



Creative Writing on Tourism in Chiang Rai After COVID-19: Application of Creative Nonfiction on Senior Projects

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Abstract. Creative writing studies have been gaining a foothold in the academic world in recent years, but its reach in Thailand is still few and far between, not to mention its application in the tourism industry. The author proposes the use of creative writing studies in helping the tourism industry after the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in Chiang Rai, through senior projects. During the COVID-19 crisis, the businesses supporting the tourism industry were seriously affected. Mae Fah Luang University, local authorities, and national agencies encourage projects that could solve unemployment and reinvigorate local businesses, which lead to changes from a small scale such as senior projects. By exploring the existing narratives revolving around the businesses, knowledge of creative writing, especially in nonfiction writing, could develop new narratives that could help the businesses gain new insights or voices, attracting more readers and potential customers. During the process, decoding meanings and constructing new ones turn out to be vital skills apart from using impactful dictions and following effective writing models. Unique perspectives offered by the creative writing pieces reflect the necessities for the businesses and people involved to adapt their waves of lives or their thinking to survive in the world after COVID-19.

Keywords: Creative Writing studies · COVID-19 · Tourism industry · Creative Nonfiction · Nonfiction writing · Senior projects · Chiang Rai

1 Introduction and Rationale

Senior Projects are, in some universities, considered part of the requirements for completing undergraduate programs in Thailand. They are one of the assessments on accumulative knowledge which could be applied to life improvement of the surrounding communities. In addition, theoretical and academic frameworks are selected, analyzed, and synthesized before adaptation and application in community service. Literary studies, including creative writing, could also be used to service people in the community. With this belief in mind, the author proposes the use of creative writing studies in helping the tourism industry in Chiang Rai, Thailand, recover after the COVID-19 crisis through senior projects.

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1.1 Geographical and Tourism Context

Thailand's GDP economy value could be counted around 11.5% of the national GDP in 2019, with the majority of Chinese tourists around 27.5%, followed by Malaysia and India [1]. This shows the major role tourism plays to Thailand's economy not only at the national level but also at the provincial one.

Chiang Rai, the northernmost province in Thailand, is known for its mountainous landscape and its geographical significance as part of the Golden Triangle which covers three countries: Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos. Its borders to Laos and Myanmar contribute to its importance as a gateway for economic trade. As for the tourism context, Chiang Rai could not attract as many tourists as Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, or Chiang Mai, the biggest city in the north. The province's economy relies heavily on tourism, considering almost 4 million tourists per year before the COVID-19 crisis who generated around 40 billion baht in revenue according to the director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)'s Chiang Rai office [2].

Chiang Rai's landmarks, natural and man-made, include temples, such as The Blue Temple, The White Temple, museums such as The Black House, and mountains which are called Doi in the northern dialect. Furthermore, cultural tourism also includes products and services related to Northern Thai culture (Lanna).

1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Effects on Chiang RAI's Tourism Industry

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry in Thailand was affected by the strong currency (Thai baht) and a less-than-expected slow stream of foreign tourists [3]. Once the virus began its foothold in Thailand, and more travel restrictions were introduced, the number of foreign visitors dramatically dropped comparing between March 2019 and March 2020 [4].

From mid-April to mid-May 2020, there were travel bans preventing people from traveling across provinces in Thailand because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the number of visitors to Chiang Rai in 2020 dropped to just 2 million, and tourism revenue slumped to just 15 billion baht [2]. Furthermore, the economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses had rendered some Chiang Rai workers in Bangkok unemployed. When the unemployed returned to their hometowns, including Chiang Rai, some of them did not have secondary or supported jobs.

As for local businesses, some restaurants resorted to doing food delivery while hostels and hotels were forced to shut down temporarily. After the travel ban was lifted, many businesses began to show signs of recovery. Various government strategies to stimulate the country's tourism industry were introduced such as the "Rao Tiew Duay Kan" (We Travel Together) subsidy scheme and the "Tour Tiew Thai" co-payment scheme [5]. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic has left a great impact on Chiang Rai's economy. Not only that, but Thailand's lessons can also, in a way, "act as a guide for other tourism-dependent countries facing similar dilemmas as they prepare for the resurgence of international travel" after the pandemic subsides [6].

2 Creative Writing – Nonfiction Writing

Creative writing studies as an independent field may still be in the beginning stage in the academic world of universities in Thailand, but its integration within the English language and literature studies has already occurred as extra activities or elective courses. In consequence, there are few applications of creative writing frameworks in real life, including community services. This creates a gap in applying literary knowledge to real-life situations. To clarify, the definition and application of creative writing will be discussed first, followed by the strategies and processes used in the senior projects.

2.1 Definition and Application

When talking about defining creative writing, another terms that comes to mind is content writing, but there are differences between the two types. Content writing in marketing involves a client who sets the purpose of a piece of writing to appear as an outcome that could be measured in some way, such as sales figures or website traffic while creative writing should not be limited by business outcomes and focuses instead on personal expression and reflection [7].

What is more is that the creative writing can be divided into two categories: Creative fiction and creative nonfiction. On one hand, creative fiction includes narrative elements such as themes, characters, settings, and plots. Rhetorical or figurative devices such as metaphor, simile, etc., are also used to enhance the writing and to convey meanings to the reader. On the other hand, creative nonfiction is more focused on narrative techniques and stylistic strategies in to retell a true story. The key word being “to retell a true story” is important because it differentiates the line between fiction and factual stories. Moreover, the writers of creative nonfiction could also “use craft and technique to situate the reader into their own personal lives” [8].

Consequently, creative nonfiction not only shares real stories or facts but is also full of techniques to engage the reader. Examples of creative nonfiction can be found in genres that include autobiography, biography, memoir, diary, travel writing, autobiographical fiction, and biographical interview. In this research, following the senior project’s context, travel writing and feature articles are the two prominent outlets of creative nonfiction. Firstly, travel writing’s dominant subject is the experience of encountering foreign places [9]. Secondly, feature articles’s purpose is more factual: providing information about people, places, or issues, but in a more casual and emotive form than interviews or analytical essays [10].

The creative nonfiction, with its true-to-life elements, is then suitable to support the storytelling of the surrounding communities in Chiang Rai as the framework for the writing products of senior projects.

3 Strategies and Process of Senior Project

The undergraduate program of the School of Liberal Arts, Mae Fah Luang University, also requires undergraduate students to undertake senior projects. During the COVID-19 crisis, the businesses supporting the tourism industry were seriously affected. Mae Fah Luang University, local authorities, and national agencies encourage projects that could solve unemployment and reinvigorate local businesses, which lead to changes from a small scale such as senior projects.

The five sites chosen by the senior project students are the Black House (Baan Dum Gallery & Museum), Wat Phra That Doi Wao (Scorpien Temple), Chiang Rai Walking Street, Doi Din Dang Pottery, and Chivit Thamma Da Coffee House, Bar, and Bistro. The varied choices require exploration of different aspects of tourism in Chiang Rai: religious (temple), artistic (Baan Dum and Doi Din Daeng Pottery), and commercial (walking street and café) sites.

After selecting the sites, the next step is finding the suitable subgenre and format for the creative nonfiction piece while setting up the tone and target readers in the process. The students need to be able to set up the project's rationale and objectives of why they choose the sites, explore the narratives of the sites, analyze the strength and weaknesses of the existing narratives, and create an outline. Then, after the students collect additional data by interviewing the sites' subjects (including the owner or the administrator, the employees, and the customers), they should be able to write the first draft. Once the editing process along with the consultations with the supervisor finishes, the finished writing piece will be given to sites' related personnel to be used for the promotion of the sites.

4 Senior Project Output

The senior project output of the students in the author's group are as followed: literary journalism for the Walking Street and Phra That Doi Wao, travel writing for the Black House and Doi Din Dang Pottery, and feature article for Chivit Thammada Coffee House, Bar, and Bistro. The figures of writing samples are shown in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Unique perspectives offered by the creative writing pieces reflect the necessities for the businesses and people involved to adapt their lives and thinking to survive in the world after COVID-19. In addition, for students, during the writing development process, decoding meanings and constructing new ones turn out to be vital skills apart from using impactful dictions and following effective writing models.



PHRA THAT DOI WAO

📍 MAE SAI CHIANG RAI

Written by Chanida Chayangkoor Na Ayuttaya
 - Fourth-year student of Mae Fah Luang university, School of Liberal Arts
 May 7, 2022



WHY DIDN'T PHRA THAT DOI WAO COME BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE?
 Why now Phra That Doi Wao is as quiet as mice? Due to COVID19 or not? Or are there other factors that we might overlook?



Now I am looking up to the sky, and I see white clouds floating like a fluffy. It looks such a softening touch. A cool breeze is blowing me all the time. Wherever I look, I see the green color of nature. Such a relaxing atmosphere! I believe that these are what make many people fascinated in this city.

Chiang Rai is probably a city that is more or less popular with many people both Thai and foreigners. I am quite sure that they want to touch a natural feeling truly. In the urban town, there is a lot of dirty black smoke from plenty of vehicles that absolutely cause air pollution. I think there is such one suitable song as 'Poom Pae Krunghthep' by Pang Nakarin. Whenever I listen to this song, I am always in the mood for urban people who seek to escape the chaotic city. And my goal is Chiang Rai.

Fig. 1. Phra That Doi Wao Writing Sample

Chiang Rai Walking Street Through Lens: Perspectives and Effect of Covid-19

The first impression, namely exhaustion for some, that catches the visitors of Chiang Rai Walking Street is its endless walk in a night market and vast selections of goods in it. In 2008, as Thailand and Chiang Rai Province had given itself to tourism, local authority founded a market for tourists on Thanalai Street, Chiang Rai City.

Saturday evenings, the street is closed for commotion and open for business. Merchants from all over Chiang Rai gather and sell vast selections of foods and clothes in both general and local fashions. Also, the walking street has a mixture of a gallery—displaying artworks, handmade products, and live Lanna performing arts by local artists. Providing the virtue, the market has become the most easy-to-access cultural demonstration although some shops have left the market around the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tanapat Pacome Bruneau or “First” had been in Chiang Rai from 2016 to 2020 as a student a nearby campus. According to him, his first visit to the market was much like that of most first-time visitors. The market features a very long walk and different products i.e. “Tung,” which are local decorative flags. He particularly enjoyed the “Rum Wong” floor. Rum Wong is a slow simple dance once favored in all regions of the country. The dance floor is dense with a festive atmosphere and everyone is welcome to join as Sao Rum Wong leads visitors in the dance.

Mook, a student from Southern Thailand is another frequent visitor. She always had in her mind dinner dishes for each visit. The first of them would always be rice vermicelli (Kanom Jean) with spicy pork sauce, a famous Lanna dish, and other traditional sauces. Fried mushrooms are rare, and Mook knows it when she saw one in the market. Its thin layers was crispy on the

Fig. 2. Chiang Rai Walking Street Writing Sample

The Black House

The Songkran holiday is usually a hot period. As long as I remember, it was one of my most memorable memories from my childhood. A lot of children would love to splash water. Yep, nothing was more precious than splashing water on your friend and family during the summer time with the temperature almost forty degrees celsius.

Besides, today was more special because I got to meet someone very important. Someone could guide me through the mystery of Baan Dum or The Black House as most foreigners know. Mr. Witsanu was welcome and willing to give me a tour and an interview, and I could not wait to uncover the truth behind the place, even if it meant dragging my sweating body on a motorcycle under the blazing sun.

On the way to The Black House, I swore that today was the most challenging riding a motorcycle for me. The first priority right now was not to get to the place correctly, but it was how could I get there without a water-soaked body. I believe that many children were thirsty to splash water on their victims who were reckless walking or riding around here.

Fig. 3. The Black House Writing Sample

DISCOVER THE HIDDEN ATTRACTION IN DOI DIN DANG POTTERY

PARAWAN NAMUEANGRAK



THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY

During the middle of summer day in 2022 in the hottest month of the year of Thailand, April, when I could be melted by the endless sunshine over my head. However, I keep going ahead to my destination no matter how much I'm dripping with sweat from the heat of the afternoon sun of Thailand.

I have to be sincere that I have been bothered by the feeling that I couldn't get rid of for a while since I have to finish my senior project on a challenging topic that I'm not familiar with and I've never done this kind of project before. "Will I be able to overcome this hard time?" I keep asking myself and my heart gets hurt and pound so many times whenever I think about the deadlines, the scores or even the commentary that I have to face in the next few weeks from my teachers. For this reason, I completely need some place that is not too noisy and too crowded to let myself relieve my tiredness and escape the worry about my project for a moment, so I decided to take myself into a place where I can be surrounded by nature and beautiful simple things.

The destination of this trip is Doi Din Dang Pottery, one of the most attractive and rare pottery hidden in the woods in a small village in Chiang Rai. The reason that I call it rare is because the route to this pottery is a little complex, at least for me, as it is located in the village that has to make a turn into the right alley from the main road. For this reason, you have to carefully look for the Doi Din Dang's signboard on the entry of the alley. However, the most convenient and helpful way is to let the google map be the little friend to guide you.



Fig. 4. Doi Din Dang Pottery Writing Sample

CHIVIT THAMMADA

Coffee House Bar and Bistro

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The most popular Café in Chiang Rai for decades



Some people might say that tourists who visit Chiang Rai have to visit the Chivit Thammada coffee house. This restaurant is a place where foreign and Thai tourists have to be there for once, to have experiences of the owner's service-mind and the best selection of ingredients. Also, this restaurant is a place for many couples to celebrate their anniversary together. Chivit Thammada coffee house is more than a restaurant because the owner, Miss Nattamon Holmberg or Khun Aon, always takes good care of customers and also welcomes them with pleasure. Moreover, the staff of Chivit Thammada are working as a family. They have the same goal, that they want customers to be happy and impressed by the restaurant.

Fig. 5. Chivit Thammada Sample Writing

5 Conclusion

By exploring the existing narratives revolving around the businesses, knowledge of creative writing, especially in nonfiction writing, could develop new narratives that could help the businesses gain new insights or voices, attracting more readers and potential customers. The senior project aims to utilize the narrative techniques found in literary studies to create a creative nonfiction piece. The process includes data collection of the existing writing and people involved with the organization, analyzing the strengths

and weaknesses of the sites, finding suitable writing samples and models to follow, and creating the creative piece using the students' voices, perspectives, and dictions.

To show further utilization of creative writing in community services, the presentation also adds case studies beyond senior projects, which are the results of the integration of storytelling from the Chiang Saen community and local products' narratives. The author believes that there are opportunities beyond academics and the surrounding community for creative writing since the expression of thoughts and voices of the few could find ways to the hearts of the many.

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