Case Study of Essential Character Design Elements to Communicate

the Identity of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy – Phetchaburi, Thailand

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Abstract
Character design plays a vital role in design, particularly, in the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. This specialized design represents the values, culture, people, lifestyles, and products associated with the city. It is essential to consider how a global audience perceives the intended message. To explore this, a thorough analysis was conducted, evaluating the design of 24 characters from the Phetchaburi Mascot and Creative City Logo: International Design Competition 2021. The winning character was selected to promote Phetchaburi for the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy campaign and various tourism initiatives. The primary aim of this research is to identify design configurations that effectively communicate the identity of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, using Phetchaburi as a case study. The resulting design attributes can provide valuable insights for future character design applications and city mascots aspiring to join the UNESCO Creative City Network.

Keywords: *Character Design, Phetchaburi Mascot, UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Identity Essential Elements*

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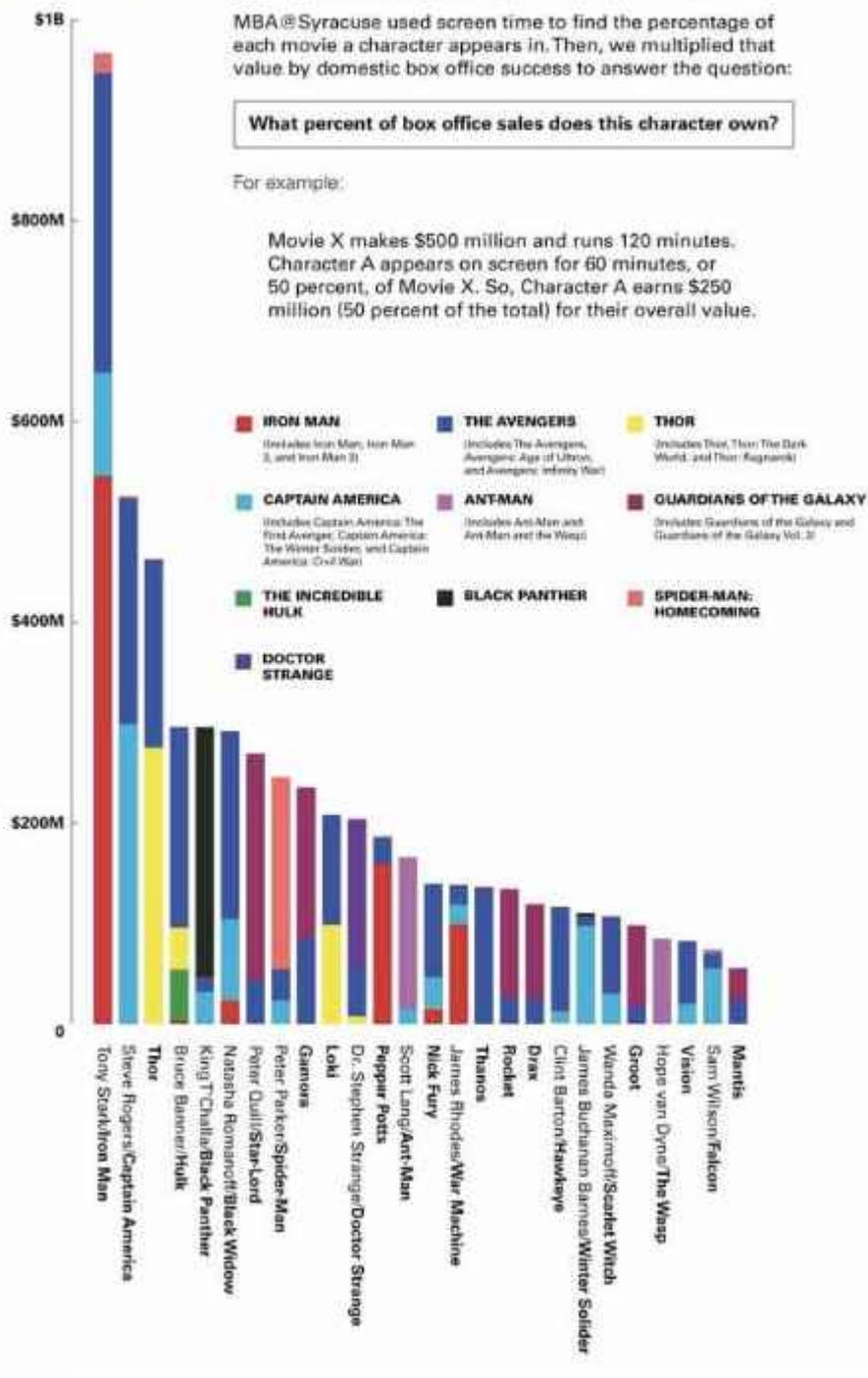email: fox_d@suic.su.ac.th.
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Introduction

Being a member of the UNESCO Creative City is regarded as a prestigious privilege that numerous cities aspire to acquire, recognizing the immense advantages it brings to the city itself (Thawipat, 2021). Hence, the design of a mascot character serves as a strategic mechanism to effectively propel Phetchaburi City toward its objectives (Maksawat, 2021). At present, urban areas accommodate over 50% of the global population and account for 75% of its economic activity, encompassing a significant portion of the creative economy. The vital significance of cities in advancing sustainable development with a people-centered approach and engaging local communities and stakeholders is prominently acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda encompasses 17 goals, one of which is dedicated to a specific objective of 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (The Global Goals, 2023). Cities aspiring to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network must demonstrate their commitment and capacity through a comprehensive application. The Network encompasses 7 creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music. The organization requires member cities to develop a thematic focus to develop their cultural identity. Member cities are dedicated to achieving the goals outlined in the UCCN Mission Statement and contribute to the local implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as UNESCO partners (UNESCO, 2023). Character design is an undeniable factor in the market share and global proliferation of brand identity. The animation, film, comic, merchandise, and gaming fields all rely on a solid character design. According to Professor Eunkyu Lee of marketing and associate dean for global initiatives at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University measuring the Value of Franchise Film Characters using the screen times determined the amount of money each Marvel character generates from each Marvel movie. Some of the characters like Iron Man are worth almost 1 billion USD (Lee, 2018). Japanese companies are renowned for their exceptional ability to effectively commercialize character designs in the mainstream market. A prime example is the ownership of the Gundam franchise by Bandai Namco Holdings. By the year 2000, this franchise had achieved an astonishing retail sales revenue of over $5 billion, merely one year after its introduction to the US market (The Expositor, 2000). Bandai has not limited its collaborations to popular Japanese characters like Doraemon by Fujiko F. Fujio (Shiraishi,1997), Godzilla by Akira Watanabe and Teizo Toshimitsu (Ryfle, 1998), Mazinger Z by Go Nagai (Kenichi, 2024), and Macross by Studio Nue (O'Mara, 2020) but Bandai has also successfully partnered with Western companies such as Disney to secure licensing rights for globally recognized characters such as Star Wars. These characters have transcended the confines of comic books and films, permeating various facets of consumer products such as books, toys, stationery, fashion items, kitchenware, and gaming platforms.

How can the mascot character design for the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy be different from others? This analysis will provide insight into the character design process utilized in the UNESCO competition, comparing the results to those utilized by the commercial animation industry.

Figure 1. Total Character Value in Marvel Movies. Source: https://onlinegrad.syracuse.edu/blog/marvel-character-values.

Figure 2. The creators of Doraemon and multiple license applications, such as films, toys, and lifestyle products.
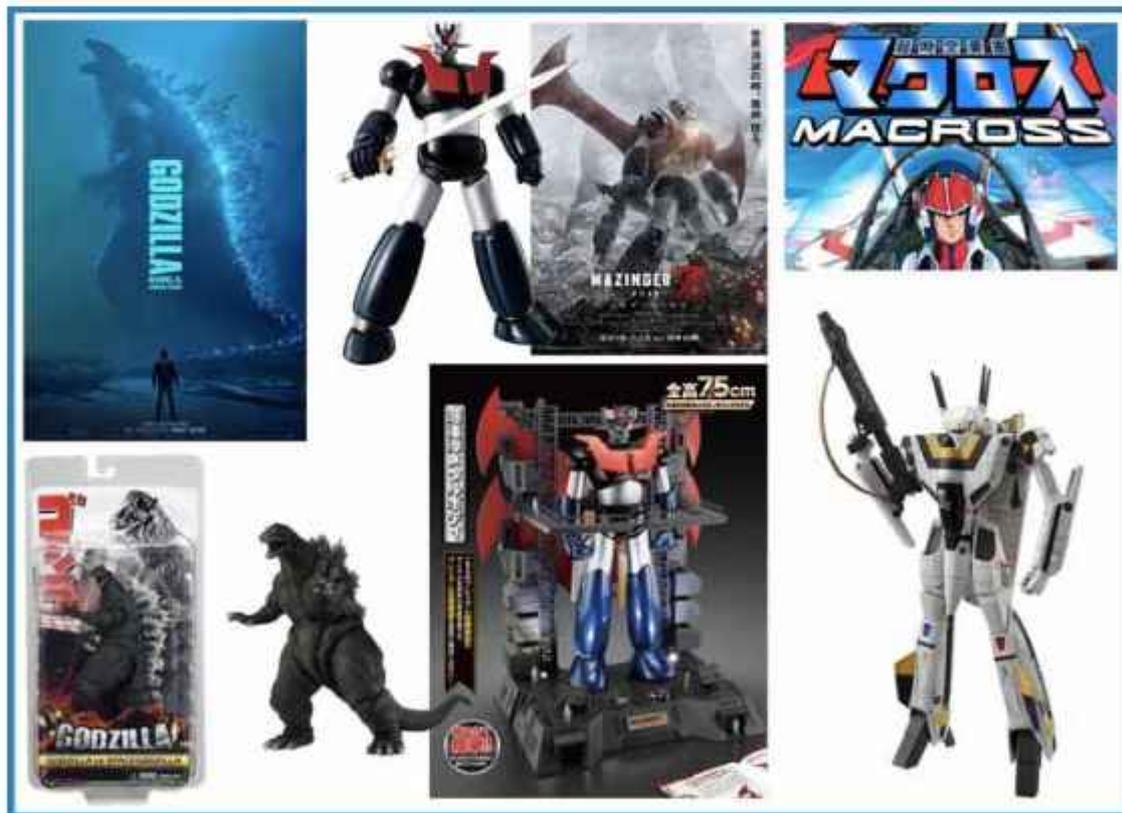

Figure 3. Godzilla, Mazinger Z and Macross Characters in different variations and applications.

Methodology

1. Review character design principles, and related literature to summarize essential character design attributes.
2. Collect data on the character designs from the Phetchaburi Mascot and Creative City Logo: International Design Competition 2021 and conduct in-depth interviews with stakeholders.
3. Gather all mascot character designs from participants, and extract silhouette outline and color scheme for visual analysis.
4. Compare analysis of mascot character designs with essential character design attributes.
5. Conclude with results of essential character design elements that communicate the identity of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

Review of Related Literature

Character Design, which originates from drawing, takes inspiration from real life to effectively convey messages. It is not an exaggeration to state that this form of expression is almost as old as human civilization itself. The iconography of game animals inscribed by our ancestors in ancient caves has been radio-carbon dated to be 32,410 years old. The Chauvet Cave, discovered in December 1994, stands as one of the earliest known sites of prehistoric cave paintings. Its captivating imagery depicts grazing, running, and resting animals, such as wild horses, bison, mammoths, bears, panthers, owls, deer, aurochs, wooly rhinoceroses, and wild goats. Occasionally, human figures, both male and female, are also present.

This creative expression and its evolution paved the way for symbolic languages and arts in Mesopotamia and Ancient Egyptian culture (Stokstad, Marilyn, 2014). Throughout human history, numerous renowned characters have been utilized for diverse purposes. In the modern era, character design has developed into animated visuals for communication and recreation, commonly referred to as animation. The forms vary across mediums, including digital media, printed materials, television broadcasting, and online platforms. Regardless of the format, characters remain the essential conduits for conveying narratives. This research endeavor focuses on exploring the advantages of character design and its diverse elements.

Prior to initiating the character design process, it is essential to address some important questions: What role does the character play in the story? It could be a hero, heroine, villain, comic foil, sidekick, or supporting character. What traits define the character's personality? These could include optimistic, dysfunctional, passionate, loving, and courageous. Are there any narrative elements that influence the design? For instance, this notion is illustrated in Dumbo's prominent ears, Pinocchio's elongating nose, and Shrek's unconventional appearance. Gathering this information aids in commencing the design formulation (Bancroft, 2006). Reality Is Overrated takes inspiration from the real world when crafting animated characters and narratives, but modifies and customizes them instead of merely imitating them. Reality serves as a reference in illustration and animation, which allows for enhancement and refinement. It is important for animated characters to possess plausibility rather than realism. In animation, the principles governing gravity and physics can be altered. A character has the ability to float effortlessly in a state of emotional euphoria

or transform its physical form, color, or size to reflect its changing mood. Visual exaggeration, caricature, and stylized actions hold greater intrigue than faithfully reproducing natural movements.

This form of streamlined symbolism reduces complex ideas into easily understood icons, making seemingly simple forms into dense vehicles for larger ideas. This process has the additional benefit of sparking cultural curiosity. As an example, a child watching the modern Thor films becomes interested in Norse mythology and begins a journey of self-guided research through the history and geography of the region. Thus, the fictional stories designed for entertainment overlap with the scientific, political, and economic systems in the real world. It encourages engaging with ideas that captivate and fascinate, rather than producing narratives that conform to the expectations of studios or audiences. Authentic animation arises from artists who infuse their creations with passion and impulsive creativity (Beiman, 2007).

The primary aspect of character creation: The primary rationale behind our fascination with a character stems from our inherent curiosity regarding individuals. Scientific findings have long confirmed that humans possess an innate inquisitiveness. Without this curiosity, the realms of scientific progress, Shakespearean literature, and even the discovery of new territories would not have thrived. This becomes even more apparent when considering characters such as elves, individuals endowed with extraordinary abilities, historical figures, or any character that has captured your attention. Most character designers and storytellers adeptly utilize this phenomenon (Tillman, 2019).

Besides the storyline, character creation has also emerged as a fundamental element of animation. Character development encompasses the entire portrayal, including attire, accessories, and weaponry, all of which are typically influenced by cultural aspects, such as indigenous garments and the warrior's choice of sword, symbolizing the character's status (Mohd Khalis and Mustaffa, 2017). According to Liang, Hui-E, and Cui, Rong-Rong, traditional attire plays a crucial role in the evolution of contemporary clothing culture, merging practicality and visual appeal. The research focused on the design of Chinese traditional costumes, highlighting their significance (Liang et al, 2006). These have the potential to generate increased economic value through merchandise sales, fashion industry collaborations, and licensing agreements. Furthermore, character design can deeply communicate about culture, way of living, and social value to the new generation, raise awareness, and attract admirers of such soft power.

As per a visual game character design study in 2017, the main concept behind character design is to merge aspects of Malay culture with a modern approach (Mohd Khalis and Mustaffa, 2017). This can serve as a means to communicate anti-corruption principles to young individuals, particularly those belonging to Generation Z. Psychologically speaking, it encompasses a character's mindset based on their individuality, the methods employed to establish typical portrayals and patterns of characters that possess tangible attributes capable of symbolizing Malay culture, and display social standing denoting anti-corruption conduct, such as integrity, diligence, and accountability (Eva, et al., 2023). This game has the potential to positively influence society uniquely.

These character design effects can contribute to individuals and society by enhancing economic value and improving quality of life. Besides their economic and social significance, character design involves creating a concept for a character's personality traits, behaviors, and physical attributes before bringing it to life (Coursera, 2023). The aesthetic aspect of character design holds significant importance. Deguzman proposed a classification of key elements in good character design, categorizing them into three groups: silhouette, color palette, and exaggeration (Deguzman, 2021). This classification aligns with the 10 principles of character design outlined by Melling, which encompass silhouettes and exaggeration along with additional details such as shapes, lines, proportions, scale, shading, texture, and color (Melling, 2019). The combination between proportions and exaggeration can be significant (Williams, 1989). Furthermore, the inclusion of expressive qualities to narrate a story is emphasized as an integral component. This notion is supported by Shah, who acknowledges the role of expression and storytelling in endowing characters with uniqueness, vitality, and the ability to convey specific objectives within the realm of character design (Shah, 2021).

Veteran animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston popularized several key design components in their book "Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life." This work has had a lasting impact on the industry and its principles of animation have become an important tool for all aspects of design. One such term used in the book is appeal. This notion refers to a subjective quality that enhances the likability or interest of a character among the audience. Because the public's taste is ever-changing, there is no definitive formula for creating an appealing character. However, certain factors have been observed to contribute to appeal, including symmetry, large eyes, soft features, and vibrant colors. Appeal in cartoon characters can be equated to the charisma in actors. An appealing character does not necessarily have to be sympathetic; even villains or monsters can possess appeal. What matters most is that the viewer perceives the character as genuine and captivating. Various techniques contribute to enhancing a character's connection with the audience. For likable characters, a symmetrical or baby-like face tends to be effective. Conversely, a complex or difficult-to-read facial expression may diminish the character's appeal or the overall impact of the pose and character design. (Thomas and Johnston, 1981). The appearance and essence of the character also must be taken into account, ensuring harmony with the character's inherent qualities in a game or animation. Archetypes exist for various character types depending on the genre of the media. It remains crucial to possess a strong conceptualization and comprehensive comprehension of fundamental artistic principles (Levanier, 2021).

Following an analysis of design attributes on character design, drawing from key components of effective character representation and principles applied in diverse media contexts such as advertising, animation, illustration, and film, the findings of this investigation can be distilled into three discerning criteria, as described below.

Character Uniqueness
Because the market is swarming with competition, an effective design must possess distinctive unique traits that make it stand out from the crowd. Ideally, these details also contain relevant depth and meaning, deepening the character's cultural value. Thainess is the objective to be perceived by the audience. The color palette sets mood and tone of the character, while the scale is the comparison that makes the viewer understand the relationship of the character and its environment. If colors and details are removed, and the character outline is filled with solid black, an effective character design can remain recognizable. This means the shape, line, size, and scale have to be working together to make the character unique. The term silhouette refers to the outline of the overall form. Designers often begin with this method, refraining from detailing, but concentrating on the solid black shape before adding refinements. The silhouette is an effective way to determine how well the design can be interpreted visually and recognized by the viewer, even at a glance. The ability to project a distinct form based solely on their silhouette is considered indicative of good character design.

Telling a Story
The character's story, meaning, personality, and objective have to be aligned with the concept of character design. In order to provide characters with a clear motivation, it is essential to construct a comprehensive backstory encompassing various aspects such as their origin, the circumstances of their position in the story, significant events within the narrative, their place of residence, occupation, and some personality traits.

Exaggeration
Exaggeration effectively utilizes distinct characteristics to deliberately elicit emotional and psychological responses from the audience towards a particular character. Employing Exaggeration is intimately linked to character expression: exaggeration breathes life into characters, engaging the audience. The researchers converted each character design from the contest from full-color details to silhouettes and color themes for reviews based on the three criteria described above.

Design Comparisons Analysis
Data collection involved gathering information on Character designs from the Phetchaburi Mascot and Creative City Logo: International Design Competition in 2021. Subsequently, the silhouette outline and color scheme of the Character designs were extracted for visual analysis. This study focuses on comparing the mascot character designs based on their essential design attributes.
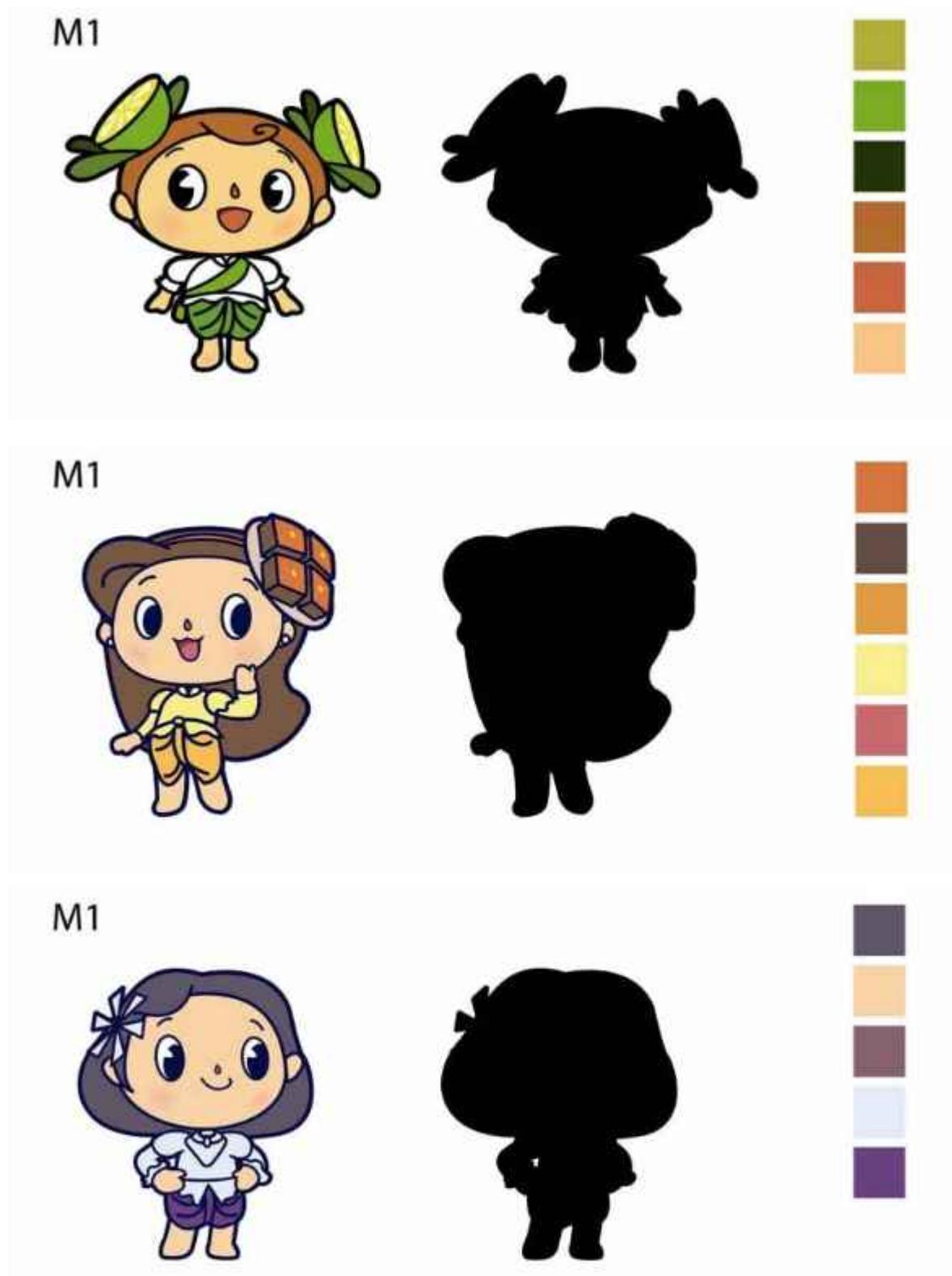
Figure 4. Design Participant Character: M1 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color schemes.

M1 Design

The designer created a set of three female characters. Each can be recognized from the shapes, lines, and colors very easily. The hairstyles can tell the story of the character's objectives, which is to represent sour, sweet, and salty. Moreover, traditional Thai costumes can also be recognized. The exaggeration of the head size makes the characters easier to identify. Designing three characters, instead of just one, makes it harder to utilize and remember. The color palette could be simplified.

Figure 5. Design Participant Character: M2 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M2 Design

The designer tried to integrate the Toddy Palm fruit shape into the character, as well as traditional Thai costumes. Unfortunately, it can be recognized as some kind of alien monster. The Thai color palette stands out quite prominently with complementary colors. The character's proportions are quite typical for a body, without much exaggeration.

Figure 6. Design Participant Character: M3 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M3 Design

The character design is easy to recognize with the body representing a palm tree, as well as its accessory properties. Unfortunately, the character does not quite communicate Thainess or the Phetchaburi key messages. The color palette and exaggeration make the character more unique and easier to remember.

Figure 7. Design Participant Character: M4 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M4 Design

This character design effectively employs shape, color, and scale. The overall shape of the character is easily identifiable. However, the intended meaning and narrative purpose are unclear, and it does not effectively convey Thainess. The character's body lacks clarity in representing either a tree or a pagoda. Additionally, the colors in the character design can be too heterogeneous.

Figure 8. Design Participant Character: M5 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M5 Design

This character functions effectively within the overall design elements. The shape, colors, and scale harmonize well together, despite the slight excess of colors used. The essence of Thainess is seamlessly integrated into both the facial features and the costume. However, the head is somewhat indistinct, making it challenging to discern whether it represents a toddy palm fruit or a pagoda.

M6

Figure 9. Design Participant Character: M6 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M6 Design

This character works well in terms of general character design standards. It is easily recognizable, utilizing shape, color, and scale effectively. However, the character fails to convey the essence of Thainess or reflect the creative city of gastronomy that is Phetchaburi.
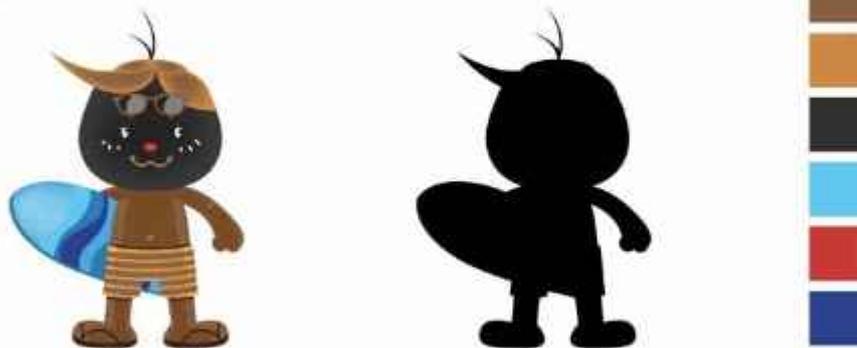
M7

Figure 10. Design Participant Character: M7 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M7 Design

This design is easily recognizable as a beach boy due to the strong costume and surfboard accessory of the character. However, the attempt to incorporate a toddy palm fruit as the character's head falls short in effectively conveying the story of Phetchaburi, or capturing the essence of Thainess in the design. The small eyes can make emotions difficult to perceive. Additionally, there is an excessive use of colors in the character, which detracts from its overall appeal.

Figure 11. Design Participant Character: M8 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M8 Design

The character design is easily recognizable, as the designer has successfully incorporated multiple iconic shapes of Phetchaburi tourist attractions into the crown of the character. Additionally, the cloth has been designed to resemble ocean waves. However, the variety of colors being used diminishes the uniqueness of the design.
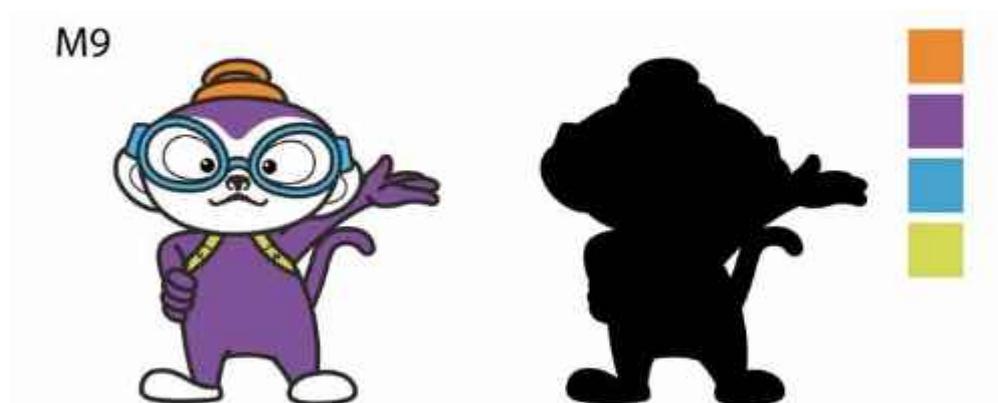

Figure 12. Design Participant Character: M9 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M9 Design

The character design creates the shape of an easily recognizable monkey. The facial expressions and gestures effectively convey mood and personality. However, there is no connection between the design and the objective concept or the story of Phetchaburi, the creative city of gastronomy.

Figure 13. Design Participant Character: M10 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M10 Design

The character itself is unique and intriguing. The designer endeavors to employ shape, color, and scale to effectively convey the story and objectives. The design functions admirably in capturing the essence of gastronomy, although it lacks a connection to Phetchaburi, as well as Thailand.

Figure 14. Design Participant Character: M11 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M11 Design

The designer utilizes shape, color, and scale to effectively convey several ideas through the character head of Rose Mango and the cooking glove, thus communicating the concept of gastronomy. However, in order to establish a stronger connection with Thainess and Phetchaburi, additional elements are required for proper recognition.

Figure 15. Design Participant Character: M12 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M12 Design

The characters have a strong sense of identity, shape, color, and scale working effectively together. The color scheme is minimal and effective. The characters look like babies with toddy palm fruit helmets. But they could communicate the identity of Phetchaburi or Thainess more effectively.

M13

Figure 16. Design Participant Character: M13 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M13 Design

This design exemplifies an evident utilization of exaggeration in the toddy palm fruit's body head, facilitating its recognition as illustrated in the silhouette outline. Additionally, the designer incorporates the shapes of pagodas, palaces, and iconic landmarks as integral components of the character's hat.
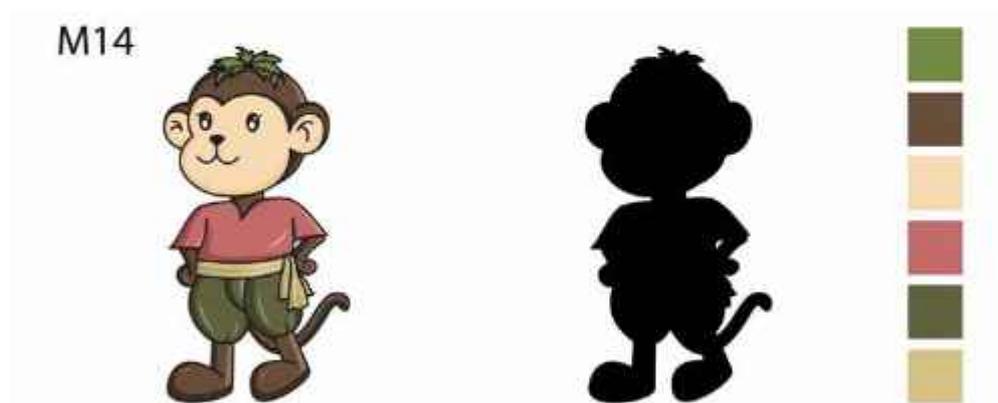
M14

Figure 17. Design Participant Character: M14 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M14 Design

This particular monkey character appears relatively generic, featuring a traditional Thai costume. It serves to establish a connection with Thailand, albeit not specifically with Phetchaburi or its gastronomy. The character and details lack elements of exaggeration.
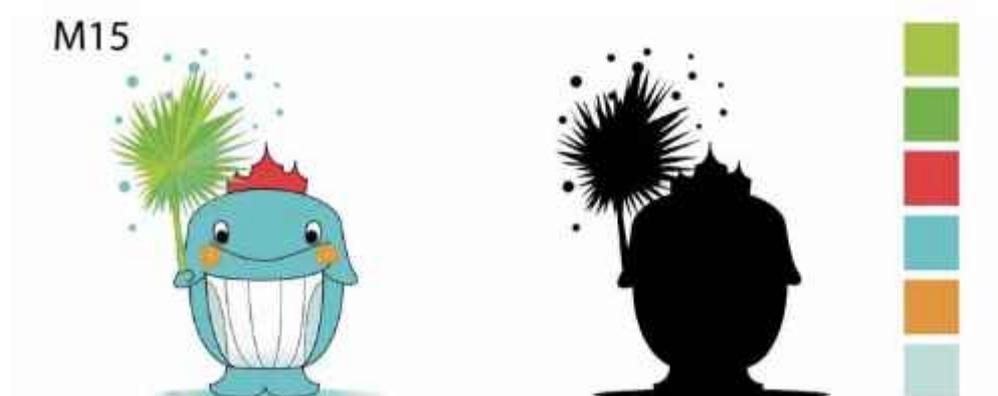
M15

Figure 18. Design Participant Character: M15 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M15 Design

The design features a whale as the central character, holding a palm tree and wearing a crown in the silhouette of the Kao Wang Palace. This could pose a challenge for international tourists in comprehending the narrative behind the design; the excessive use of colors in the character could also be an issue.

Figure 19. Design Participant Character: M16 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M16 Design

The designer utilizes the toddy palm fruit as the central concept for the character. Each component represents different parts of the tree, including a leaf on the head, the face, and the hands. The body seamlessly incorporates Thai traditional costumes. While it can be recognized as a character from Thailand, it would benefit from further development to establish a connection with gastronomy. The color palette employed is slightly excessive.

Figure 20. Design Participant Character: M17 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M17 Design

This is a meticulously designed character with a strong form that is intricately connected to gastronomy, making it easily recognizable. It exhibits an intriguing implementation of scale, color theme, and exaggeration. There is an absence of Thainess, which would serve as the connecting link between the character's purpose and narrative, effectively promoting Phetchaburi as a city renowned for its creative gastronomy.

M18

Figure 21. Design Participant Character: M18 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M18 Design

This character is easily identifiable, depicted as an elephant holding a large spoon. The animal is adorned in an Asian-style costume, although not significantly associated with Thailand or Phetchaburi in particular.
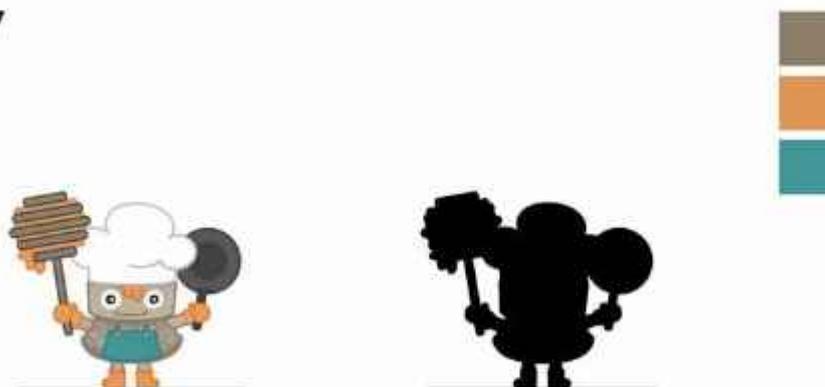
M19

Figure 22. Design Participant Character: M19 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M19 Design

This character design incorporates a recognizable shape derived from the Ramayana Story. However, the details are not limited to Phetchaburi province; there are other provinces that exhibit a stronger connection to this character. From a design perspective, the creator integrated various elements to align with the intended concept, although they could establish a more distinct uniqueness.

M20

Figure 23. Design Participant Character: M20 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M20 Design

This character is easily recognizable as a bear surrounded by cakes, candies, and various types of food. However, the connection to Thainess, Phetchaburi, and gastronomy is quite limited. Additionally, the unevenness of the details, in particular the eyes, can challenge the connection with the viewer.

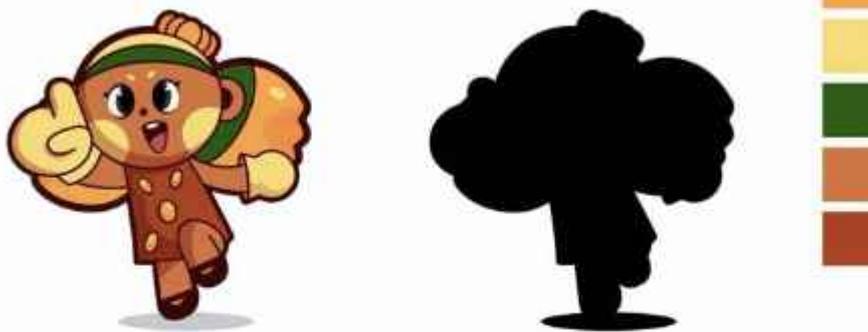Figure 24. Design Participant Character: M21 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M21 Design

The character attempts to establish a connection with the local custard cake of Phetchaburi; however, the shape can appear confusing. It is challenging to discern its nature and how it relates to Thainess or Phetchaburi. Additionally, the character's mood and actions do not align with the story and its objectives.

Figure 25. Design Participant Character: M22 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M22 Design

This character design is based on the shape of a toddy palm fruit, adorned with a traditional Thai costume and accompanied by traditional Thai kitchenware. It effectively establishes a connection between the concept, objective, and distinctive design, despite the slight overuse of colors and details.

M23

Figure 26. Design Participant Character: M23 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M23 Design

This character is based on the traditional toddy palm cupcake as its head. It displays a strong personality and potential for emotional connection. However, it is challenging to discern its clear identity and it lacks a connection to Thainess and the objectives of the design. Additionally, an excessive number of colors have been employed for the character.

M24

Figure 27. Design Participant Character: M24 is depicted in two-dimensional color, silhouette, and color scheme.

M24 Design

This character possesses a distinctive shape, readily recognizable. The designer endeavors to seamlessly incorporate it into the upper portion of the character's head. However, the design and colors can struggle to establish cohesive links between the concept, objectives, and Thainess.

Overall Score Results

Design	Character Uniqueness					Telling a story			Exaggeration		Score
	Recognize	Shape	Thainess	Color	Scale	Meaning	Personality	Objective	Character	Story	
M1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
M2	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	7
M3	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	8
M4	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
M5	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
M6	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	6
M7	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	6
M8	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
M9	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	7
M10	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
M11	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
M12	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
M13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	8
M14	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
M15	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
M16	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	6
M17	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	7
M18	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	8
M19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	9
M20	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
M21	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	6
M22	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
M23	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
M24	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Design Score	24 (100%)	23 (96%)	8 (33%)	12 (50%)	20 (83%)	23 (96%)	22 (92%)	15 (62%)	21 (87%)	7 (29%)	

Figure 28. Results of Character Design Comparison Scores.

Results Summary

The table provides a comprehensive evaluation of 24 designs, from M1 to M24, based on various design aspects. Criteria such as character uniqueness, telling a story, exaggeration, and use of colors were assessed. Notably, designs M1, M5, M8, M19, and M22 achieved the highest score of 9, showcasing exceptional performance across multiple categories. In contrast, designs M14 and M21 received lower scores of 5 and 6, respectively.
When looking into the details of each design criteria:

Character Uniqueness

In terms of recognizability, all designs achieved 100%; for shape, they reached 96%: regarding these two sub-criteria, every design performs very efficiently. When it comes to Thainess, which involves some Thai background and traditional visual elements, the scores drop to 33%, while color schemes reach 50%, which requires some research with a solid background in art and design. Finally, the use of scale scores 83%.

Telling a story

This part requires some research on several aspects: objective, city history, and people's lives. The meaning sub-criteria scored 96%, whereas the personality criteria reached 92%, which is considered very high. However, regarding the objective, only 62% of the design pays attention to this critical part.

Exaggeration

This category has two sub-criteria: personality and story. The participants score fairly well concerning capturing a personality, with a total score of 87%. Conversely, many designers struggle to incorporate a narrative component, which scores lower at 29%.

Overall, the evaluated designs demonstrate diverse levels of proficiency in meeting the principles of character design and visual uniqueness, But the key lies in deeper research and story connection.

Figure 29. Left, 3D printed model and color rendering, a design winner. Right, Life-size 3D color model, a design winner.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted, the following conclusions can be suggested to enhance character design for the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. The essential key configurations of character design to communicate the identity of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy consist of in-depth research of a unique story that ties into the character shapes and lines, proportions, and the application of exaggeration, expressions, and color schemes for their local representation.

Figure 31. The working mascot suit of the character design winner.

A character that possesses a narrative reflecting their local community, culture, heritage, or aspirations can strengthen its uniqueness. Effective and coherent utilization of shapes and lines can evoke emotions and movement, with sharp angles conveying aggression and rounded shapes suggesting approachability. The combination of sharp angles and smooth rounded shapes with Thai art patterns can generate a strong personality; utilizing them in character design can effectively communicate the notion of Thainess.

Silhouettes play a crucial role in the recognizability of the character, as they are the initial visual impression, enabling characters to stand out against backgrounds. If uniquely recognizable, it can convey the key message. Proportions and exaggeration contribute to realism and fantasy; grounding characters or emphasizing their cartoonish or fantastical nature. Facial expressions and body language convey emotions, fostering a strong viewer connection. The scale provides depth and perspective, where larger characters command power and significance. The color selection establishes mood and tone, as well as a connection to the location's background. By adhering to the above principles, character designers can create visually appealing, memorable, and captivating characters to communicate about a unique city. Besides, mascot character designs can possess additional functionalities, including a comfortable set of proportions that reflect the human body, articulations that enable natural movement, and expressive details embedded in the design, such as details, accessories, and patterns. Furthermore, the costumes based on the designs need to remain lightweight, durable, and easy to maintain.

Recommendations

For future research in character design for the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, consider the following:

Cultural Exploration:
Exploring local culture and gastronomic heritage can add unique elements to character designs.

User Perception:
Gathering feedback to understand how characters are perceived can enhance the viewer's engagement.

Cross-cultural Influences:
Referring to characters from Japanese manga or Chinese kung fu graphic novels can strengthen the character's cultural appeal.

Emotional Impact:
Analyzing design elements that evoke emotional responses can foster meaningful connections with the audience.

Storytelling Techniques:
Exploring different techniques to enhance narrative aspects can create an immersive experience. Using new technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or artificial intelligence (AI) can engage and enhance the audience's perception.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) as Research and Design Tools:
Advancements in AI technology, such as Chat GPT and Generative AI Models, enable researchers to gather and analyze data in unprecedented ways. AI's ability to automate routine tasks such as image editing, data visualization, and layout design is seen as a positive development. It frees artists and designers to focus more on the creative aspects of their work. Additionally, AI can act as a creative catalyst, sparking unique ideas and helping explore new design possibilities (Binson, 2023)

Research in these areas can improve the visual representation and communication of the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy's gastronomic identity.

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