Design Concept of Contemporary Cultural Character as Two Dimensional Graphics for Art Toy

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Abstract: The purpose of this design study is to focus on designing a concept of a contemporary cultural character. The relevant documents and survey on child's play behavior were studied on the following aspects: 1) the concept of toy design, 2) the selection of characters in the literature for toy design, and 3) the character designed by this process. The research instruments were observation form of children's play behavior, character collection form of Thai literature, and open-ended questionnaire related to cultural play's notion.

For the result of the study, the researcher had designed a conceptual framework for designing contemporary cultural character, consisting of 6 aspects as follows: 1) promoting children's progress, 2) creating fictional characters, 3) utilizing culture to make inspirations, 4) using body language to create, 5) the ways to select characters from basic virtue, and 6) creating play experiences.

In conclusion, the researcher had designed a new concept for contemporary cultural character by creating hero characters from Thai Himavanta literature. The concept and process of the above research have been applied as an idealized model for creating additional cultural characters for variation of play experiences under a 2 dimensional design concept.

Key words: design concept, contemporary cultural character, Thai Himavanta literature

1. The Importance or Background of Problem

Characters are crucial in expressing meanings and describing abstractions to provide well understanding strory. As, characters play resembled role to an everyday life figure, such as in the form of animated movies, cartoons, illustrations and comic books (Miller-Zarneke Tracey, 2014). Since 1897, Japan has laid out the toy concept that expand the playing life not for 1–2 years but to generate prototypes of toys till the next 70–80 years. While most of European toys, like England were aimed at giving children strength and being able to serve their country in the future. They focus on toys like soldiers, war horses, guns, swords, artillery, as well as playground equipment with implications to strengthen children's physicality (Theerawat Charoenthaweesit, 2013). As Japanese and later English toys aimed to incorporate ideas into toys (Piyaporn Arunkriangkrai, Akira

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Kangwanphathara, 2015), the act of play becomes both objective and subjective ways of learning from playing.Kunio Okawara (Kunio Okawara, 2016) defines the design theory by looking beyond geometry while maintaining uniqueness and blending it with Japanese culture. It was then taken to be the inspiration for the designs developed from the hairstyles of samurai and thief turban (Robert Rasmussen & Per Kristiansen, 2016). With such sense of design concept, creativity is the application of imagination into the toy design (Jean Piaget, 2015). The creation of knowledge to the brain consists of 1) building knowledge by creating things, 2) concrete thinking VS abstract thinking, and 3) using experience as a thought process, that is, children gradually apply their real experience to create a strong and interrelated conceptual framework called Knowledge Structure. As such, Thai mythological folktales have helped to engage children inspiration through contemporary cultural characters of Himavanta creatures. Thus, allows various level of characters development, raises the knowledge level, enhances strength and sustainability, to derive a relationship of toys and the real world as a necessary bonding of the learned and played experiences.

2. Related Concepts/Theories

Kunio Okawara was used as the case study. The following are details of the design theory with looking beyond a geometry while maintaining uniqueness while blending with Japanese culture, which then inspired the designs developed from the hairstyles of samurai and thief turban.

1) Looking beyond geometry;
2) blending with cultural identity;
3) Focusing on cartoons and toys that can be assembled with 2D designs.

The design theorist on looking beyond geometry while maintaining uniqueness and blending with Japanese culture, which then interpreted from cultural traits (samurai hairstyle and thief turban) concluded that the cultural concepts can be used in character designs by drawing on cultural capital to reflect identity.

Toriyama Akira is a character designer used as a case study. He modernized ideas from history or Buddhist literature and beliefs in gods. The details are explained as follows:

1) Applying the concept of Buddhist literature;
2) Developing contents to fit with current generation;
3) Focusing on cartoons and toy models with 2D designs.

The character designer modernized ideas from historical or Buddhist literature and beliefs in gods, for example, the Dragon Ball manga. This manga adapted the ideas from Monkey King character in Journey to the west story, which regards to a journey in search of a sacred Buddhist Scroll. Based upon this Chinese literature, Dragon Ball manga also applied this idea of journey to find the magic items (Sasi Tanadirojkul, 2010), where character overcomes obstacles to define its identity.

3. Creation Process

First, the process aimed to determine the properties of contemporary cultural characters. Where afterward, select literature characters from Himavanta creatures into design. Thirdly to design the storyline to create basic works. Then, to use Thai patterns with pattern reduction to design. And lastly, conduct the work as a contemporary 2D cultural character based on the Himavanta creatures.

4. Work Analysis

Data was analyzed and collected along with an analytic induction. The researcher performed the analysis in accordance with the research questions: What is the concept of contemporary cultural character design? How character design ideas can create new phenomena for children's play experience? To ensure the analysis efficiency and quality, the researcher applied four following steps: PDCA (Plan, Do, Check and Act) (Suthasinee Pothichan, 2015).

1) Plan: The researcher planned to study from related documents, explored and observed children's playing behaviors in the following aspects: 1) Concept of contemporary cultural character design, 2) Characters selection on Himavanta creatures to design 2D from Thai literature and, 3) Characters created through this principle.

2) Do: The researcher conducted open-ended survey questions with 20 high school students. The data was collected and sorted systematically.

3) Check: The researcher evaluated the performance according within the plan.

4) Act: The researcher explained the concept of contemporary cultural character design using the Ramayana character case study. The following 6 aspects are described: 1) Promoting the development of children, 2) Creating fictional characters, 3) Using cultures for inspiration, 4) Using body language for creation, 5) How to select characters from basic virtue, and 6) Building playing experience.

5. Design Results

A qualitative synthesis of contemporary cultural character design concepts consists of the following 7 aspects, where its relationship can be seen from figure 1 below.

1) Promoting four areas of human development: physical, emotional, social and intellectual areas.

2) A fictional character creation consists of 9 conditions: 1) location, 2) costume, 3) character, 4) appearance, 5) courage and loyalty, 6) strength, 7) leadership and responsibility, 8) responsibility, and 9) gratitude.

3) The culture implementation for inspiration can be described as follows: 1) language, 2) art, 3) performance, 4) music and 5) folk play.

4) The creation by using body languages including these organ moments: 1) head, 2) shoulder, 3) arms and hands, 4) legs and feet, 5) torso and 6) hips.

5) Methods for selecting characters based on these basic virtues: 1) good physical and verbal conduct, 2) keeping physical and verbal modesty, 3) being discipline, 4) abstain from bad conducts, and 5) self-control not to harass others.

6) The building of playing experience is to enhance the thinking ability to go beyond the reality such as flying lion, lion with swimming ability, etc.

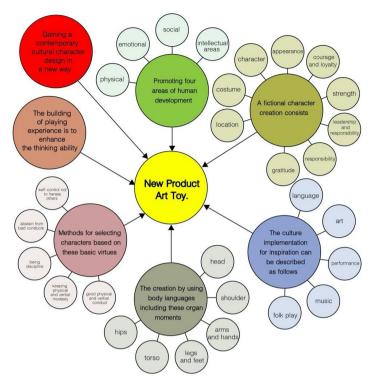7) Gaining a contemporary cultural character design in a new way.

Figure 1   Concept of Contemporary Cultural Character Design

Figure 2   2D Toy "Chasi" Art Characters Created Through This Concept

Figure 3   2D Toy "Chew" Art Characters Created Through This Concept

5. Conclusion

The findings of the research showed that the concept of contemporary cultural character design could be implemented in art toy design based on the conceptual framework for contemporary cultural character design. It could also apply the art and culture capital reflecting the identity of Thai literature about the Himavanta creatures and entertained children to enjoy the literature world. While in 2D format, the design shown a strong communicated connection with children, which as an 3d Art Toy, the result remained to enhance a child's learning and understanding about Thai literature in a more tangible way.

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