

Parasol: Visual Trope of Protection, Attraction, and Identification in Thai Womanhood Formation

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Abstract

In this research, eight visual representations of women holding parasols in Thai pre-school alphabet primers dating from between 1922 and 1977 are thoroughly analyzed, as the main resources, in order to reveal connotative meanings and their relations to Thai femininity discourses. Visual rhetoric, social semiotics, and multimodal critical discourse analysis frameworks are used as analytical tools. Besides functioning as a protective device against rain or sunlight, the parasol has long been connected to cultural and social ideologies, especially those referencing femininity. Through extensively analyzing paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of visual features chosen to represent women holding a parasol in Thai alphabet primers, implicit meaning potentials about protection, attraction, and identification are found. Consequently, the power relations among participants involved under patriarchy are disclosed. As secondary resources, other media with images of women holding parasols, such as magazine advertisements, book covers, newspaper covers, collectible cards, movie posters, and news photographs are contextually investigated as well. The discovered pattern and network of a “parasol” visual trope in various social practices reveals how these femininity discourses are repeatedly and perpetually disseminated in Thai society.

Keywords: femininity discourse; parasol; Thai alphabet primer; visual semiotics

Introduction

As a mode of communication tool for pre-school children to learn the alphabet, verbal and non-verbal codes in alphabet primers are the first conceptualized pictures of reality that children memorize besides the actual things in their home. Written linguistics, in the forms of alphabet letters, an accompanying word, the oral linguistic in the form of their mothers' voices, and the pictorial images, usually displayed in large sizes, are embedded in their memories. Significantly, as a printing material that has long been reprinted in countless numbers of publications, alphabet primers that may seem neutral are a source of media that has inevitably shaped our social ideologies.

In my previous research titled, "Visual Rhetoric of the Construction of Beauty in Thai Alphabet Primer, Yaw Ying" which focuses on the analysis of verbal and non-verbal codes used in twenty-eight Yaw Ying (ยง) alphabet primers dating from between 1899 and 2012, the patterns of beauty representations are disclosed through the findings of two visual tropes: flower and umbrella (or parasol), and eight woman illustration types accompanying verbal codes with meanings related to beauty ideologies. Additionally, the absences of visual representations of female ideals, such as the good wife, good housewife, good mother and the majority class of female commoners in alphabet primers are uncovered. These verbal and non-verbal codes and their visual rhetoric reveal how "beauty" is embedded as the most desirable female characteristic and encoded as a femininity ideology in Thai society through alphabet primers.

Materials & Methods

From the previous findings, that images of woman holding a parasol have been continuously used to typify beautiful woman for at least fifty-five years, during the more than one hundred years of the Thai alphabet primer's history, this research, as a further study, focuses on how these verbal and non-verbal codes depicting a woman holding a parasol are part of social semiosis and femininity discourses. Visual rhetoric, social semiotics, and critical discourse analysis frameworks are used as

analytical tools. The main resources are eight visual representations of women holding a parasol with their accompanying verbal codes drawn from various forms of alphabet learning tools such as pre-school books, learning posters, learning cards in a box set and collectible cards. In order to conceptualize the network of intertextuality, and to understand how these cultural meanings are related to other social practices, secondary resources for this study are magazine advertisements, book covers, newspaper covers, collectible cards, movie posters, and news photographs with images of women holding parasols.

Area Descriptions

Fifty-five Years of Imprinted Memories

The main visual resources for this study are the eight Thai alphabet learning tools dating from between 1922 and 1977, displaying images of women holding a parasol comprising six Yaw (ญ) Thai alphabet learning tools in various media and two U English alphabet primer pages. In the Yaw pages, the accompanying words are Ying (meaning woman) and Yeepoon (meaning Japanese people), while in the U pages an Umbrella is depicted. Visually represented alongside the alphabets and words, images of a woman holding a parasol are unvaryingly shown as the salience of the entire composition. It seems normal and appropriate for the U pages that an image of an umbrella would be chosen to visualize the Umbrella word, but why display the images of a woman holding a parasol? Furthermore, why are the images of a woman holding a parasol the ultimate choices of visual features to convey the meaning of the words Ying Sopa (meaning beautiful woman) or Yeepoon (meaning Japanese people).

“Woman Holding a Parasol” Images and Their Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Relations



Figure 1: Yaw Ying Sopa alphabet primer (1977/2520)

(Image from: the author’s collection)

Starting from the most recognizable and conceivably, until present, widely published photographic version of the alphabet primer to date, is that of Prachachang, originating in 1977 (to the best of the author’s knowledge as this is the oldest copy that was found) (see Figure 1). The largest and most salient element, the letter Yaw, is placed at the top left hand corner of the page. Its gigantic size functions as a guide for children to drag their fingers along the letter’s shape, an act which is beneficial for them to learn how to write when they get older. The accompanying word, Ying (meaning woman), is smaller in size and is positioned at the top right, while the rhyming word, Sopa (meaning beautiful), is located at the bottom left corner of the page.

In the center, there is a photographic image of a Thai woman standing and posing like a model while holding a red parasol over her right shoulder. The position of her left arm on her left leg that overlaps the right thigh is a typical pose for female models dressed in traditional Thai costumes. Her dress is in an applied style of “Thai Chakri,” one of the eight formal dress patterns for woman proclaimed and designated by Her Majesty the Queen as Thai traditional costumes back in 1960. Not

adhering to the tradition of wearing long hair pulled up in a bun, her short and Western-influenced hairstyle depicts a “modern” look in contrast to her conservative dress. Another choice of visual features that reflects an up-to-date fashion style and practicality in modern culture is the umbrella’s vinyl and steel materials. This practical evolution extends the primary function of the paper parasol from that of sunshade to a rain shield.

Analyzing the participants and settings in this visual semiotic resource delineates an outdoor full-body photographic shot in front of a temple construction. Using the sculpture behind the woman as a clue, historical research indicates that the location of this setting is the front of the main ubosot of Benjamaborpit Temple (The Marble Temple) in Bangkok. Among eight visual resources, this is the only one that explicitly communicates the ‘truth’ by manifesting both the “real” woman in the “actual” site. By assessing the modality in this resource, the level of truth that the author chose to communicate is “reality” in comparison to line drawings or painted images of women in other resources.



Figure 2: Yaw alphabet learning poster (1966/2509)

(Image from: House of Museum’s collection)

Another visual resource that communicates realistic modality is the poster version of the alphabet primer distributed by the same publisher, Prachachang in 1966 (see Figure 2). The only linguistic feature

utilized here is the big letter Yaw at the top left corner of the design. The accompanying word Ying (meaning woman) is absent and no rhyming word appears. The visual representation of a smiley woman holding a paper parasol over her right shoulder implies beauty. Her direct gaze at the reader and big amiable smile seems to convey the greeting words “Sawasdee” or “Welcome.”

Among eight visual resources, and despite the absence of an accompanying word, this woman is the only visual representation specified as a beauty contestant, a delineation indicated by the sash with her sponsor’s name imprinted on it. Her long-sleeved blouse and long hair in a bun decorated with a flower resemble the style of dress of beauty contestants in the Northern part of Thailand. The details and decorations on the parasol depict a Northern craftsmanship style that originated in Chiang Mai province. These parasols, made from bamboo and Sa paper, were used widely in the past for protection against the sun; nowadays, they are primarily used as interior decorations or souvenirs.

Although the meaning of the representation of this woman is attached to that of a beauty contestant, the actual setting indicating where the image was taken is eliminated and replaced by a vague background of blue space. This abstraction reflects the author’s intention to remove the sense of place from its meaning. As a detailed background within the photograph is not visible, the author is able to imply that she is representative of all beauty contestants, either in local or national pageants. In comparison to Figure 1, which depicts a specific shooting place, the background concealment in Figure 2 serves as an example of how nominalization is used to avoid specificity through simplification or abstraction.



Figure 3: Yaw alphabet learning poster
(before 1976/2519)
(Image from: the author’s collection)

Investigating the third visual resource, that also takes the form of a poster but is printed by a different publisher, Siam Stationery, the top part of the female body is dressed in a similar blouse pattern as that in Figure 2, and is the most salient element in the composition. The position of the letter Yaw on the right-hand side is totally distinct from the other seven examples. According to the reading customs of Thai language, from left to right, this poster seems to place more attention on the image on the left than the letter on the right. The figure's face and body don't face the audience directly as she smiles and looks beyond us toward the right. Her gaze does not fall straight toward us, but rather looks narratively toward the public or a crowd behind us. Noticeably, but strangely appearing in this painted image, her right hand at the lower edge seems to resemble the greeting gesture of beauty pageant participants who wave their hands toward the audience while on stage.

Similar to Figure 2, the actual setting of this painting is absent. The ambience of an exciting competition is replaced and abstracted by a vague background of gradual shades of green. Again, in this context, the author uses nominalization to make the time and space unspecific. Thus this visual image depicts the proper characteristics associated with any beauty contestant. In comparison to the photographic images in Figure 1 and 2 in terms of modality, this painted image shows another level of truth committed by the author. Even though this is a still image, the narration depicted could be that of the parade of this beauty contestant and her competitors, marching on the stage with photographers' lights flashing and the audience clapping their hands to cheer on their favorite contestants.



Figure 4: U Umbrella alphabet primer
(1970/2513)
(Image from: the author's collection)

Figure 3, this visual resource of the U Umbrella alphabet primer page, published in 1970, displays a smiling woman holding a parasol on her right shoulder. She wears long hair in a bun with no flower decoration. The only accessories visible are her single-bead pearl-like earrings. The blouse she dresses in is dissimilar to all previous ones, as it is a Western-influenced sleeveless style with an upright collar. These fashion styles were popular in Thailand at the time, when the Americans and Hollywood stars' outfits influenced middle-class citizens. Looking in the opposite direction, her pose and gaze depict the same narration as that of Figure 3.

By using a monotone line drawing with some shadowing on the woman's body and a blank background, another level of truth by the author is committed via these visual features. Even though this A to Z alphabet primer page presents the Umbrella word as an accompaniment of the letter U, instead of merely displaying the umbrella as an object, the author chooses to embed and connote the meaning of an umbrella with woman, beauty, and beauty contestant.



Figure 5: U Umbrella alphabet primer (1974/2517)

(Image from: the author's collection)

Another monotone line drawing U Umbrella page published in 1974 manifests an umbrella as the most salient object in the illustration, but deliberately displays a woman holding another one in a fuzzy background on the left side. She stands still, holding an umbrella on her shoulder with her right hand, while her left hand rests on her waist. Both umbrellas used in this illustration are “modern” ones, the same as in Figure 1, typically made from synthetic fabric sheets and steel ribs. Thai words on the last line

explain their function as forms of rain and sunlight protection.

Her appearance is out of focus, thus the audience can hardly see the details of her face. She wears shoulder length curly hair. The blouse and long skirt she dresses in seem to depict a middle-class woman. Despite that, the prominent umbrella has this woman's portrait as its background, the visual features describing the particular place where she stands are absent. Again, the author uses nominalization to keep the time and place unspecific.



Figure 6: Yaw Ying Sopa alphabet learning card (1956/2499)
(Image from: Pabtai Lae Singpim [Photographs and Publications], 2006)

This rarely found version of Thai alphabet primer is in the form of a box set consisting of full-color learning cards, published by Prachachang in 1956. The Yaw card has a big letter on the upper left side and the accompanying word Ying on the right in a smaller size. At the bottom, overlaying the illustration, the rhyming word Sopa is placed at the center of the card. The visual representation depicts the upper half of a beautiful middle-class woman standing while holding a parasol on her right shoulder. The details and style of the parasol seem to imply that it is made from a paper material and Northern-made handicraft techniques. The figure turns her face slightly to the left while cheerfully smiling and directly gazing at the audience. She wears long curly hair, fashionable clothes, and a stylish short-sleeved blouse with a colorful floral skirt.

The distinct visual feature of this resource is the background. This is the only instance that uses the natural environment of an outdoor garden or hillside scenery as its setting. The woman portrait and the

landscape scene are separated in a diagonal line from the flat blue background that implies a bright, cloudless sky. These layers of visual elements give the effect of spatial distance and depth. Therefore, the level of truth is committed through these choices of visual relations. Historical research shows that many old news photographs depict beauty contestants parading on an outdoor uplifted platform with big trees in the background. The beauty pageants used to be organized outdoors with a morning parade by the finalists being held before the final round of the pageant at night.



Figure 7: Yaw Ying Sopa alphabet primer (1950/2493)
(Image from: Gae Roy Gaw Gai [Tracing Gaw Gai Alphabet], 1993)

Also published by Prachachang, this 1950 Yaw page alphabet primer depicts an almost identical woman as that in Figure 6, but zooms in to a close-up shot of her upper body. Similarly, the parasol of the same size is in a matching position but the decorative lines around the edges are removed. She wears the same hairstyle and dress, except that a little embroidery on the chest has been added. Compared to Figure 6, the page format has changed into a horizontal layout and the most obvious difference is the absence of the background. This painted illustration has almost no shading or shadows. It appears flat without indicating any specific place or time.

Compared to previous visual resources, the size of letter Yaw is much smaller and the accompanying word Ying is on the same line as the rhyming word Sopa. The author chooses to use a visual image as the main communication tool.



Figure 8: Yaw Yeepoon alphabet primer
(1922/2465)
(Image from: Gae Roy Gaw Gai
[Tracing Gaw Gai Alphabet], 1993)

The last visual resource is the Yaw page alphabet primer published by Hang Samut in 1922. The letter and illustration are made by the technique of woodblock printing in one color. Its accompanying word is different from previous resources and uses “Yeepoon” (meaning Japanese people in this context). In Thai, the word Yeepoon is a noun that literally means the country of Japan, or an adjective that can be added to any word related to Japan. The author’s choice to represent “Japanese-ness” by displaying a Japanese woman in the national costume may be influenced by the older publication of Rat Chareon or Wat Koh in 1915 that used the word Yuan (meaning Vietnamese people) to accompany the Yaw alphabet. At that time, the use of a country’s citizen in national costume as its representation was typical for the illustrations printed on sets of candy cards, cigarette cards, or any collectible cards in Europe (see Figure 9). Influentially, these rare and valuable items may have been brought into Thailand via the royalty and nobles who traveled or through trade.

The illustration on the page Yaw Yeepoon depicts a woman in a kimono dress and traditional footwear holding a parasol over her head while leaning towards the left side of her body. Near her feet, some dark horizontal lines imply her shadow on the ground. These small visual elements add light and shadow to the basic outline image, and simultaneously give a sense of perspective and narration to the illustration. By analyzing the visual representations of transitivity, this

Japanese woman is walking on a bright shiny day, protecting her body from the sunlight by holding a parasol. In comparison to that of the woman in Figure 9, the differences between their gestures are the opposing directions of their walking paths and the motion of the hand not used to hold the parasol.



Figure 9: “Japan” collectible card
(circa 1900s)

(Image from: www.museumvictoria.com.au -
accessed on September 29, 2013)

Techniques

In order to understand the paradigmatic and syntagmatic sign relations of the visual representations in all eight resources, Table 1 thoroughly displays the choices of visual features constructed in each resource, horizontally, and their relations to the others, vertically (see Table 1). Contextually, each set of visual features is structured to communicate and represent the image of a woman holding a parasol in relation to the alphabet and its accompanying or rhyming words. By using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the signifying structure of the syntax is divided into seven categories: (1) participants / people (2) attributes / objects (3) transitivity / action (4) pose (5) gaze (6) settings / background and (7) modality / truth.

Through extensive analysis of the visual choices used in these eight representations, the first finding is that all visual resources, except Figure 5 and Figure 8, communicate connotative meaning of the beauty contestants. Due to similar uses of images of beautiful women as the most salient elements on the pages, her action of holding a parasol implies the

narration that she is walking alongside other competitors on the stage or stopping to pose and smile in front of the photographers. Even with the absence of a background, we can imagine the ambience of a cheering crowd.

Interestingly, one prominent setting in Figure 1 displays Benjamaborpit Temple as the woman's background. This specific site is not a place where beauty pageants took place, but it is related to Miss Apasra Hongsakula, the first representative from Thailand who won the Miss Universe title in 1965. A news photograph shows that she posed while holding a parasol when she went there to receive a blessing before leaving Thailand for the competition in Miami (see figure 10). During the pageant, she was photographed posing while holding a parasol on many occasions, both in a Thai traditional costume and a bathing suit. The presence of the parasol made her outstandingly recognizable from other contestants (see Figure 11). After being crowned as Miss Universe, her appearances with a parasol were both nationally and internationally admired (see Figure 12 and 13). Subsequently, it seems that the parasol was claimed as an icon of Thai beauty in international pageants. Still today, many Thai representatives use the parasol as an accessory with traditional costumes.



Figure 10: Miss Apasra Hongsakula at Benjamaborpit Temple
(Image from: Miss Thailand 1964 Miss Universe 1965 Photo Album, 1965)



Figure 11: Miss Apasra Hongsakula in bathing suit amongst other competitors in Miami (Image from: Miss Thailand 1964 Miss Universe 1965 Photo Album, 1965)

Figure 12: Miss Apasra Hongsakula as Miss Universe 1965 in Miami (Image from: Miss Thailand 1964 Miss Universe 1965 Photo Album, 1965)



Figure 13: The welcoming procession of Miss Apasra Hongsakula in Bangkok, Thailand (Image from: Miss Thailand 1964 Miss Universe 1965 Photo Album, 1965)

Thirdly found, one disparate set of words and image in Figure 8 syntagmatically communicate a woman in a kimono dress holding a parasol as a representation of the Japanese nationality. The familiar paper sunshade in this image has long been a cultural icon as an accessory of the Japanese traditional costume. Rather than men, images of women are typically used to represent the Japanese national identity and are commonly portrayed in a kimono dress holding a fan or paper sunshade. The Japanese are not the only nation that claims the parasol as an icon of national identity. It has been clearly seen in the Miss Universe beauty pageants of the past that representatives from at least three nations occasionally use paper sunshades or umbrellas as an accessory to their national costumes, they are Japan, Thailand, and the Republic of the Philippines (see Figure 14).



Figure 14: Filipino and Thai beauty representatives (far left and far right) in Miss Universe 2012 pageant
(Image from: www.t-pageant.com - accessed on September 29, 2013)

Explicitly, Figure 2 uses a set of syntax that denotes the beauty contestant, as this is the only woman shown wearing a sash on her body. The depiction clearly indicates and narrates her walking on a stage in a beauty contest somewhere in Thailand. Owing to the fact that words on the sash indicate her sponsor's name in characters of the Thai alphabet, she cannot be a representative of Thailand in an international beauty pageant. Considering the year this poster was published, 1966, Thailand was still in exhilarating celebration of Miss Apasra, the first Thai Miss Universe and the first Miss Thailand after the cancelation of the national beauty pageant for nine years between 1955 and 1963 due to political situations

and constant turbulence in Thai society. The image of a “real” beauty contestant with a sash on her body is suitably defined to represent an ideological woman during that period.

In analysis of the transitivity or action of the participants, the position of the parasol on the woman’s shoulder in all resources, except Figure 8, implies that the accessory is not used purposely as a sun protection tool. Most photographs of the beauty contestants show a use of the accessory in a similar manner (see Figure 15 and 16). It could be contextually interpreted that the parasol is used as an attraction tool rather than a means of protection from the sun.



Figure 15: Miss Amporn Burarak before crowned Miss Thailand in 1950/2493
(Image from: Dok Mai Khong Chart: Jak Vethee Kwamngam Soo Vethee Cheevit. [Flowers of Nation: From Beauty Pageant Platform to the Platform of Life], 1990)

Figure 16: Beauty contestants in Miss Thailand 1971/2514 competition
(Image from: Miss Thailand 2514 Photo Album, 1971)



Results

Implicit Meaning Potentials and Femininity Discourses

Through the process of thoroughly investigating and identifying the choices of visual features used to represent “woman holding a parasol” in all eight visual resources, those word and image combinations and their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations to each other lead us to understand the signifying system and its complex structural network of meanings. The meaning potential of the parasol as the sun or rain protection apparatus is obviously seen, but this investigation further reveals various implicit meaning potentials hidden in those taken-for-granted assumptions. Women do not simply need the parasol in order to protect themselves from being tanned by the sun or getting wet; this icon involves many issues related to femininity and gender discourses, power relations, and social ideologies.

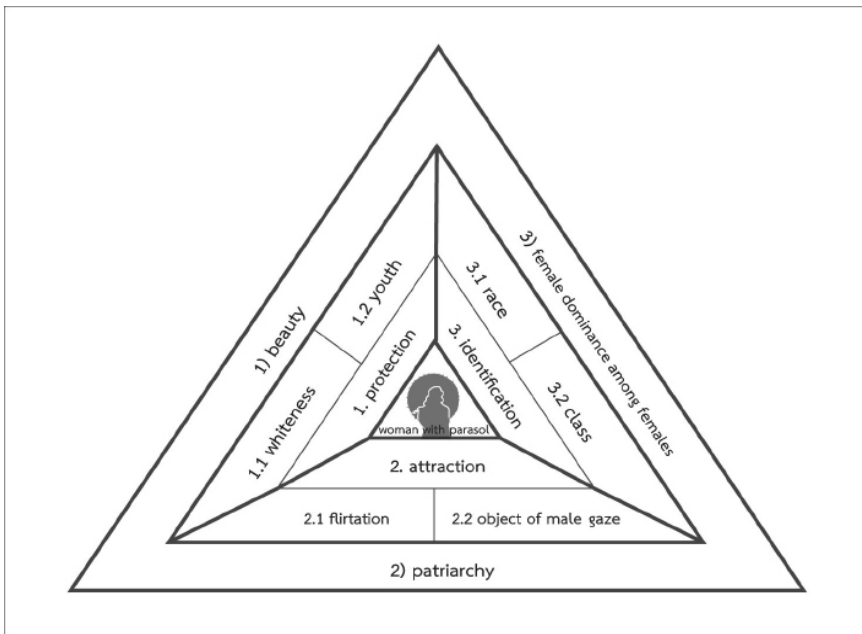


Figure 17: Diagram of connotative meanings and related femininity discourses

By analyzing all potential meanings of “woman holding a parasol” representations, displayed in diagram in Figure 17 there are three connotative meanings, each one related to three main femininity discourses: (1) protection / beauty (2) attraction / patriarchy, and (3) identification / female dominance among females (see Figure 17). Additionally, beauty discourses involve whiteness and youth, patriarchal discourses concern flirtation and designation as the object of male gaze, and female dominance among female discourses in connection to race and class. This complex network of all visual semiotic choices and their meanings reveals how these discourse formations are activated by those participants involved in respect to the three discourses mentioned: (1) woman to self, (2) male and female, and (3) female and female. These findings also explain how power relations are repetitively produced and circulated in Thai society from generation to generation through the use of basic alphabet learning tools and other media that are produced through various social practices.



Figure 18: “Medica” soap advertisement (1936/2479)
(Image from: Thai Advertisements Vol. 2 1920s, 2007)

Protection and Identification

When seeing the images of people, especially women, holding a parasol or umbrella under a sunny sky or in clear weather, we assume that they want to protect their complexions from the sun in order to avoid being tanned or dark-skinned; but this apparatus is not merely a protective device. According to Ariel Beaujot, who investigates the cultural mean-

ings of women's accessories through material culture analysis (Beaujot, 2008), whiteness and youth are the most desirable female characteristics representing beauty of the British middle class during the Victorian era. Lace and decorated parasols were widely used by women in public to preserve their whiteness as long as possible. Besides functioning as a protection tool related to beauty ideologies, Victorian umbrellas and parasols are decoded as symbols of imperialism, race, youth, and flirtation.

On the 1974 alphabet U learning page (see Figure 5), the definition of the accompanying word Umbrella is “a device used as protection against rain and sunlight,” which are the without-doubt and taken-for-granted assumptions about its function. Thereby, an image of a woman holding a sunshade or parasol on the beach in the soap advertisement (see Figure 18) seems appropriate and harmoniously incorporates its advertised text: “Medica: medicated toilet soap with fragrance, can be used with either freshwater or salted water; don't forget to take this soap with you on your summer holidays; widely distributed, by Borneo Co, Ltd”. Below right, an image of the soap is displayed alongside the text. In the background, there are two more people with a large sunshade and a beach ball. Not far away under the bright and sunny sky, a sailboat floats on the water near the shoreline.

However, by interpreting the linguistic and visual choices used in this resource, as an imported commodity from England, the sale price of the soap must have been rather expensive at that time. According to the woman's dress and fashion style, as well as the advertised text, a certain group of people who could afford a summer trip to the sea is implied. This visual resource implicitly communicates connotative meanings regarding the woman's class. The parasol helps identify the status of its user who represents an upper or middle class young woman who joyfully spends her leisure time strolling on the beach during a summer trip with her family. This connotation is similar to the implicit meaning potentials of visual features chosen to represent British upper class women's lives on the beach during the 1930s in a Lux laundry soap advertisement (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: Lux laundry soap advertisement (1923/2466)

(Image from: <http://thevintagetraveler.wordpress.com/tag/beach/> - accessed on November 10, 2013)

Another visual resource that illustrates the parasol's connotative meaning potential related to class is the volume 1 cover of the renowned novel by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, "Four Reigns," published by Prae Pittaya in 1962 (see Figure 20). This novel was composed in 1950, but its plot was about the life of Mae Phloi, a woman in Thai society during the reigns of King Rama V through VIII (between the years of 1882 and 1946). The visual features chosen to represent her first half-life depict a woman dressed in a traditional Thai costume walking while holding a parasol. As part of the flat blue colored background, the blurred outline drawing in the upper left resembles the pagodas in the Grand Palace area, one setting in the story. By contextually analyzing all visual features, the parasol helps in identifying the class of its user. Being the novel's main character, Mae Phloi's status as the daughter of a lower aristocrat who spends her teenage life as a minor courtier in the royal palace and later gains nobility as the wife of a military man is differentiated from that of common people.

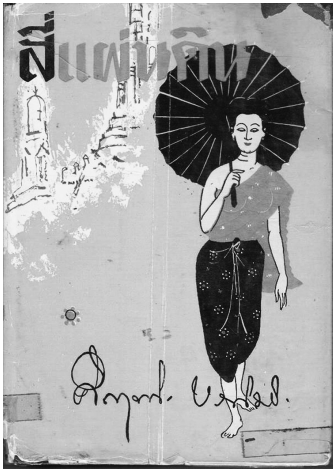


Figure 20: Cover of “Four Reigns”
novel, volume 1 (1962/2505)
(Image from: www.manager.co.th/entertainment/viewnews.aspx?NewsID=9540000152551 -
accessed on December 3, 2013)

As a device that needs at least one hand to hold, carrying a parasol represents an activity during free time. Compared to the function of a farmers’ hat with a broad rim that allows for wearers to work with both hands, the parasol depicts its user spending their leisure time outdoors. The parasol thus connotes a female accessory of a non-working class woman or a working class woman capable of affording free time. Furthermore, considering power relations within female groups, for example Mae Phloi’s status, the action of holding a parasol also separates its user from the upper courtiers in the royal palace whose parasols were held by female servants, and the bondwomen who cannot bear the expenses of a parasol.

Identification of Nationality



Figure 21: “Sao Kruea Fah”
movie card (1965/2508)
(Image from: Roy Pee Nhang
Thai [A Century of Thai
Cinema], 2002)

Another “woman holding a parasol” representation with connotative meaning potential related to race and identification is a *Sao Kruea Fah* movie card published in 1965, the same year that this renowned fiction was remade for the second time (see Figure 21). The tragic love story of *Kruea Fah*, a beautiful Chiang Mai woman, and an officer from Bangkok is primarily a Thai-style musical drama adapted from the world famous opera, *Madame Butterfly*. The visual features chosen to represent the ideologies of Northern or Lanna women are their traditional attires with a paper sunshade or parasol. *Kruea Fah*’s Thai paper sunshade and *Cho-Cho-San*’s Japanese parasol (see Figure 22) are exotic symbols in the eyes of male foreigners, respectively an officer from Bangkok and a U.S. naval officer. Besides the meaning potentials in relation to the identification of race, paper sunshades also connote beautiful women. In Thailand, Lanna women from the northern parts of the country have long been renowned as being the most beautiful women with the most natural white and delicate skin. Since the first local beauty pageant was held in Lampoon province in 1929, five years before the first national beauty pageant was organized in Bangkok (named *Phra Nakorn* at that time), many of these Lanna women were consistently named winners of the pageants.



Figure 22: Geraldine Farrar in *Madame Butterfly* opera (1907) (Image from: <http://turnofthecentury.tumblr.com> - accessed on December 3, 2013)

The history of paper sunshade making in Thailand is, to a certain extent, connected to Myanmar (Burma at that time) and China. One record shows that techniques of how to make parasols were brought to Thailand from Burma by a Lanna monk. Another indicates that Chinese paper sunshades influenced the tradition of umbrella making in northern parts of Thailand. Later, in the village of Bor Sang in Chiang Mai province, the local production was supported by the government and promoted as a well-known form of handicraft and souvenir. In 2009, the Department of Intellectual Property of Thailand registered the Bor Sang umbrella as a “geographical indication.”

Attraction and Flirtation



Figure 23: Thairath Newspaper
Sunday cover (1965/2508)
(Image from: the author’s
collection)

After Thairath was established as one of the highest circulating newspapers in Thailand in 1962, Kumpol Watcharapol, the founder, decided to attract readers by printing a four-color cover for the first time in the newspaper’s history on Sunday copies in 1965. This visual resource displays a woman dressed in a pink two-piece undergarment covering with a see-through raincoat (see Figure 23). She wears blue high heels and holds a red umbrella over her head with her right arm. Amid the pouring rain at

night, she looks as though timidly posing on a busy street. The colorful lit-up neon signage in the back and one familiar Thai beer brand on the top left suggest a nighttime entertainment area as the photographic setting. Even though this umbrella is obviously seen to be used for rain protection, contextual analysis further finds that the accessory represents an alluring action and a sense of flirtation. Symbolically, it is used to attract men, thus its user becomes the object of male gaze.

According to Thairath newspaper's history, the most famous Thai actresses and beautiful fashion models at that time were photographed and exploited as eye-catchers to increase the newspaper circulation. This strategic marketing technique was so successful that, a year later, the so-called "Colorful Thairath" Sunday copies reached 140,000 circulations per day throughout the country, the highest of all newspaper publications at the time. Many of these images portrayed women in sexually attractive poses looking stunning in the large newspaper page layout on the shelf amongst other newspaper covers printed in two-tone colors and mainly illustrating political or criminal headlines. As a thriving media company that effectively reached every small village in the country, Thairath newspaper possibly dispersed examples of alluring or sexy appealing women stereotypes that partly led to the construction of femininity discourses in Thai society.

Conclusion

Results from this study show that the visual rhetoric of "woman holding a parasol" representations in pre-school Thai alphabet primers create, exchange, and negotiate connotative meanings related to femininity discourses. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of verbal and non-verbal codes chosen by the author shape the reader's prospective thoughts and behaviors. Under the assumption that a parasol is merely a rain or sunlight protector, thoroughly investigated by utilizing visual rhetoric, social semiotics, and critical discourse analysis frameworks, gender discourses related to protection, attraction, and identification are revealed. Parasols are exploited in order to maintain their users'

whiteness and youth, identify gender's class and race, and help the holders look charming and attractive. From time to time, typical images of a beautiful woman posing in an alluring gesture holding a parasol are disseminated through various media sources as objects of men's gaze and desire.

In the field of design criticism, this study helps to extend visual language studies and visual semiotics related to gender issues. Designers, curators, or journalists in graphic design or related fields can use this research as an example of how to "deconstruct" visual languages in order to elucidate implicit meaning potentials of codes, understand how semiosis forms femininity discourses, discover the network of power relations of participants involved, and how social agents construct their own ideologies. Furthermore, this study reminds us how important and influential visual languages are, therefore, their authors, or "designers," cannot deny responsibilities for their design choices.

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Table 1: Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of eight “woman holding a parasol” visual representations in Thai alphabet primers

Visual resources			1. Participants/ people	2. Attributes/objects							3. Transitivity/action		4. Pose		5. Gaze	6. Settings/ background	7. Modality/ truth
Images	Words (medium)	Year (published)		Parasol: material	Parasol: decora- tion	Costume	Sash	Hair decoration: flower	Hair- style	Hand hold- ing parasol	Parasol: position	Body	Face	Eye direction			
Figure 1	Yaw Ying Sopa (primer)	1977/2520	woman	plastic	plain	Thai	none	none	short	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	still	direct	Benjamaborpit Temple	photo	
Figure 2	Yaw (poster)	1966/2509	woman	paper	line/floral	Thai	Sash	rose	bun	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	smile	direct	none	photo	
Figure 3	Yaw (poster)	c.1976/ before 2519	woman	paper	floral	Thai	none	orchid	bun	left	on shoulder	stand- ing	smile	left	none	painting	
Figure 4	U Umbrella (primer)	1970/2513	woman	paper	floral	Western- style	none	none	bun	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	smile	right	none	line drawing	
Figure 5	U Umbrella (primer)	1974/2517	woman	plastic	line	Western- style	none	none	curly	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	x	x	none	line drawing	
Figure 6	Yaw Ying Sopa (card)	1956/2499	woman	paper	line	Western- style	none	none	curly	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	smile	direct	garden/hillside	painting	
Figure 7	Yaw Ying Sopa (primer)	1950/2493	woman	paper	plain	Western- style	none	none	curl	right	on shoulder	stand- ing	x	downward	none	painting	
Figure 8	Yaw Yeepoon (primer)	1922/2465	woman	paper	plain	kimono	none	none	Japa- nese style	left	over the head	walk- ing	x	right	ground	woodcut print	

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