stories* and *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* (including *The True Story of Ah Q*) published by China foreign languages press in 1976.<sup>4</sup> During that period, although *The True Story of Ah Q* was banned by the government, it still received a large number of publications and widespread dissemination. This is sufficient to illustrate its popularity in Thailand.

In October 1976, Thailand experienced a historical peak in economic crisis, leading to social turmoil. In order to control people’s thoughts and stabilize society, the Thai government enacted the “Thai Printing Act” passed by the parliament. According to this act, any book that defames the monarchy, jeopardizes national stability, or violates Buddhist ethics is considered a banned book by the state, prohibiting any organization or individual from publishing, owning, and circulating such books. Subsequently, the government released a national banned book list that includes 204 books. *The True Story of Ah Q* and *Ah Q and Lu Xun’s Thoughts* were included. The novel *The True Story of Ah Q* quickly disappeared from the public in Thailand.

At that time, the Thai government introduced the concept of “national economic development” in order to control public opinion and stabilize society. They claimed that literary works with political and social criticism (known as progressive literature) were obstacles to the national economic development. Through repeated propaganda about the dangers of banned books, utilizing their power and the public’s lack of understanding of national laws, the Cabinet government managed to convince a large number of ordinary people to accept their views on banned books. As a result, including *The True Story of Ah Q*, many progressive books were burned by the people. Therefore, during this period, it was difficult for people to find complete Thai translations of this book.

After enduring a military dictatorship for 12 years, Thailand held elections in 1988 and established a democratically elected government with Chatichai Choonhavan as the Prime Minister. Chatichai Choonhavan advocated for political reconciliation and actively promoted the process of political democratization, leading to a resurgence of democracy and freedom in Thai society. In 1990, the Chatichai Choonhavan government enacted the “Temporary Ordinance on the Cancellation of Book Ban”<sup>5</sup> (Somsakdi Xuto 82–97; John L. S. Giring 102–118; Thawatt Mokarpong 87–98). This ordinance allowed *The True Story of Ah Q* to be published and circulated openly in Thai society once again.

### 1.3. *The period of rational dissemination as a modern literary classic (1990-present)*

Since the “Temporary Ordinance on the Cancellation of Book Ban” issued in 1990, the Thai translation of *The True Story of Ah Q* has been published multiple times in Thailand. During this period, some editions of *The True Story of Ah Q* were published as standalone books, while others were included in various anthologies. These include the 1990 edition of *Selected Works of Lu Xun* (including *The True Story of Ah Q*, translator unknown), the *The True Story of Ah Q* translated by Manit Jianbunjongkit in 1997, the 2006 textbook *Selected Chinese Novels* (including *The True Story of Ah Q*) edited by the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at the Silpakorn University, and the *The True Story of Ah Q* translated by Decha Bunchachai in 2007.

Since the 1990s, although the translated Thai version of *The True Story of Ah Q* has been published multiple times, it has become difficult to resonate with the Thai people. This is not only due to the long-term impact of the “book ban order” on the people, but also because Thai society at this time has undergone significant changes, which are far different from the social and historical conditions depicted in *The True Story of Ah Q*.

Starting from the 1950s, the Thai people gained spiritual strength from *The True Story of Ah Q* and sought a way out for political reform in the country. However, starting from the 1990s, Thai society has become more stable and has achieved political democratization. The Thai people, who have been deeply influenced by Buddhist philosophy, are now seeking a return to a peaceful and tranquil life<sup>6</sup> (Sumankaya Jingtanchen 146-150; Prapunhom Kunnapon 142-76). At this time, the Thai people prefer to read leisure literature that brings them spiritual joy. The critical thinking, spirit of struggle, and strong sense of speculation portrayed in *The True Story of Ah Q* can no longer meet the literary reading needs of the Thai people.

During this period, the recipients of this book have changed from the general public to a few “progressive thinkers” or “academic readers,” namely those who are genuine literature enthusiasts, literature researchers, and undergraduate or graduate students majoring in language and literature. They read *The True Story of Ah Q* in order to understand, analyze, and study the literary ideas and artistic techniques of the work, and to learn about Chinese modern literature through the book. Therefore, we refer to the dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand during this period as “the period of rational dissemination as a modern literary classic.”

## 2. *Political and literary perspectives: a review of the Thai academic community’s study of the true story of Ah Q*

Lu Xun is a great writer, thinker, and revolutionary of the 20th century in China. During his time studying in Japan, he was exposed to progressive ideas and scientific culture, which led him to start paying attention to the development of his nation and country. He integrated his unique reflections on the fate of the nation into his literary works, providing a beneficial remedy for the transformation of people’s thinking. In “On New Democracy,” Mao Zedong commented: “Lu Xun is the chief commander of China’s cultural revolution. He is not only a great literary figure, but also a great thinker and a great revolutionary. Lu Xun has the strongest backbone. He does not have the slightest

servility or flattery, which is the most precious character of the people in colonial and semi-colonial countries. On the cultural front, Lu Xun represents the majority of the nation, charging toward the enemy with the most correct, courageous, determined, loyal, and enthusiastic spirit, making him an unprecedented national hero. Lu Xun's direction is the direction of a new culture for the Chinese nation"<sup>7</sup> (Mao Zedong). Mao Zedong's comment on Lu Xun later became the consensus among progressive intellectuals in Thailand. Ever since the spread of *The True Story of Ah Q* to Thailand in 1952, Thai scholars have embarked on the study of this work. Upon reviewing the research achievements of the Thai academic community on *The True Story of Ah Q*, we find that these studies mainly cover research with a political focus and research with a literary focus. In the early stages, most of the research had a political focus, but starting from the 1980s, research with a literary focus began to dominate.

### **2.1. The political orientation of the research on the true story of Ah Q in Thailand**

After ascending to the throne, Rama V of the Bangkok Dynasty initiated political reforms that propelled the country toward modernization. However, these reforms faced significant resistance due to the influence of conservative traditional culture and mind-set. The deeply rooted feudal patronage relationships, centered around interests, among various societal strata in Thailand continue to hinder the democratization process of the country's politics. Although the democratic revolution in 1932 established a constitutional monarchy and a republican form of government in Thailand, it was an incomplete revolution that failed to awaken the consciousness of the general population. In the pursuit of democratic politics, Thailand quickly veered toward authoritarian rule, influenced by various conservative forces and interest groups. The dominance of authoritarian politics has resulted in widespread corruption, economic decline, and escalating social conflicts in Thailand. Faced with such a turbulent society, many progressive individuals have started to question the constitutional monarchy and its democratic system, seeking a new future for the nation. In the process of exploration, they gradually realized that literature always remains at the forefront of struggles in an era of continuous change. It has the power to expose the darkness and injustices in society, as well as serve as a weapon to enlighten the minds of the people. In order to explore a new path that aligns with Thailand's social development, progressive intellectuals have started to introduce and study progressive literature from abroad.

Works of Lu Xun, represented by *The True Story of Ah Q*, became the focus of progressive intellectuals in Thailand at that time. In introducing Lu Xun's works and ideas to the Thai people, Sanam Vilapong pointed out that Lu Xun's opposition to "art for art's sake" was actually a rejection of novels being seen as mere leisure reading, rather than a rejection of art itself. As a great realist writer, Lu Xun truly understood the suffering and demands of the Chinese masses, and used literature as a weapon to fight against the darkness and injustice in society alongside the people (Sanam Vilapong 5–37). Later, a large number of progressive intellectuals in Thailand unanimously believed that Lu Xun's great idea of saving the country and the people, advocated in his works, was very suitable for the needs of Thai society at that time (Pairin Srisinthon 62–65). The research on the Thai version of *The True Story of Ah Q* was initiated against this

backdrop. Many progressive scholars at the time studied and interpreted this book from the perspectives of society and politics.

The famous Thai writer, critic, and key figure of the “For Life” literary movement, Jitr Pumisak, greatly admired *The True Story of Ah Q*. He believed that the various social ills depicted and exposed in *The True Story of Ah Q* were also widespread in Thai society at that time; and the various psychological deficiencies of the Chinese people at that time, as well as their commonly used method of self-consolation, were also widespread among the Thai people; and small characters like Ah Q can be seen everywhere in Thai society (Kan Sarika 63-66). Therefore, he calls on the Thai people to take active action to reform society (Kan Sarika 66). In an interview with biographer Kan Sarika, Jitr Pumisak said, “In addition to Russian literary works, I really enjoy reading Chinese literature. I have read many Thai translations of modern Chinese literature, but I can no longer remember the names of those translators. Among these works, I particularly admire the works of Lu Xun, as his works vividly portray the social reality of China before and after the Revolution of 1911. As far as I know, Lu Xun’s ideas are quite unique. From the preface of *The True Story of Ah Q*, I learned about Lu Xun’s life and his patriotic and democratic ideals. *The True Story of Ah Q* depicts the characters and characteristics of the era when Chinese people wore queues, and through these descriptions, I gained insight into Lu Xun’s thoughts. Lu Xun excels at approaching issues from the perspective of social reality, and he has always been calling for a national awakening and social unity” (Kan Sarika 66). Another prominent figure in the “For Life” literary movement, Assanee Polajun, believes that Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q* exposes the dark nature of Chinese society at that time, giving voice to the lower-class laborers, exposing the oppression of feudal forces against the people, and calling for not just creating art for the sake of art; art should follow the advocacy of Lu Xun and belong to the masses, serving the society at large; it should enlighten readers’ rationality and wisdom, inspiring the public to pursue a better life of democracy and freedom (Assanee Polajun 383-455). Later, Huang Muyin compared the character of Ah Q with the character of the Thai people before and after the 1932 Thai coup in his article *A Psychological Analysis of the Ah Q Spirit in Relation to the Character of Thai People before and after the 1932 Thai Coup*. He believes that “*The True Story of Ah Q* reflects the idea that the Revolution of 1911 in China only overthrew the feudal imperial system, but did not change the conservative and backward thinking of the people. The ‘Ah Q spirit’ is a kind of servile spirit, good at bullying the weak but afraid to confront the strong. The failure of the Revolution of 1911 lies in its inability to eliminate the ‘Ah Q spirit’ from the people and to make democratic ideas a widely accepted political proposition among the general public. The political coup in Thailand in 1932 bears a striking resemblance to the Revolution of 1911. Although the coup established a democratic regime, the majority of Thai farmers, who accounted for 80% of the population, were deeply influenced by feudalistic ideas and lacked a demand for democracy and freedom. They did not understand the concept of democracy, which made it difficult to achieve true political democracy. At that time, both the Thai and Chinese populations shared common traits such as a submissive mentality, mistreatment of the

weak, absolute obedience to the strong, and outdated ideologies” (Huang muyin 33–44).

From the above representative research findings on the political orientation of *The True Story of Ah Q*, it can be seen that the progressive scholars of that time mainly focused on interpreting the social and political dark side exposed in the novel, the ignorance of the people, the inferior nature of the nation, etc. Based on this, they called for the awakening of society and the people, advocated for social reforms, and encouraged active participation of the people in the movement for democracy and freedom, in order to strive for and safeguard their rights and interests.

## 2.2. The literary orientation of the research on the true story of Ah Q in Thailand

The main literary orientation of the research on *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand is to interpret the literary ideas presented in the work from a literary perspective, summarize and evaluate the techniques used in character development, as well as compare and analyze *The True Story of Ah Q* with other relevant literary works in Thailand.

In the book *Art for Life, Art for the People* (1957), Jitr Pumisak provides a detailed interpretation of the artistic thoughts regarding “for life” reflected in *The True Story of Ah Q* (38–97). He strongly supports Lu Xun’s artistic ideology of “for life” (Lu Xun 525–30), and emphasizes the responsibility of being a popular artist to wholeheartedly serve the people, as well as fulfill the duty toward the people, as stated in Lu Xun’s poem, “Fiercely-browed, I coolly defy a thousand pointing fingers; head-bowed, like a willing ox I serve the people” (Jitr Pumisak 38–97). Jitr Pumisak greatly admires the character portrayal techniques used by Lu Xun in *The True Story of Ah Q*. He believes that only a genius writer like Lu Xun can touch and showcase the national spirit through character development, thereby stimulating readers to contemplate the destiny of the nation (Jitr Pumisak). In a study conducted in 2015, Suphala Hubianyanai pointed out that in today’s Thai society, the majority of people come into contact with *The True Story of Ah Q* during their university years; these readers generally believe that the novel demonstrates uniqueness and typicality in its literary expression, portrayal of typical character traits, and expression of ideas, realistically depicting the various shortcomings and the inferior nature of the old Chinese society in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal era (Suphala Hubianyanai 230–8).

In terms of comparative research, in the article *See Literature from Society, See Society from Literature* (1974), Bunjong Bamjedsin compared the character Ah Q with the protagonist Jiladhi in the Thai writer Sriburabha’s *Behind the Painting*. He believes that Jiladhi, like Ah Q, likes to use the “spiritual victory method” to console herself (Bunjong Bamjedsin 213–9). Additionally, Uenchong Bonchesin points out that Jiladhi’s view of love is similar to Ah Q’s “spiritual victory method” (Uenchong Bonchesin 76–78). At the end of *Behind the Painting*, Jilati, before her death, says, “Until that moment of death, even though I haven’t met someone who loves me, I have already loved someone in my lifetime, and I feel satisfied.” Uenchong Bonchesin states, “Upon further consideration, we can see that this is not the voice of a victor, but rather the self-consolation of a loser. This statement reminds me of the protagonist, Ah Q, in Lu Xun’s work *The True Story of Ah Q*, who embodies the moral shortcomings of the Chinese people at that time. When Ah Q is insulted and unable to resist those in power, he often shouts, “The son hits the

father.’ He uses this self-deceptive way to console himself and achieve spiritual balance, pretending that nothing has happened. I believe that Jilati’s idea is very similar to Ah Q’s approach. However, the portrayal of Jilati in *Behind the Painting* does not fully represent the spirit and soul of the entire Thai aristocracy. The author has not been able to deeply understand the essence of the problem and analyze it as profoundly as Lu Xun did” (76–78).

From the literary analysis of *The True Story of Ah Q* by Thai scholars mentioned above, we can see that the research mainly focuses on literary thoughts and character development techniques. The emphasis is on exploring how to reveal the dark side of social politics and human flaws through the depiction of typical characters.

### 3. From literature to society: analyzing the impact of the true story of Ah Q in Thailand

As a novel with a strong sense of political and social criticism, *The True Story of Ah Q* has widely resonated among the people in Thailand after its translation, and has had a profound impact on the social, political, and literary development of Thailand. These impacts include enlightening the people’s intellect, inspiring them to strive for democracy and freedom; promoting the development of critical literature in Thailand, nurturing a group of progressive intellectuals who dare to criticize the current situation, and further promoting the in-depth development of the literary movement of “art for life, art for the people” in Thailand; at the same time, it has also provided new creative techniques for literary works in Thailand.

#### 3.1. The impact of the true story of Ah Q in Thailand: enlightenment of the masses

Since the Kingdom of Sukhothai, the Thai royal family has always revered and supported Buddhism, making it the de facto state religion. The general population has long been influenced by a Buddhist worldview and ethics, leading to the deep-rooted belief in the concept of karma and reincarnation. It has become a part of the collective unconsciousness. People generally believe that by pledging loyalty and obedience to the king or officials, and by being a faithful servant, they can receive blessings from the heavens and experience less suffering (Sumankaya Jingtanchen 146–150). When they encounter hardships, they attribute them to their past life’s “karmic retribution” and believe that they can only accept and endure these retributions as a way to atone for their past sins and accumulate merit for their future lives. It is precisely this submissive mind-set of the Thai people that provides a social foundation for the authoritarian ruling group. At that time, the military authoritarian group led by Luang Pibul Songgram exploited the people’s submissive mind-set and shaped the “leader’s authority,” promoting the belief that only by trusting the leader can disasters be avoided (Chanavita Khashetasiri 465–77). At the same time, the authoritarian group disregarded the internal and external crises facing the country and continuously instilled political lies on the people, claiming that the country was heading toward greatness and that life was becoming better.

The dictatorial rule of the authoritarian regime and the policy of keeping the public ignorant has led to the intensification of various social contradictions and the presence of numerous crises. In addition, the influence of international national and democratic movements has prompted a large number of awakened Thai intellectuals to advocate for democratic reforms. During the process of calling for democratic reform, these progressive intellectuals realized that in a political environment where the military has long held power and implemented dictatorial rule, there must be a powerful ideological weapon to awaken the general public. At this time, the introduction of *The True Story of Ah Q* happened to provide Thailand's society with an enlightening ideological weapon. Thai intellectuals have come to view *The True Story of Ah Q* as a source of spiritual strength in their fight against dictatorial rule and for democracy and freedom. Through the translation and promotional efforts of Thai intellectuals, the general Thai population has gained the opportunity to read *The True Story of Ah Q* and thereby become acquainted with Lu Xun's unique ideas.

After reading the novel *The True Story of Ah Q*, the Thai people are deeply moved by the various social ills exposed and criticized in the story. By comparing the content of *The True Story of Ah Q* with the social reality of Thailand at that time, they discovered that the dark society depicted in the novel and the various psychological flaws of the people (also known as the Ah Q Spirit) were also widespread in Thailand (Silp Pitakchon 116–8; Jitr Pumisak 210–3). For example, during World War II, Thailand evaded the reality of being a weak country and adopted an “Ah Q-style spirit of victory” to deal with imperialist aggression. When reluctantly agreeing to allow the Japanese military to pass through Thailand and establish military bases, the Thai government declared to the world that their purpose was to become a superpower with Japan and achieve prosperity in East Asia; and they subsequently signed the “Japan-Thailand Offensive-Defensive Alliance Treaty.” After Japan announced its surrender, Thailand joined the Allied powers the next day and proclaimed itself a victor of World War II<sup>8</sup> (Chanavita Khashetasiri 257–366). In another instance, under pressure from the United States, Thailand was forced to send troops to participate in the Korean War. The “Ah Q spirit” was once again perfectly interpreted in Thailand as the government declared to the outside world that sending troops to Korea was to fulfill the responsibility of maintaining world peace and freedom alongside the United States.

After being translated into Thai, *The True Story of Ah Q* became a guiding light for the Thai people in their search for enlightenment during a dark period. It led to a profound awakening in the minds of the masses, who actively engaged in the political movement against authoritarianism and fought for democracy and freedom. As renowned Thai writer Jitr Pumisak (Hundred Stars Distribution) pointed out, the novel's criticism of reality and contemplation of national destiny provided the spiritual nourishment that the Thai people needed at that time (209–12).

### **3.2. *The impact of the true story of Ah Q on the direction of Thailand literary creation: promoting the development of critical literature***

Most of traditional Thai literature consists of sacred literature that praises the king, royal family, religion, and heroes, as well as recreational literature that depicts love.

The main form of literature is poetry, with a focus on form rather than content. Traditional Thai literature does not have specific political or social criticism literature. The reason for the formation of this literary tradition is twofold. On one hand, the Thai people have been deeply influenced by the ideas of the “divine king” in Brahmanism and the “dharma king” in Theravada Buddhism. They believe that the king is the embodiment of the divine and the consolidation of merit, and that his rule over the people is sacred and inviolable. The people are obligated to obey the king’s rule. On the other hand, the ruling class has actively suppressed those who criticize politics and society in order to maintain their own rule. They have created a social atmosphere where criticizing the king and the ruling class is considered illegal. By promoting ideas such as “past lives and present lives” and “karma and reincarnation” in Buddhism, this concept has deeply ingrained itself in the hearts and minds of the people.

From the Kingdom of Sukhothai to the 1940s and 1950s, Thai sacred literature and recreational literature have always been dominant. In the 1940s and 1950s, there were significant changes in both domestic and international political situations. The social and political changes necessitated the emergence of a new literary form. At that time, progressive writers in Thailand turned their attention to foreign countries and translated a large number of critical works of Soviet and Chinese revolutionary literature. *The True Story of Ah Q* was one of the most influential works among them. After reading *The True Story of Ah Q*, progressive writers discovered that the depiction of the diseased old Chinese society in the book was extremely similar to the social conditions in Thailand at that time. These writers were inspired by the literary ideas of “for life” reflected in *The True Story of Ah Q*, and actively responded to the literary assertion of “art for life, art for the people.” They believed that writers must take on their social responsibility and create more works that criticize and expose the dark realities of society in order to awaken the public and encourage them to actively participate in social reform (Uenchong Bonchesin 61–63). At the same time, these writers who advocate “art for life, art for the people” also learned from the spirit of Mao Zedong’s *Speech at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art* (Han Jianghua & Huang Lina). They actively engaged in the creation of Thai critical literature, following the critical spirit of *The True Story of Ah Q*, and opened a new era in Thai literature.

During this period, progressive writers produced a significant number of influential works of critical literature. For example, *Looking Forward* by Sriburabha deeply exposed the darkness of Thai society at the time, condemning the extravagant and domineering behavior of the ruling class. It also depicted the transformation of Janta, from a commoner to a revolutionary fighter for democracy and freedom. In *The Devil* by Shenit Shaowaphong, the novel portrays a lawyer named Sai Sema who dares to defy the old world and reveals the various injustices and darkness of society, encouraging people to fight against all forms of darkness and injustice, and strive for democracy and freedom. Sirila Shatapanavat’s *Whose Land is This* exposes and criticizes the reality of officials abusing their power to oppress and exploit the common people, resulting in numerous social tragedies. Jitr Pumisak is deeply influenced by *The True Story of Ah Q* and expresses his fondness for the character of Ah Q on various occasions (Kan Sarika 64–67). His work *National Spirit* provides a comprehensive and thorough critique of the dark social and political situation in Thailand at that time.

### 3.3. *The impact of the true story of Ah Q on the techniques of Thailand literary creation: emphasis on characterization and the fusion of tragedy and comedy*

Traditional literature in Thailand primarily consists of rhymed verses and places emphasis on aesthetic form while neglecting the use of flexible and diverse artistic techniques. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, the introduction of Chinese modern literary works injected fresh vitality into the Thai literary scene, resulting in significant changes in both writing style and verbal expression. Among them, the use of realism in *The True Story of Ah Q* and the seamless integration of tragedy and comedy have had a profound influence on modern Thai literature.

One of the greatest artistic achievements of *The True Story of Ah Q* is its use of realistic techniques to create typical characters. The novel integrates numerous different character images and personality traits through the method of “combining various elements to form one person” (Lu Xun 527), thus shaping Ah Q as a condensed embodiment of the “national character” of China at that time. Another artistic achievement of *The True Story of Ah Q* is the skillful use of comedy to present tragedy, making everything laughable in the work also pitiful. Lu Xun expresses a critical attitude toward the inherent inferiority of the national character that is complacent and lacks ambition by using this technique of turning tragedy into comedy.

The character portrayal and narrative technique of Lu Xun had a profound influence on Thai writers. The novel *The Madman Nalong* by Thai writer Tammachat was deeply influenced by the narrative technique of *The True Story of Ah Q*. The protagonist Nalong in the novel was long oppressed by a malicious boss, jealous colleagues, and ultimately became mentally deranged, despite being diligent and honest. Through the portrayal of Nalong’s tragic life, the author vividly exposed the cruel competition and indifference among people in Thai society at that time, implying that weak individuals like Ah Q (Nalong) were destined to be bullied in such a social environment. In addition, the character development, scene descriptions, and language expressions in *The Madman Nalong* are quite similar to *The True Story of Ah Q*: many scenes, when first read, give a feeling of humor and comedy, but upon closer examination, evoke endless sadness. Furthermore, works such as *National Spirit* by Jitr Pumisak, *Bloody Land* by Suwat Walattilut, *Slave City* by Sirilat Satanavat, and *Night with Wind and Rain* by Thai Chinese writer Li Yi, deeply influenced by the creative techniques of Lu Xun’s works represented by *The True Story of Ah Q*, achieve the exposure and criticism of the dark side of reality in society and politics through the portrayal of typical characters and the combination of tragedy and comedy.

## 4. Conclusion

As a great writer and thinker, the works and ideas of Lu Xun have not only had a profound impact on Chinese society, but also on many countries around the world, especially in Southeast Asia. *The True Story of Ah Q*, as the first complete translation of a Chinese modern literary work in Thailand, has had different effects on Thai society during different historical periods. During times of social turmoil and political dictatorship, *The True Story of Ah Q* served as a guiding light in the darkness, providing spiritual guidance for the Thai people in their pursuit of democracy and freedom. In the current

context of political democracy and social stability, *The True Story of Ah Q* has become a literary classic and entered the literature classrooms of major universities, becoming a classic work for literary majors to study and research.

From the transformation process of the dissemination of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand and its various impacts on Thai society, we can observe the existence of a mutually exclusive and mutual assistance relationship between literature and social politics. When social politics takes a reactionary turn, literature becomes a sharp weapon, firmly and resolutely declaring war against reactionary politics. Regardless of the hardships endured, there will be no compromise or retreat until victory is achieved. On the other hand, when social politics are filled with integrity and democracy, literature becomes a loyal friend of politics, safeguarding democracy and providing ideological guidance for social development.

Simultaneously, the spread of *The True Story of Ah Q* in Thailand also witnesses the extensive and profound cultural exchange between China and Thailand, as well as the sincere friendship between the two peoples. In the new historical period, guided by the “Belt and Road” initiative and the concept of “a community with a shared future for mankind,” *The True Story of Ah Q* will undoubtedly play a new role in cultural and artistic exchanges between China and Thailand, and promote the exchange and cooperation between the two countries to a new level of brilliance.

## Notes

1. “Art for life, art for the people” is a progressive literary trend that emerged in the Thai literary community in the 1950s. Around 1950, the Thai literary community formed two major camps. A group consisting of the royal family and government, whose works are mostly either praises of virtue or tacky, far from public life, and have little influence among the general public. The other faction is a mass oriented group that established the Writers Association. Although they do not have a strict organization and formal program, they emphasize that literature and art should serve the lives of the masses and meet their needs, and put forward the slogan “Art for Life, Art for the People.” Its essence is the progressive literary movement led by the Thai proletariat, which opened up a new era in Thai literature. For details, please refer to: Choishin Bonkayong. *Novels and Thai society*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1999: 15–17. (In Thai)
2. On November 8, 1947, Luang Pi Wen Song Kan launched a military coup and became prime minister. Afterwards, in October 1948, February 1949, and June 1951, the Thai army launched three more military coups, but all three were thwarted by Luang Phi Phraya Sungkan. Later, in September 1957, Shali Tanarat launched a military coup to overthrow the military government of Luang Phrayon Sungkan and appointed army general Pot Shalasin as acting prime minister. Later, in October 1958, Shali Tanarat and Thanon Gidrikazong teamed up to launch another coup, with Shali Tanarat serving as prime minister. From 1947 to 1973, there were six military coups, and four military prime ministers (who passed away in 1963 and succeeded Thanon Gidrikazong as prime minister) vigorously promoted military dictatorship and suppressed democratic progressive forces. They were known as the “era of coups and dictatorship” in Thai historiography. For details, please refer to: Naron Pompis. *The History of Thailand: The Political History of Thailand*. Bangkok: Shinakaran Willow University Press, 1980: 2–27. (In Thai)
3. Due to the dissatisfaction of students and intellectuals with the long-term high-pressure policies of the military government at that time, Thailand erupted in October 1973 with a large-scale anti-dictatorship and democratic movement. Protesters demanded the release of arrested student leaders, teachers, and democratic activists. On the 14th, the Tainong

- military government dispatched military and police to suppress protesters by force, resulting in a large-scale bloodshed of nearly 100 deaths and hundreds of injuries, escalating the confrontation. In order to quell the unrest, King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand immediately delivered a public speech after the bloody incident, opposing the military government's military suppression. He also announced the dissolution of the Tanong Cabinet and appointed the President of the Law and Political University, Shanye Tammasai, as the interim Prime Minister of the Cabinet Government, to begin restoring peace to the country. In Thai history, this event is referred to as the "10.14 Incident." For details, please refer to: Banou Piyapan. *Thai history*. Bangkok: Audi Sadong Publishing House, 1995: 20–23. (In Thai)
4. The Thai translators of these two books are unknown. They were first published by China foreign language publishing house, and after entering Thailand, they have been reprinted and distributed multiple times by Thai publishing houses such as Bopite Publishing House and Flame Publishing House.
  5. According to the operational system of Thai national power, temporary laws refer to laws issued and implemented by the Cabinet government in the name of the king in emergency situations. However, such laws must be submitted to the parliament for review afterward and can only become formal laws after passing the parliament's review. After its promulgation in 1990, the Temporary Act for the Abolition of Prohibited Books in Thailand was immediately submitted for parliamentary review. Due to multiple coups in Thailand since 1991, the cabinet government and parliament have been replaced several times, and it was not until 1998 that the Temporary Act for the Abolition of Prohibited Books in Thailand was approved for parliamentary review; subsequently, the official decree "Thailand's Abolition of Prohibited Books Act" was signed and implemented by the then Chuan Li Pai Cabinet Government. For details, please refer to: Somsakdi Xuto. *Government and Politics of Thailand*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987: 82–97; John L. S. Giring. *Thailand: Society and Politics*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University press, 1981:102-118; Thawatt Mokarpong. *History of the Thai Revolution*. Bangkok: Bangkok Salaka Dit Press, 1972: 87–98 (In Thai).
  6. The Thai Constitution stipulates that citizens have the freedom of religious belief, but throughout Thailand, kings have upheld Buddhism (the Theravada sect of Buddhism), making it the de facto state religion in Thailand, with over 95% of the population practicing Buddhism. At the same time, Buddhism holds a very important position in the Thai education system. From early childhood education to higher education, Buddhist ethics courses must be offered, and schools should regularly hold Buddhist activities hosted by monks with the participation of all teachers and students. Therefore, Thai people are deeply influenced by Buddhist ethics, have a gentle temperament, enjoy a peaceful life without conflict with the world, and enjoy being content with the status quo. For more details, please refer to: Sumankaya Jingtanchen. *Introduction to Thai civilization*. Bangkok: Tharipong Enkozen Publishing House, 2008: 146–150; Prapunhom Kunnapon. *Introduction to Asian Buddhism*. Bangkok: Tamasapa Buddhist Publishing House, 2012: 142–176. (In Thai)
  7. "On New Democracy" was a speech given by Mao Zedong at the first representative conference of the Shaanxi Gansu Ningxia Border Region Cultural Association on January 9, 1940. The original title was "The Politics of New Democracy and the Culture of New Democracy," which was published in the inaugural issue of "Chinese Culture" in Yan'an on February 15, 1940. On February 20 of the same year, when the 98th and 99th issues of *Liberation* were published in Yan'an, the title was changed to "On New Democracy."
  8. On December 9, 1941, Japan invaded Siam (formerly known as Thailand, renamed Thailand in 1949). After a brief resistance, Siam agreed to allow Japanese troops to pass through Siam. On December 21st, Japan forced Siam to sign the Treaty of Japan

Siam Offensive and Defense, and Siam announced its accession to the Axis powers. On January 25, 1942, Siam declared war on Britain and the United States. On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered, and Siam immediately declared the invalidity of its declaration of war against Britain and the United States on January 25, 1942. Siam's declaration of invalidity was recognized by the Allied powers, and Siam transitioned from being a member of the Axis powers to becoming a member of the Allied powers. For details, please refer to: Chanavita Khashetasiri. *Thai political history: 1923–1957*. Bangkok: Thammasat University University Press, 2001: 257–366, 465–477. (In Thai)

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