



Illustration Design of Tarot Cards from Thai Literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was three-fold: 1) to explore the ideal patterns of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature; 2) to design and create tarot card illustrations from Thai literature by the forms of representation and congruence with the original tarot cards suit; and 3) to examine the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature by collecting data from relevant documents and research works, and developing the patterns of illustrations for 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana to convey the meaning and to be congruent with the original tarot cards suit, applying the concept of Thai literature. The illustration designs were reviewed and evaluated by 3 specialists to find out the ideal illustrations which were then printed on appropriate print material. For efficiency evaluation of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature, the research sample included 50 people who were interested in tarot card illustration design. The evaluation focused on 3 aspects comprising 1) Material used was appropriate for functioning, 2) Design principles, and 3) Representation of illustrations. The result of efficiency evaluation of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature on the 3 aspects reported the overall mean of 4.00, suggesting a very high level of propriety.

Keywords: Design / Illustration / Tarot cards / Thai literature

Introduction

Tarot cards, also known as “gypsy cards,” are used as a tool to predict people's past, present, and future by flipping the card and reading the prediction as appeared on the card that contains no letters but an art illustration. The origins of tarot cards are thought to have come from the Gypsies. The word "Gypsy" refers to a nomadic people assumed to have originated in the Indian subcontinent. It is believed that they may be Dravidian, another group of people who passed on their civilization to the Babylonians before migrating and became scattered across Europe and central Asia, with some populations settling in the land of Egypt and parts of Europe. The word "Gypsy" thus emerged from the presence of this group of people in England at the beginning of the 16th century and was recorded as Egyptian immigrants. When the Gypsies came to have role in Europe during the time the church was very powerful, the early prediction was done using only a crystal ball along with psychology. The Church saw it as unacceptable and labeled the Gypsies as wizard or shaman which was considered, at that time, to be evil, leading to the Gypsies inventing cards or playing cards to substitute for their crystal balls. It was not accepted at once until a gypsy woman used her cards to make predictions for King Charles VI of France. This led to tarot cards becoming more widely recognized. Later in 1491, a complete tarot deck of 78 cards was produced by an anonymous artist and it was named after the last two rulers. The Sola Busca deck of tarot cards that remained unreleased and seen by very few until a few cards were publicised.



A deck of tarot cards consists of 78 cards consisting of the Major Arcana with 22 cards containing inserted stories of mythology especially Greek gods in some cards; and the Minor Arcana with 56 cards divided into 4 suits of 14 cards each by their symbols including pentacles, discs, coins; cups, chalices; swords; and wands, all are used to represent the four elements as a basis of all things and humans namely earth, water, wind, and fire. The coins suit corresponds to the earth element associated with physical things such as matter or objects, and was often used to predict financial outcomes. The cups suit corresponds to the water element and is often used when talking about abstract ideas such as love and relationships. The swords suit corresponds to the air element representing reason and the logic in the form of decision-making in life. The wands suit corresponds to the fire element, and was commonly used to predict works or driving force of life. Illustrations have been important to humans since ancient times as the letters used by humans today have evolved from paintings. It was assumed that humans had drawn pictures along the cave wall to worship the gods or to record important events. "Illustrations" are the main element to convey meaning, motivating receivers to pay attention and understand the stories and words described in the illustrations. Illustrations stimulate viewer's imagination and awareness as they are able to better explain ideas and stories than presenting stories with letters alone. The properties of an illustration are that it provides a sense of liveliness, movement, enjoyment, and harmony with the story, and can be used to clearly depict the story or meaning (Phadung Prommoon 2004: 92).

Thai literature is a precious literary work with its aesthetic uniqueness. It is part of language learning whereby poets put words in beautiful prose and verses accompanied with contents that help to edify the reader's soul to develop a beautiful mind by those ideas and values embedded in a particular literature. One should thus realize such value of literature (Ratri Preawpanich, 2009: 58). Thai literature is worth studying because "Literature is a language culture that expresses the flourish of the past, and told stories, ways of life, beliefs, thoughts, and courses of people in society (Ingorn Suphanwanich, 2010:196).

With the history and importance of tarot cards and the aesthetic uniqueness of Thai literature, they can be matched to create distinctive illustrations in new forms which can also be utilized to propagate Thai literature to the new generation to become aware of its value. Realizing such importance, the researcher hence carried out this research to guide the development of illustrations so that Thai literature is further recognized and preserved.

Objectives

1. To explore the ideal patterns of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature
2. To design and create tarot cards illustrations from Thai literature based on their representation and congruence with the original tarot cards
3. To examine the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature

Scope of the Study

1. In this study, the researcher selected 5 stories of Thai literature namely: Kanha Chalee, Sungthong, Phra Aphai Mani, Traibhum Phraruang, and Inhao to be used for designing illustrations for 22 tarot cards of the Major Arcana.

2. This study focused on exploring the ideal patterns of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature and the suggestions from experts and specialists in arts, and illustrators, which were created by the researcher considering the features, principles of design, and congruence with the original tarot cards.



3. This study aims to create tarot card illustrations from 5 stories of Thai literature comprising Kanha Chalee, Sungthong, Phra Aphai Mani, Traibhum Phraruang, and Inhao according to the experts and specialists in arts and the illustrators from their propriety evaluation of tarot cards on the propriety and congruence with the original tarot cards.

4. The research sample was recruited using a sampling method of people interested in tarot card illustrations design, totally 50 persons.

Methods and Materials

The current research designed tarot card illustrations from Thai literature, and examined the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature. The procedures are described below.

1. Documentary study was undertaken through the search from relevant documents and research works including academic papers, research reports, articles, journals, related theses, and internet data sources, and the investigation of relevant stories in Thai literature and mathematical statistics.

2. Designs of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature were developed based on the original illustrations of 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana. Evaluation was performed by 3 specialists on the propriety of illustration designs by the patterns of tarot cards and the patterns of Thai literature on functioning the communication of meaning and congruence with the original tarot cards.

3. Construction of questionnaire and survey of the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature. There were altogether 50 respondents. The obtained data was taken to the analysis; conclusion; presentation in analytical description using statistics including mean and standard deviation; and discussion. Research report was prepared accordingly.

Results

This research on illustration designs of tarot cards from Thai literature provided the following results by its objectives.

Objective 1 To explore the ideal patterns of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature. The investigation of data suggested that a deck of tarot cards consists of totally 78 cards divided into 22 cards in the Major Arcana and 56 cards in the Minor Arcana. This research designed illustrations for 22 cards in the Major Arcana comprising 1. The Fool, 2. The Magician, 3. The High Priestess, 4. The Empress, 5. The Emperor, 6. The Hierophant, 7. The Lovers, 8. The Chariot, 9. The Strength, 10. The Hermit, 11. The Wheel of Fortune, 12. The Justice, 13. The Hanged Man, 14. The Death, 15. The Temperance, 16. The Devil, 17. The Tower, 18. The Star, 19. The Moon, 20. The Sun, 21. The Judgement, and 22. The World.

The contents, stories, and characters in Thai literature were studied and used for designing tarot card illustrations from Thai literature including Kanha Chalee, Sungthong, Phra Aphai Mani, Traibhum Phraruang, and Inhao.

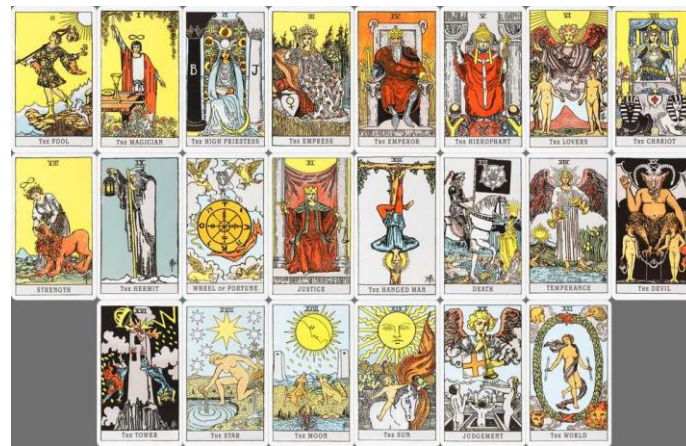


Figure 1 The 22 original tarot cards in the Major Arcana

Objective 2 To design and create tarot card illustrations from Thai literature in the forms of representation and congruence with the original tarot cards. The patterns of designs for tarot card illustrations from Thai literature were developed from the original illustrations of 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana. Evaluation was performed by specialists on the designs of illustrations for their propriety by the patterns of tarot cards and the patterns of literature in functioning communication of meaning and congruence with the original tarot cards.



Figure 2 Patterns of illustration designs for 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana



Figure 3 New patterns of illustration designs for 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana



Objective 3 To examine the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature. Evaluation results on the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature were summarized as follows.

Table 1 Efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature (n=50)

Evaluation List	Level of Opinion		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Material used was appropriate for functioning			
1.1 Material used to create tarot card illustrations was appropriate.	4.10	0.54	Very High
1.2 Materials used to create other components were appropriate.	3.88	0.55	Very High
Total	3.99	0.35	Very High
2. Principles of design			
2.1 Colour	3.66	0.62	Very High
2.2 Proportion	3.70	0.58	Very High
2.3 Unity	3.82	0.52	Very High
2.4 Harmony	4.06	0.51	Very High
2.5 Emphasis	4.30	0.54	Very High
2.6 Balance	3.60	0.57	Very High
Total	3.85	0.22	Very High
3. Representation			
3.1 Illustrations accurately communicate the meaning of stories	4.32	0.55	Very High
3.2 Illustrations contain clear details	3.74	0.59	Very High
3.3 Illustrations are easy to understand, uncomplicated	4.32	0.51	Very High
3.4 Illustrations can stimulate viewers' emotion	3.76	0.51	Very High
3.5 Illustrations are congruent with the originals	4.30	0.54	Very High
3.6 Illustrations are congruent with Thai literature	4.50	0.50	Very High
Total	4.15	0.22	Very High
Grand Total	4.00	0.17	Very High

Table 1 shows mean and standard deviation of evaluation result on the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature, ranked by mean score as follows.

Efficiency on material used appropriate for functioning. The material used to create tarot card illustrations was appropriate with a highest mean of 4.10, suggesting a very high level. The overall mean was 3.99, suggesting a very high level.

Efficiency on the principles of design. The emphasis of illustrations was reported most efficiency with mean of 4.30 as a very high level; followed by the harmony of illustrations with mean of 4.06 as a high level; and balance of illustrations with the lowest mean of 3.60 as a very high level. The overall mean was 3.85, suggesting a very high level.

Efficiency on representation of illustrations. The illustrations congruent with Thai literature was reported most efficiency with mean of 4.50, suggesting a very high level; followed by illustrations accurately communicating the meaning of stories, and illustrations easy to understand and uncomplicated both with mean of 4.32 as a very high level; illustrations having clear details reported lowest efficiency with mean of 3.74 as a very high level. The overall mean was 4.15, suggesting a very high level. On the whole, respondents to the evaluation form on the efficiency of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature rated a high level of satisfaction with overall mean of 4.00 for the 3 aspects.



Discussion

Based on the analysis, the design of tarot card illustrations from Thai literature created by collecting data from relevant documents and research works, drawing conclusions, and analyzing to guide the illustration designs, was developed from the original patterns of 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana. An evaluation was performed by specialists on the designs of illustrations as appropriate for the patterns of tarot cards and the patterns of Thai literature for functioning communication of meaning and congruence with the original illustrations. After that the appropriate illustrations were printed on print material. According to Siri Noodang (2004), illustrations are vital to human communication for a long time. For the use of illustrations, designers should present images that can aimingly communicate and create good understanding to viewers or users. At present, illustrations take part and have an influence in various media. In print media, illustrations came to play a special role for it uses the senses of the eyes.

In this study, the researcher designed a new suit of illustrations of 22 tarot cards in the Major Arcana to convey the meaning and to be congruent with the original suit of tarot cards. As suggested by Thawatchanon Tathaisong (2003), the design with consistency and conveying meaning through visual perception is the process of selecting what is seen as information for perception and is then input into the thoughts through the brain and mind to be interpreted into meaning of things for what they are or what they mean. The tarot card illustrations from Thai literature thus require the design to convey the meaning as in the original cards and to be consistent with the patterns of Thai literature according to the set objectives.

The efficiency evaluation of the designs for tarot card illustrations from Thai literature among the sample group interested in tarot card illustrations from Thai literature suggested that the tarot card illustrations were designed to convey the meaning as in the original forms and were congruent with the patterns of Thai literature. Siri Noodaeng (2004) stated that illustrations need to provide a tool to help visualize the story plot, interpret the meaning or well expand understanding about the story, and create the mood of the story in conformity and relation with the story, corresponded characters, and scenes or places described in the story. The efficiency evaluation was conducted in 3 aspects: 1. Materials used were appropriate for functioning, 2. Principles of design, and 3. Representation of illustrations. The evaluation in overall of the 3 aspects reported mean of 4.00, suggesting a very high level of propriety.

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