Font Design to Promote Thai Identity

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Abstract

This study on font design reflecting the identity of Thai-ness was aimed to: 1) design Thai fonts that reflect Thai identity; and 2) explore the opinion of designers of font types. This font design focused on applying Laai Thai (Thai patterns). The opinions of 30 designers and users were sought and analysed statistically. Statistics used are percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

A summary result of the evaluation on the quality of fonts in the aspects of utility, uniqueness, and Thai identity are reported to be at a high level overall. Individuals reported that Thai identity was found at the highest level. Other opinions included the attractiveness of the design, the design having Thai identity, offering diverse uses, the font sizes being easily readable and the applicability and readability of the designs in various media.

Keywords: Journal format, Printing, References

Introduction

Each particular society differs in culture. Cultural heritage covers ideals, traditions, arts, architecture and social values. Culture partly determines the behavioural patterns of people in a particular community. Arts and culture come from the developments and values that reflect the profound core of that society. Those arts and culture well represent the social situation, background, living and economic conditions at a certain period of time. It has to say that Thailand is fortunate to possess interestingly diverse cultures and different identities.

The cultural heritage and natural history of a nation are precious and unique. The security of cultural heritage relies on a solid foundation which includes cultural sites, old buildings, and temples, landmarks of cultural and historical significance. Culture and history reflect the development of morals, beliefs, and aims that create the national identity of the people. It is imperative to keep our cultural heritage to preserve our identity as a nation. The value of cultural heritage is less on cultural expression and more on the experience and skills accumulated over generations (The Language Doctors, 2012). Identity refers to the collectively of distinctive features of something that makes it known or recognized. Each society has its own cultural identity. Globalization affects identity changes and expression in Thai society (Office of the Royal Society, 2007).

Characters or alphabets were first invented in the Great Era 1205 (B.E. 1826) by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great and were called Laai Seu Thai or Thai letters. At that time the Thai nation had accumulated knowledge in the arts and culture, and academics and had successively passed on the knowledge through the use of Laai Seu Thai. King Ramkhamhaeng the Great invented Laai Seu Thai and stone inscriptions and chronicles remain as evidence of his work (Prasert Na Nakhon, 2003). Letters are used

by people as visual symbols to create perception and interpretation in a systemic way. They were used to express feelings, thoughts and human knowledge and help spread those thoughts and knowledge to others over distances and maintain those thoughts and knowledge for future generations in various media formats containing letters, language characters, messages, and symbols. Letters provide detailed information about things that are meant as shared communication. They bring about the aesthetic value of the arts along with mental aesthetics as well (Ptachis Tinnabutr, 1988).

Today, a wide variety of media are used in communication. Letters are essential to written communication as they are used to build written words which are used in an almost infinite variety of combinations to create messages for communication. The importance of a message sent from a messenger is to act as a stimulus for the recipient to perceive meaning and respond. It is not only print media that contains letters as components, modern media acts more in sending invisible messages. Various shapes and forms of the font itself can trigger responses independently of the spelled words and before reading as they stimulate the imagination, emotions, memories, and connect to all the senses of readers to automatically perceive attributes from the physical world (Simon Garfield, 2011)

Objectives

1. To design a font set to promote Thai cultural identity.
2. To explore the opinions of producers and users of media with fonts as components.

Conceptual Framework

The design of fonts uses Laai Thai as a component.

Procedures

The following procedures formed part of the design of fonts to promote Thai cultural identity.

1. Explore and compile documents, concepts, and research pertaining to font design, Thai culture, and concepts about media design with fonts as components, and designs that reflect Thai cultural identity.

2. Analyse the data to determine font design and concepts applicable in promoting Thai cultural identity.

3. Design fonts and seek comments from design experts of Thai identity, create, revise according to their suggestions, and proceed to design fonts with the aid of a computer program.

Font design steps

1) Sketch fonts on paper, scan and draw using Adobe Illustrator.

2) Enter the font draft into the computer with Fontlab studio.

3) Operational procedures

Phase 1 Planning (Pre- Production)

1. Study font designs and the art of each historical period to guide font design.

2. Sketch out fonts and typeface and draw them using a drawing program, and import them to develop fonts, using the following steps.

Step 1 Download a grid template for font handwriting, print and write the letters
Step 2 in grids.

Step 3 Scan the images written on the computer.

Step 4 Open the scanned file in Photoshop, select the Crop Tool to crop the desired font, and go to Select > Colour Range, select white space, press OK and Ctrl + Shift + I, and then press Ctrl + x to cut the font structure out.

Step 5 Input the fonts onto Font Creator with an opening of the selected file to be edited which is font AAA-Watin-new, then modify, reduce-enlarge the font to the desired size and type. Complete all the fonts according to the Unicode character code chart for Thai characters.

Step 6 Once completing all of the fonts, check the gaps and spaces of letters by pressing F5, and try typing different texts.

3. Design media by using the designed fonts in the title of the design work, and then seek the opinions of others.

4. Explore the opinions of 30 purposively selected media design experts using a 5-point rating scale (Likert scale) questionnaire and conclude the opinions.

5. Try out, among 30 purposively selected students who enrolled in the print design course and use the usability assessment form.

Research Result

1. Font Design

Figure 1 Font set "Tossakan"

2. Opinions of design experts and design students

Table 1 the result of the opinions of design experts and design students

List	Experts		Design Students		Total	Interpretation
	x	sd	x	sd	x	
Utility	4.30	0.56	4.50	0.76	4.40	High
Uniqueness	4.45	0.75	4.45	0.55	4.45	High
Thai identity	4.55	0.45	4.65	0.65	4.60	Highest
Total	4.43		4.53		4.48	High

Table 1 shows that the sample of both experts and design students similarly reported
the highest level of opinion on Thai identity, followed by uniqueness, and utility, respectively.

3. Printing Media Design

Figure 2 Fonts from Canva Program

Figure 3 Fonts in the design of Thai tourism sites

Figure 4 Fonts in the design of Thai restaurants

Figure 5 Fonts in the design of Thai dessert shops

Discussion

The results of font design to promote Thai cultural identity was based on the design concept and study of Thai culture from which Laai Thai was adopted for font design. It accords to Putharet Phomdee (2014) suggesting that Laai Thai is a heritage that has been passed down over many generations (*c*725 years) to the present day. It is the craft of the arts that represents the uniqueness of Thai-ness and faith in Buddhism. These inspire artists to invent Laai Thai with ideas acquired from lotus flowers, garlands, and incense smoke and candle flames to create numerous patterns namely Kanok, Pleaw Plurng, Baited, and floral patterns, for example. Laai Thai is regarded as an outstanding part of the arts such as those metal embossed, pearl inlaid, niello, and enamel work, all with different patterns and created from Laai Thai.

The art of Laai Thai images is a legacy that has been passed down from our ancestors and continues to develop to this day. Such development is on the basis of Thai-ness as characterized by delicacy, gentleness and a love of beauty that has long been maintained as part of Thai society, thus making Thai art refined and soft. According to historical evidence, Laai Thai has been part of Thai art since the Chiang Saen period and inherited from the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods. In former times, artists were found only in temples but they later offered themselves to serve the King and were called "Chang Luang" (court artisans) or "Chang Sib Mu" (10 groups of artisans). At present, other than inheriting knowledge from such artists, various educational institutions have been extensively promoted and encouraged to offer education in this area (Sanay Luangsoonthorn, 1999). Applying Laai Thai in font design for print media suggested that the Thai identity can be conveyed by components of Laai Thai as a design concept, and it is also applicable to the design of other media intended to present Thai-ness.

Recommendations

In this study, the design procedures and fonts development were time consuming, it is therefore recommended that designers should define the concept and design fonts that stand out and are attractive when used in designs. Further studies should be developed for other creative fonts design and applications either preservation or commercial purposes.

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