Kon-har kon-pop:
A research-through design to understand interpersonal relationships among Thai graphic designers undertaking social design projects

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Khemmiga Teerapong
BFA Visual Communication Design (Silpakorn University)
MA Graphic Design (London Colledge of Communication)

School of Media and Communication
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
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A research-through design to understand interpersonal relationships among Thai graphic designers undertaking social design projects

Khemmiga Teerapong
RMIT University
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**Kon-har kon-pop**

is a research project exploring the use of graphic design as a research methodology to enable better understanding about interpersonal relationships among Thai graphic designers.
My curiosity about social design was the starting point of this project.
The starting point of this research project developed from my interest in social design. This area is far from my professional practice. In my experience, I have seen social design in Thailand as

pro bono, non-profit, altruistic
and

Thai designers often devote their time, life, energy and personal budget in undertaking these projects.

I was very curious how the designers still survived with this approach to design practice. This curiosity drove me to conduct this research project in order to better understand Thai social design.

I decided to study a group of Thai graphic designers who undertake social design projects.
My background as a Thai who was born and raised in Thailand

Thai cultural factors were influential to this studied group and it became the context of this study. The core elements of Thai society needed to be considered in this study and they include Thai Buddhism, Thai monarchy and Thai citizens.

As a designer who was born and raised in Thailand, I am an insider in this designer group. This allowed me to reveal insights into Thai graphic design.

The selection of photographs that show Thai culture are displayed on the right page. Most of the images displayed on the next page are my photographs. The references of the images from other sources are listed below.

References
An altar at a house

A picture of the Thai king and queen

A Buddha statue in a temple

A temple at Sukhothai

An army coup in Thailand in 2014 (Reuter 2014)

A roof decoration displaying Thai Buddhist cosmology

A demonstration of Wai (Kolrob por mae 2014)

A welcome activity for first year students at Silpakorn University

A Thai flag at a protest site
Graphic design as the research methodology

My background as a graphic and packaging designer and design educator became a factor in this research project.

The design skills from my professional practice became the way in which I approached this investigation.

This research was an important opportunity for me to conduct Research through Design (RtD), a designerly approach to investigate through designing process, and undertaking this project was significant for myself to shift from my professional practice to research practice.

The selection of my professional works are showed on the right page
A book design for Designer of the Year 2009

Logo design for Amporn Foundation

Packaging design for 12+ deodorants

Logo design for Aurora Clinic

Packaging design for Golden Banana products

Logo and CI design for Thammanoon Law Office

Packaging design for tool sets, First Tool

Book Design for Designer of the Year 2010

Packaging design for a local product: orange
The process of this investigation

This research project was my exploration. It was not a linear process. Rather, the investigating process was dynamic and the project was refocused and refined throughout the journey.

In this research project, there are four types of activities which are listed on the right page.
Project preparation

Interviews

Analysis and synthesis through visualisations

Communicating my research outcomes
Project preparation

The activities include reviewing literature & existing documents, deciding to move to interviews, an Ethics approval, and searching for interviewees.
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**Notes:**
- MA. fashion management & Entrepreneurship  
- 2555-2556

**Additional Notes:**
- 2550
- 2551-2552
Interviews

(during June -August 2012)
with 14 Thai graphic designers who undertook their social design projects

The three sets of questions:
• personal background (icebreaker questions)
  • their social design projects
  • graphic design profession and community

Data obtained from the interviews:
• voice recording (interview transcripts)
  • research notes for observations & informal conversations
Analysis and synthesis through visualisations

This was a process to interpret the interviews through visualisations (Dec 2012-Feb 2014) which were
visual experiment 01
(Organising information with tables),

visual experiment 02
(Playing with words),

visual experiment 03
(Playful caricatures),

visual experiment 04
(Drawing the connecting lines), and

visual experiment 05
(Bird’s eye view).
After the interviews and transcription, it came to the process of analysis and synthesis through visualisations. I called this process, visual experiments.
Visual experiment 01
organising the information with tables

What is this experiment?
Creating tables was the first experiment. This experiment was adopted and adapted from a conventional social science method. It was my first attempt to categorise the interview transcripts

Conducted in
December 2012
The first table was created based on background information of the interviewees. This table aimed to understand how their background could refer to their social design projects. I found two issues that their educational backgrounds were similar and most of their projects were self-funded.
After producing the first table, I realised that it was not enough to gain deep understanding of their projects. Therefore, I created another table focusing on the answers of the interviewees.
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<th>Interviewees of Thai graphic designers who launched social design projects</th>
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Please click on the table to download the full-scale file.
The picture above is the zoom-in of the top-part of the second table that aimed to categorise the answers from the interviewees. In this table, I tried to understand how and what senses the interviewees responded to the three-set interview questions.
From this visual experiment, it revealed similarities and differences in interviewees’ background and their perspectives. I also learnt that this method was not enough to better understand social design in Thailand.
Visual experiment02
Playing with words

What is this experiment?
Re-examining the interview transcripts
   Highlighting the main sentences
Deriving keywords from the sentences
   Pulling the keywords together using word cloud software

Conducted in
December 2012 - February 2013
The process of re-examining the interview transcripts and highlighting the main ideas/keywords of each answer. I also used sticky notepads to note the main ideas/keywords from the conversations. The main ideas/keywords were written in both Thai and English depending on how the interviewees described them. Some interviewees mentioned keywords in English.
This photograph displays the process to derive the keywords from the interview transcripts. I took the sticky notepads out from the transcripts, and I arranged them together. Different colours of sticky pads referred to the different interviewees.
This photograph presents how all of the sticky notes were put together on a wall, and I saw the repetitions of the keywords. I started to learn that the interviewees often mentioned about their social relationships and networks in their social design projects.

I then explored further what these relationships were about.
The next step was to visualise the keywords. I put these keywords into word cloud software. I realised that Thai language was not compatible with the software. Then, I translated all the keywords into English before putting them in.
This is a printed visualisation of keywords created by word cloud software.
This photograph shows how I highlighted the most repeated keywords.
This is a visualisation showing the keywords in different sizes that were based on the repetitions. This visualisation was interesting as it led me to realise that the word ‘family’ was one of the most repeated keywords from the interviews.
The emergence of the word "family"

The photograph on the left page displays the printed visuals that I used from word cloud software. The designs of the visuals were different but the result of repetitions was the same. The most repeated word was "design" followed by "graphic". Interestingly, the word ‘family’ came third in the most repeated word.
Other versions of graphics that visualised the most repeated keywords from the interviews.
From this second experiment, I was able to confirm the key themes emerging from this method and this enabled a re-focus and refinement of the research.

What I could not achieve: this method did not allow me to explore the word ‘family’ in detail. Therefore, it required more experiments to understand the word ‘family’ in this context.
I revisited the interview transcripts and focused on the relationships among the designers. I wrote down quotes on bubble pads as they were directly derived from the interview transcripts. This process was to understand in the deeper levels of the word ‘family’.
Each colour referred to an interviewee. In this picture, I put all of the bubbles on a wall.
Later, I grouped the quotes, I put them down one by one in order to categorise what the interviewees meant for the keyword, ‘family’.
The quotations that became the keyword ‘family’ were not only from the Thai word *krobkoul* but also derived from other sets of words that described *family-like relationships* between the designers.

From this experiment, I understood that ‘family’ in this context was not relationships within a kinship family but it is the extended family of the Thai graphic designers.

This was the feeling of being in the same family with other designers.

From a wider perspective, this is a special type of social relationship and it demanded further exploration.

This became the new focus of this research project.
Refocusing the project
Kon-har kon-pop : the project folio
The sketches were created as a part of the refinement of the project. They were my attempts to understand where my project was located in the field of design and the connection between graphic design and social design.
After refining the research focus, I attempted to use a pin-up board to refine the framework of this study.

The picture above shows how I wrote down the related fields and issues in design.
I used various shapes of sticky notepads in this activity. Each shape identified different types of information that I put into the map. For example, the heart shapes were sub-fields in design, the bubble shapes were the references, and the yarn was used where the sub-fields linked.
After the second experiment, this was an activity which I tried to map how I understood design and social design in relation to other sub-fields. Even though I could not fully reframe my project from this activity, it allowed me to understand the landscape of design and I saw opportunities for how my investigation could be located in this overlapping area.
Visual experiment03
Playful caricatures

What is this experiment?
Revisiting the interview transcripts (focusing on relationships),
Creating caricature models instead of using photographs of the interviewees (for disguise of identity),
Using yarn and ribbons to interpret where the interviewees described their family-like relationships.

Conducted in
May 2013
Creating caricature models for each interviewee one by one
These photographs display the process of how I used ribbons and yarn to link two and three interviewees who stated they knew each other or they worked with their peers.
These photographs show the process of arranging the models with yarn that assisted my understanding of the relationships between the interviewees and their peers.
These photographs also display how I interpreted the relationships of each interviewee through this visual experiment. However, the relationships were complicated in terms of quality and emotions embedded within each relationship.
When I recognised this complexity, I then revisited the transcripts and wrote down words relating to the relationships among the designers.
I checked the transcripts and research notes again to confirm how the interviewees expressed their relationships, and these words were combined with the models.
The third experiment started to become too complicated when I put the words on the yarns.

At this point, I learnt that this experiment only allowed me to understand how the designers were connected.

However, this method still could not help me to understand transactions among the designers as well as quality, types and levels of relationships.

This required the next experiment to explore this complexity of the relationships.
Visual experiment04
Drawing the connecting lines

What is this experiment?
Revisiting the transcripts (focusing on relationships),
Using shapes and colours as symbols of
the interviewees (for disguise of identity),
Drawing lines and using pictograms to interpret
the relationships and interactions between the designers

Conducted in
November - December 2013
This visual experiment was simplified from the caricature models of the previous experiment. This fourth experiment was to visualise the details of family-like relationships.
I started this experiment with hand-drawing and tried to use colours, shapes and lines to understand the relationships.
Developed from the third visual experiment, this experiment started with hand drawing. I used different colours to represent interviewees and the blank circle for non-interviewees. I drew lines and symbols to present their relationships and interactions.
I revisited the transcripts once again when I drew the diagram of each interviewee, and I started to create more symbols to represent interactions between the designers.

I discovered that there were many transactions emerged between the designers. They were related to family-like relationships among the designers and they behaved to one another like brothers and sisters.

Therefore, I started to pay my attentions these interactions carefully.
When I drew more diagrams, I also found more transactions and emotions from the interview transcripts. I then began to design and develop a set of pictograms in order to understand these relationships in deeper levels which were related to behaviours and emotions like brothers and sisters that the designers reacted to one another.
The process to create pictograms
Collaboration
Cooperation
Care
Respect
Sharing

1 2

3 4
By attempting to use symbolic language to visualise what had emerged in the interactions, these hand drawings led to confusion when having more symbols and the colours looked very similar.

Therefore, I needed a method that could visualise these relationships in a more variety and greater detail. I decided to turn my hand-drawn diagrams to the digital version.
The digital diagrams were drawn based on a system
The circles symbolise people, either the interviewees or others.

The squares symbolise groups of people.
The colours and circles were used as representations of the 14 interviewees + myself.
Design project
Provide an opportunity
Collaboration
Cooperation
Caring
Sharing

Inspiration
Respect
Admiration
Trust
Sympathy
Empathy
The pictograms indicate how I interpreted the reciprocal processes and qualities that the interviewees described.
A dashed line represents a first-time meeting.

A thicker line refers to a close relationship.

The pink, blue and green lines are the relationships from educational institutions.
The connections among Pink, Cyan, a non-interviewee and myself
Diagram of Navy
Diagram of Indigo
Diagram of Yellow
Diagram of **Maroon**
Diagram of Green
Diagram of Pink
Diagram of Coral
Diagram of Orange
Diagram of Red
Diagram of Cyan
Diagram of Purple
Diagram of Ivory
Diagram of Magenta
Diagram of Violet
In this experiment, I was able to clarify the qualities that are embedded in family-like relationships. However, there are limitations for this method.

Drawing these diagrams could not display all of the designers’ relationships. They did not include relationships that emerged outside their social design projects such as their acquaintances or clients in their professional lives.

These diagrams could not fully visualise all of the relationships in a dynamic way as they were created based on how the interviewees described their relationships from their views.
However, the process to create them definitely allowed me to understand some parts of the family-like relationships in this design network. While not conclusive and definitive, this experiment helped me become aware of the emotional dimensions that shape these family-like relationships.
Experiment05
Bird’s eye view

What is this experiment?
Revisiting the diagrams from the fourth experiment,
Drop out the pictograms and details of relationships,
Re-examining the relationships with a broader picture,
Mapping the overview of these networks and relationships

Conducted in
February 2014
I developed this experiment by drawing all of the relationships together in one circle but this excluded the pictograms. I saw this as a large network of practice.
I then developed this further by putting the diagrams on top of each other. From this mapping, I found connections between groups of designers and organisations.
From this activity, I also realised that the resulting visual did not have sufficient clarity as the diagrams overlapped and this resulted in illegibility of texts, colours, shapes and lines. This led me to the next process to redesign it.
I revisited the transcripts and reproduced the map by using mapping software.
I drew the connecting lines from each interviewee, but this did not include the emotional dimensions.
This is a complete map showing the large network among the Thai graphic designers.
I drew the lines to understand how these people were connected relating to their backgrounds, educational institutions and organisations.
The complete map with highlights on different groups, institutions and organisations
From this visual experiment, the linkages to organisations and educational institutions appears to be keys in developing the social design projects further and engaging with the public. The limitation of this experiment is that it displays only a ‘flat’ interpretation of the relationships. It does not include their complex dimensions involving brother-like and sister-like emotions and behaviours among the designers.
My research project

Overview of the network

Emotions & interactions

Background

The keyword ‘family’

Relationships
From the first to the final experiments, they became an essential and cognitive process to understand interpersonal relationships in Thai graphic design. This experimental process was continuous and required several experiments to reveal implicit knowledge. These visualisations helped me, as a designer researcher, to interlace the fragments to collate my understanding through the visualisations.
The journey of *kon-har kon-pop* is an invaluable experience in my life. This research process has revealed the complexity of the family-like relationships in various angles and, more importantly, led me to evolve and finally discover my own pathway of researching through my graphic design and learning to shift from professional practice to research practice.