

# TRANSMISSION GUIDELINE OF THAI TRADITIONAL-CRAFTSMANSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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## ABSTRACT

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From the past to the present, traditional craftsmanship has been adapted and developed according to the era through the continuous transfer of wisdom from generation to generation. Such transfer of wisdom includes the body of knowledge about various techniques and the value of exquisite beauty. However, if the development is focusing only on the products of the original craftsmen but not also on the creation of consumer groups and the means to present the traditional craftsmen work to suit the lifestyle of modern time, the craftsmanship will not be accessible and tangible to the people. Therefore, another interesting way to extend local wisdom is to create activities for learning and real practices. This article aims to study the approach for transmission of Thai traditional craftsmanship in the digital age. The study results reveal that the transmission of Thai traditional craftsmanship is divided into 4 methods as follows: (1) model development, (2) materials development, (3) tools development, and (4) production and marketing system development. All four methods must be developed together. Also, the study results of the trend of the general consumer behavior in the digital age revealed the following behaviors: (1) the increasing focus on the importance of the people who came in direct contact or experiences at present resulting in the longing for a deep and meaningful relationship, (2) the concept of self-acceptance which is different and more unique resulting in the more importance given to individual persons, and (3) the increasing realization of personal data security.

**Keywords:** Transmission; Thai traditional craftsmanship; digital age society

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When today's technology causes a lot of changes in the world, people in the society are entering the online ways of life by means of the online social and virtual world. Therefore, coping with modern consumer behavior has become different and divided, especially the way of thinking that one is running for the future and yearning for the past. Consequently, this is the opportunity for handicrafts to become the foundation of design, given that people in the digital age start to return to the search for relationships with their surroundings that reflect their identities and use their senses to perceive things delicately. Jonathan Anderson (cited in Morby, 2018) said that at present, the handicrafts made by hands are very popular. Today, we communicate via social media, email and online channels. It seems as though we live most of our lives in an impersonal world. We, humans, therefore need more sensual contact. Also, the demand for products is shifting towards sustainable products with longer lifespan as opposed to the disposable ones. It is important that consumers are more

conscious about the production process of that product. When comparing, products that are considered in the higher grade may be more valuable, but the products that we know of their origins are even more valuable (Morby, 2018).

Regarding the inheritance and extension of traditional Thai craftsmanship to promote its accessibility to the general public as consumers, in line with the current Thai social context, there are ways to carry on the Thai art works that are still full of wisdom. The steps and production processes that are within reach of the people as consumers can create value and monetary values for the works, and help traditional craftsmanship to have a role and benefits in people's daily lives nowadays.

## 2. TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Traditional craftsmanship means wisdom, craftsmanship skills, material selection and creative strategies that demonstrate identity, and reflect social and cultural development of the ethnic group that has been inherited. The Department of Cultural Promotion (2016) divides traditional craftsmanship into nine categories as follows:

1) Fabrics and products from fabrics refer to the products produced by means of weaving, dyeing, knitting, twisting, tie-dyeing, pattern printing, continuous supplementary weaving, and tapestry weaving for use as clothing and showing social status.

2) Wickerwork means household utensils made from local raw materials, such as bamboo, rattan, bulrush, and pandanus, which are known to be wickerwork and weaving. Techniques for making wickerwork include weaving, tying and strapping, and hammering of rattan to make the wicker durable and stay in the desired shape.

3) Lacquerware means craftsmanship that uses lacquer as the important material for creating works, such as gilding, water painting, quacking, pearl decoration, stained glass, and lacquer ware. Lacquer is the sap from a tree which is adhesive and can stick to the skin of any material. It is also resistant to heat, moisture, mild acid and mild alkaline, and is the material that can be decorated with pearl or color.

4) Pottery refers to craftsmanship that uses clay as the main raw material for production. There are both coated and uncoated types. The clay material must have a mixture of river sand that is fine sand that helps the pottery to dry completely without cracking. Clay from various places that is used to make pottery enables the pottery to have different colors.

5) Metalwork means craftsmanship made from metals such as iron, copper or brass. The metal has to be heated before being molded or forged into various shapes.

6) Woodwork means craftsmanship made from logs or sawn timber for use in construction work, such as choppers, furniture, worship furniture, ornaments, tools, utensils, musical instruments, weapons and vehicles through the techniques of carving, chopping, drilling, lathing, scraping, and polishing.

7) Leatherwork means traditional craftsmanship made from animal skin through the process of fermentation and tanning to prevent decay which result in suppleness that allows it to be bended or shaped as needed. Leather goods are widely used in the performing arts and in making other devices with leather as a component.

8) Jewelry means craftsmanship that is created for beautiful decoration. It can start from the use of locally available materials for production and development and can be further developed by using gems and precious metals.

9) Folk artwork means work that allows the makers' emotions to be evidently reflected in concrete forms in needs to make a living and the need for aesthetic values. This includes drawings, sculptures, carved work, cast work, and any other products which cannot be classified into the above-mentioned eight categories. They may be handicrafts that are created with the use of locally available materials or other waste materials. Therefore, in order to preserve all the craftsmanship that has been passed on from generation to generation, it must be adapted to suit the changes in the present society and in the future. Such approach will enable the craftsmanship to persist and become sustainable in the future.

## 3. GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSMISSION

Regarding the development and transmission of traditional craftsmanship, there are a number of people who are interested in studying Thai arts and Thai handicrafts in many educational institutions such as Pho Chang College, Fine Arts College, and Faculty of Fine Arts in public and private universities. So, it can be said that it is the direct role of higher education institutions to produce graduates specialized in these specific fields. However, it is perceived that the number of people interested in studying these fields is still limited and

the trend in the future seems to indicate that the number might even decline. Also, this type of work is not very popular in the market. Therefore, there is a chance that the Thai craftsmanship will gradually disappear if it is not adjusted to meet the changes in Thai people's lifestyles.

Conservation is the preservation of forms, materials, and methods. The concept of inheritance for sustainable existence includes the inheritance of forms, concepts, reasoning, materials, and methods of creation, maintenance, keeping and repairing, and creating substitute works that are as valuable as the original ones.

Development is the improvement of the existing forms, materials and methods to change in accordance with the social progress and the changing world while still maintaining the original identities so as to be able to indicate which art work belongs to which nation or which group of people. To do this, there is a need to analyze or conduct research to understand the substance or the essence of that particular artwork.

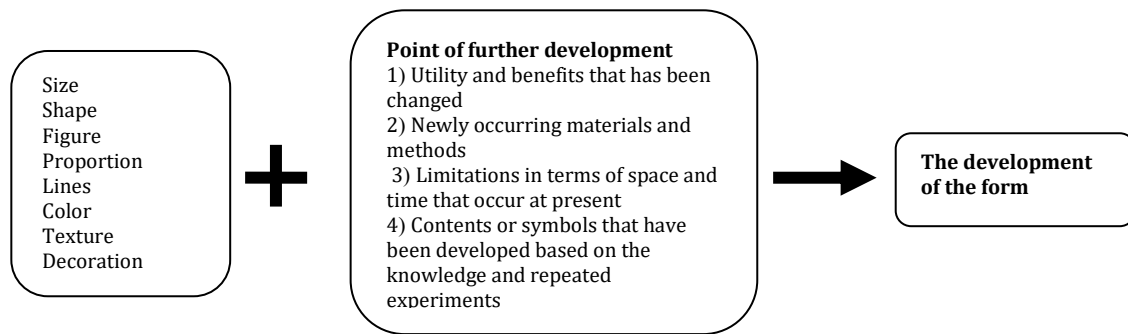
Conservation and development have conflicting meanings between them. Conservation is to keep or maintain that artwork to last long without any change, while development is to improve or change that artwork to be better. Therefore, in dealing with anything we have to decide, through analysis or research, whether to conserve or to develop it. As for the approach for studying artwork, especially traditional artwork, we should take actions for both conservation and development at the same time (Nakkong, 2000).

The development-oriented study is to improve and change the original item or to create new things based on the existing ones. The inquisitive thinking to create new inventions is a method based on the human's needs for new things, which are the nature of the creation of artworks and all handicrafts. Therefore, the people involved in this field must take this point into their consideration at all time.

Development does not mean freely creating new things. It, however, must be an unconditional development or change, that is, it must reflect the nationality or show the cultural inheritance in one's own cultural way. So, development of craftsmanship must be done carefully and meticulously. If the development is done without the proper knowledge, it will result in destruction rather than development.

In the current economic and social situation, people's ways of life in our society need to be adjusted according to the changes of the world. Thai arts would not be able to escape the trend of this change. Some cultural heritage must be preserved to show national identity and prestige. However, some heritages of Thai arts need to be developed, such as the Khon mask, one of Thailand's highest forms of craftsmanship. The style of Khon mask is clearly an identity of the Thai culture. The process of creating a Khon mask must consist of knowledge and skills in Thai artistry of at least 10 branches. This includes molding, drawing, padding, modeling, carving, sewing, lacquering, painting, gilding, decorative jewellery, and etc. Nowadays, the revival of a full-scale Khon performance that requires the complete putting on of Khon masks seems to be out dated. If the Khon masks production ceases due to the lack of the full-scale performances, then the unique and prestigious Thai craftsmanship will be lost. Therefore, Khon masks are being adapted and made as souvenirs or gifts that reflect the unique and prestigious Thai craftsmanship. The mask making process for this new purpose does not require the use of traditional materials and methods because the masks are no longer used for wearing in the actual performance. However, the most important thing that must be kept up is the forms and characteristics of the mask, the beauty in size, shape, proportion, lines, color, and exquisite decoration. These above-mentioned changes in the development of Khon masks are examples of the development of Thai artifacts. The characteristics of the development can be divided into four types as follows:

1. The development of the form is the holistic development of a product (Figure 1) which consists of various components, namely size, shape, figure, proportion, lines, color, texture and decoration. An important focal point of the development of Thai artifacts is that the item must be able to communicate its meaning to the viewers to enable them to understand that it is a product of Thailand through the expressed symbol which has been accumulated and imparted continuously. However, this does not mean that this form has not been improved or changed before. The person who can develop the artifact forms needs to study the process in order to deeply understand the origin, evolution, and development of that particular artifact. At the point of further development, the following aspects must be considered: 1) its utility and benefits that has been changed, 2) newly occurring materials and methods, 3) limitations in terms of space and time that arise, and 4) contents or symbols that have been developed based on the knowledge and repeated experiments until the artifact is completed in accordance with the developer's intent.

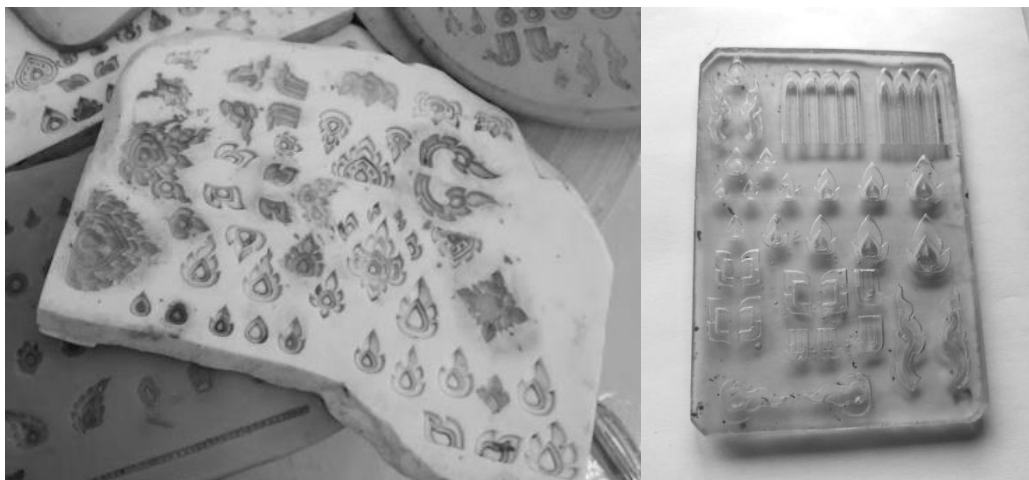


**Figure 1:** Shows Methodologies the Development of the Form of a Holistic Product



**Figure 2:** The Traditional Soapstone Mold (Boonthong, 2018)

Source: Manita Janchoungchot



(a)

Mold Is Made of Resin

(b)

Acrylic Mold Computer  
Numerical Control

**Figure 3:** Using New Materials to Instead of Old Materials (Boonthong, 2018)

Source: Manita Janchoungchot

2. Material development is the development of raw materials that artisans bring to create artworks. In the past, craftsmen in every branch of craftsmanship used materials that are near them, are easily found or are easily processed according to their own aptitude, as shown in Figure 2. At present, material restrictions have been overcome by technological advances that aid in the search for materials and transportation facilities. The artisans are therefore free to experiment and choose the material that they want and use materials that are locally available. They should also improve the quality by blending new and old knowledge about art in order to create the artwork that are strong, durable, easy to work with, safe, and economical. For example, the use of plastering machines instead of the labor force in preparing plaster material in Phetchaburi, or the use of silicone rubber to make molds which can do casting work better than the traditional mold, and conducting

research on materials for artworks such as the study of substitute materials for decorated lacquerware and the study of substitute materials for talcum molds, as shown in Figure 3a synthetic material mold is made of resin and Figure 3b acrylic mold Computer Numerical Control was developed by Surat Boonthong (2018).

3. Development of tools and methods. Tools and working methods play important roles in achieving good work results. Tools, methods, and materials are always inter-related. If artists can work conveniently, safely, and economically, they will be able to produce high quality artworks. Nowadays, it is accepted that some modern tools such as air brushes or computers can do many things that hands cannot. If the artists study and experiment with these modern tools, they will be able to produce more artworks with higher quality. Therefore, artists, like other professions, should not deny these technological advances. An example of this can be seen in the study on Art, Industry and Innovation in the Creation of Khon Masks (Thosakul, 2017).

4. Development of production and marketing systems. This is something that most artisans ignore. Most artisans reject business, even though it is related to everyone's daily life. Therefore, artisans should develop the production system and have knowledge and understanding about marketing. They should build up their consumer base in order to create and promote the traditional craftsmanship profession and earn regular income as a stable profession like other professions.

Traditional craftsmanship is a cultural product that has been continuously inherited. This is consistent with Phra Dhamma Pitaka (Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), 1994) who claimed that culture has a continuous flow like the water current. The word "current" means that the thing has been accumulated and inherited continuously without being stagnant or staying still. Therefore, culture is something that has been continuing from the past and that has existed at present, meaningfully and usefully. Sometimes, many people in the Thai society perceive culture as ancient matters belonging to ancient people. In fact, culture must exist securely at present, with the foundation that is connected to the past, and with ways to expand continuously in the future. In other words, traditional cultures should be modified to suit the people's behavior and become beneficial to the people living at the present time.

#### 4. CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR OF PEOPLE IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

Globalization has allowed the emergence of mixed culture and mixed consumption. Consumer goods from other cultures become readily available, and many advanced applications have allowed humans to live comfortably and at a quick pace. To enable the marketing development of traditional craftsmanship to match the reality of the society in the digital age, one needs to study the direction of consumer behavior more frequently from business seminars. This is in order to see the future trend faster. Guidelines for integrating the marketing sector into traditional craftsmanship products is something that should be given priority if we want to turn such cultural capital into something that can really generate income. The current Thai consumer behavior is specified by Brandbuffet (2018) as follows:

1. There is an increase in importance given to the persons or experiences that is at present. Therefore, the people are longing for a deep and meaningful relationship.

2. There is a concept of accepting more non-stereotypical and unique identities with a view that each individual is important without having to be perfect in the eyes of others.

3. There is a growing awareness of increased security for personal information. Entrepreneurs need to be able to communicate, not only to attract the attention of consumers, but also to enable the consumers to have confidence in their policy that protects the privacy of the customers.

Understanding society and creating consumer base in the present day is different from the consumer behavior in the past. For many people, the word digital and crafts may not be compatible because the image of things that are digital tends to be connected with artificial intelligence, robots, and inflexibility, which is the opposite of the definition of crafts in the dimension that is familiar to us, i.e. it is about emotions, feelings, fluidity, and is involved with coincidence or trials and errors. In addition, we also believe that crafts must be made entirely by hand. It takes time, patience, and requires the putting of full human spirit into it. However, when the world today is entering an era where all appliances are becoming digital, the world of crafts is not an exception and will soon be affected. Today, we have to admit that crafts are moving towards the more contemporary dimension. Its definition is more widely open, which may not be tied to the concept of "being objects" or "purely by hand", but can cover all types of creation methods which can sometimes arise from the fusion of the modern fields of digital science as well.

Although the scope of the definition is wider, one thing that the creative world is currently agreeing on is that whatever the type of crafts appears to the world, it still has the heart and human touch at the production process and the nature of making that craft. It is still a work that relies on the hands, mind and eyes



which are the three vital organs that enable a skilled craftsman to transmit his identity, whether the tools or materials he uses are from the analog world or the digital world.

Digital technology opens a new world for people who want to create crafts and allow them to create many things that were impossible in the past. During the last four or five years, we have seen many crafts in new languages that are successively showing themselves whether in the forms of appliances, toys, or even food, and etc. These progressive designers and craftsmen are willing to combine new skills from the digital world such as software and artificial intelligence in order to have fun playing with the idea and to endlessly extend the possibilities of creating contemporary crafts. This leads to the creation of new physical crafts which are too advanced to be created by hands alone. So, it is very probable that our consumer culture is currently undergoing another major technological change, and "digital craft" is getting closer to humans. As such, Thai entrepreneurs should adapt to participate in this new cultural trend because in the market of creativity, there are still gaps and opportunities to make money from the start to the end of the process (Thailand Creative and Design Center, 2015).

## 5. HOW SHOULD THE ORIGINAL THAI CRAFTSMANSHIP EXIST AT PRESENT?

The problem that has always been found in the Thai arts circle is that the general public feels the creative process is too far-fetched and that they have difficulties understanding such process. This is in line with the viewpoint of Miss Phiang-amphorn Thongyang, a new generation art teacher who graduated from Pho Chang College who reflected the problems of the Thai crafts circle in an interview (Sakkhajonyod, 2019), stating that "This is not the matter of Thai people being not interested in these cultural heritages, but it is because they do not know from where they can get deep understanding of this matter. Therefore, we need to introduce more artworks to the general public to let them know that everybody can learn how to do it. For instance, they can learn how to make decorated gilded pin with the application of Khon mask decoration techniques that omit all difficult details to make it easier with the addition of new techniques and pattern that allow it to be completed in a short period of time. Nonetheless, we must not forget to maintain the delicate details of the work because we should not allow time limitation to become an important issue for reducing the beauty of the work. As for today, everybody has to live hastily having to work during the weekdays while attending special classes during holidays. What we can do is adjust the learning program to best suit our way of life." This is also in line with the approach of Nithiwit Chartsupsin (SME Thailand, 2017) who said that "Currently, short-term workshop activities, either free or paid, are becoming something that the new generation is very interested in. This is due to the increasing popularity of the way of life of people who love freedom. The search for some small activity to do by oneself is another way to live one's life in the way that one wants. Also, people in the modern era want to find their own identity. The above-mentioned activities will enable people who are gifted in artworks to start workshop studio businesses in the era that people are searching for their own identity." In online communities, we will find widespread public relations on this issue.

The extension of traditional handicrafts by creating a learning space that meets the interests of those who want to learn, or by using the forms, shapes, and colors of Thai artworks to applied in other contemporary works are ways that help to pass on the value of Thai craftsmanship. This makes Thai craftsmanship useful in everyday life, aesthetically and economically.

The collection and dissemination of a variety of different traditional crafts or Thai craftsmanship in online media is a good channel for presenting them to the general public. This is because social media or social network almost cover all marketing activities. As such, work agencies in the state sector and educational institutions concerning with the conservation and development of traditional craftsmanship can create an online space for the general public to access information on Thai traditional craftsmanship. The general public themselves can also form online communities by creating groups of enthusiasts in Thai traditional craftsmanship and get together in order to share and exchange news and information that is of interest through multimedia channels.

Therefore, conservation and transmission are interpreted in the new sense that they are not reserved to just a group of people because culture is dynamic and constantly moving and changing in accordance with the purposes of the users. Thai craftsmanship should be more widely open because if the old generation of skillful craftsmen is gone, there would still be new generations to conserve and create new handicrafts for everyday life. Presentations in new patterns with tools and methods of communication make it easier for people to access the craftsmanship suitable for their age. Also, this will enable Thai traditional craftsmanship to be a component of our daily lifestyle and exist in harmony with the context of the various activities in today's society

## 6. CONCLUSION

In a rapidly changing world, making things in the old way while believing that it will result in new things is not logical. Therefore, by understanding the changes and adjusting accordingly, it will enable us to make sure that the products from local wisdom can remain a part of the society for all ages.

As for the traditional 9 craftsmanship, namely, fabrics and fabric products, wickerwork, lacquerware, pottery, metalwork, woodwork, leatherwork, folk artwork, jewelry, and other products, the related parties must clearly address how they should be conserved and developed. It is also vital to create networks of activities and cooperation among different work agencies in the public and private sectors, private individuals, and the general consumers who appreciate and realize the value of traditional craftsmanship. This is because robots or machines cannot express emotions or the delicacy like human being. In the future, however, that might be possible. To disseminate the artworks from traditional craftsmanship to the general art consumers, there must be the studies to effectively combine local wisdoms with the more modern designs to create handicrafts that are harmonious with the context of the lives of the new generation. This is therefore an approach that will benefit the society and the country. Also, the traditional craftsmen will be proud of their profession and be regarded as the transmitters of knowledge and the creators of such artworks. The general consumers obtain knowledge and would be proud to be able to create artworks by themselves. Even though they might not be able to take parts in every step of the creation process, they would learn and enjoy themselves aesthetically in the midst of a digital age culture where everything around us can be commanded at our fingertips.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be more studies on the approaches for format development, material development, and development of tools and methods to cover each of the 9 types of specific traditional craftsmanship since each type requires different techniques and format development.

2. The development of production and marketing systems for traditional craftsmanship products is an important approach in designing learning activities and creating consumer groups for traditional craftsmanship which will be useful in creating aesthetic value in parallel with the current economic and social conditions.

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