

Folk toys in Central Thailand: Product development for a creative economy

Wanna Pichetpruth, Kla Somtrakool and Pairat Thidpad

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Khamriang Sub-District, Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham Province, Thailand
wpichetpue220@hotmail.com

Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
Vol. 3 No. 4, 41-45
November 2015 Part II
P-ISSN 2350-7756
E-ISSN 2350-8442
www.apjmr.com

Date Received: August 14, 2015; Date Revised: September 29, 2015

Abstract – Folk toys in Central Thailand are a part of local Thai local wisdom. Creative folk toys are a part of cultural heritage and Thai creative and sustainable economic development. So, this research aimed to study 1) the indigenous folk toys in central Thailand, 2) the toy production problems and solution guidelines, and 3) the toy product development for the creative economy. The study employed a qualitative research method. The target group consisted of the selected communities in Nonthaburi Province, Ayutthaya Province and Suphanburi Province and folk toy sources. The informants were: 15 folk toy enterprise presidents, government officers and local experts as the key informants, 45 folk toy enterprise members as the causal informants and 45 customers as the general informants. Data were collected by means of interview, observation, focus group discussion and workshop from field study. Qualitative data were analyzed by inductive analysis method with triangular verification and the research results were presented by a descriptive analysis method. The research results revealed that folk toys in Central Thailand were derived from local indigenous knowledge that was created and transmitted through the generations for at least 700 years. Most of the folk toys in Central Thailand were produced by natural, local and easily found materials, using natural colors. The beauty, styles and quality of natural and man-made children's toys were based on parental competency. Moreover, creation of folk toys is a form of Thai handicraft. Thai people truly believe that toys are symbols of parental love and attention and the tools to build up children's growth in terms of lifestyle and creative mind. The findings show that folk toys in Central Thailand are made of special soil, wood, bamboo, lan leaf, tan leaf and coconut shell. Folk toys are categorized in four groups: 1) fun toys, such as krataewien, explosive bamboo, king drum, nangkop drum, rhythm coconut shell, cap gun, nungstrik gun, whistle, pong-pang, bamboo flute, wote and wihoksaipha; 2) pleasure and imaginative toys, such as kanghan, rotated kanghan, airplane, kalong, chackachan, pla-tapian, waling karian bird and flying bird; 3) games, such as kalakaokwai, wooden alligators, wooden swords and arrows; and 4) models, such as talapcap, trucks, tricycles, boats, lookfat, kites, eko, mokawmokeang, dinosaurs, buffalo, tang, motorcycles, jet planes and house models. Nowadays, toys are made as an enterprise, using more external materials, chemical colors, different styles and models. Furthermore, toy production helps to conserve central Thai identity, child growth and Thai lifestyle.

Keywords – Community, creative economy, development, toys, traditional knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Toys are things that can be played with. Most of them are designed for children and animals. Moreover, playing with toys helps children adjust their attitude to their lives and society. Toys are made of different kinds of materials, suited for various age levels. Furthermore, children play with toys to find themselves, make their health strong, learn critically, build relationships, practice necessary skills and relate to society, teachings, memories and past learning to adapt themselves to real situations.

Playing is a principle activity and important for children. It not only reflects children's minds but is also a part of their lives. According to academic research, those children who played with toys made from natural materials had a higher ability to use their muscles after playing than before playing. Besides, they significantly developed their mood and mind after playing [1].

Central Thai culture is the dominant culture in Thailand. Many Thai cultural arts originated from Central Thailand especially Nonthaburi Province,

Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province and Suphanburi Province. These areas are home to traditional Thai communities who campaign to preserve, promote, distribute and inherit folk toys. However, modern Thai parents do not realize about traditional toys because they prefer to order foreign toys. Foreign toys are valued highly by Thai children and research has also found that local wisdom and local culture have been neglected in favor of new technologies. This means that there are obstacles to traditional lifestyle.

According to studies of folk toys in Central Thailand, popularity of traditional toys is in decline. They are used only by children whose parents who stay in border provinces of Thailand because their low income means they cannot afford foreign toys. Apart from this, they do not realize the importance of folk toys, they let their children play alone and use new technologies without realizing their advantages and disadvantages. In conclusion, there are three main problems with folk toys: 1) the folk toys are disappearing without local cultural preservation; 2) modern and foreign toys are popular among Thai parents without standardized certification and they are dangerous for children; and 3) folk toys in central Thailand are not only cheap but they can also be developed for further cultural preservation, thereby increasing the income for local communities based on the creative economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researchers have analyzed the nature of culture in society. Amra Pongsanit stated that culture is man-made and not human instinct [2]. Therefore, culture is a sign system in human society that has been built by human beings and is transmitted to new generations to practice. Similarly, Broom and Selznick concluded that culture is a social heritage consisted of knowledge, belief, tradition, and skills that humans inherit as members of society [3]. Meanwhile, Taylor concluded that culture is a complex creature composed of knowledge, belief, arts, ethnicity, laws, traditions, competency and also transmission of social personality [4].

Research agrees that local wisdom is an integral part of this culture that occurs and remains with human society over long periods of time [5]. It is related to nature and the locality as humans adapt to their surroundings and the time. It follows that humans have high brain function and the capacity to learn, solve and inherit traditional culture. Even

though local wisdom has been inherited over time, the dominance of local knowledge is related to all aspects of life: career, lifestyle, expenses and culture.

Seri Pongpit argued that local wisdom is the basic knowledge and experience of villagers that is transmitted both directly and indirectly. Direct transmission means learning from individual teachers and indirect learning means cultural assimilation from exposure to others. In conclusion, local wisdom is a social cultural heritage that has been inherited to become the way of local life. Moreover, it is applied for problem solving in the daily life of the community. Local wisdom is the heritage that is utilized through social processes and becomes the principle foundation of a life and society based on sustainable living and social development. The culture of society comes from the original local wisdom of villagers and leads to the adaptation of the community to its social context, culture and environment.

Traditional Thai folk recreation was the children's play of ancient communities. It occurred in the past from the imagination, creation, environmental awareness and learning integrated with fun in the form of Siamese style. Moreover, it led to the development of kinds of play. Nowadays, we rarely see these play styles because of changes to society. On the other hand, remaining traditional knowledge concerning play and recreation should be collected as a learning sources and reference to protect Thai heritage from disappearing.

Thai folk toys were originally made from local materials and produced using easy tools. The beauty and perfection of the work depended on the expertise of the craftsmen. Toy-making is a kind of Thai handicraft and actually incorporates a number of traditional skills, such as clay modeling and coconut-leaf basketwork. For these reasons, locally produced toys are close to people's lifestyle, traditions, culture, thought and belief systems in Thai society. Thai folk toys reflect the development and the change of Thai traditions and can be divided into two types, as follows:

1) Toys derived from "imitation". These are imitations of nature, human society, animals and objects. For example mobiles that are made from wood, bamboo, lan leaf, tan leaf and coconut shell in natural tones.

2) Toys derived from "discovery and creation", for examples Lookkhang, Nungstick, bamboo or Sang and Si Wood. These are products created through a

process of trial and error and use prior information to produce inheritance for new generations.

In conclusion, the development of folk toys in central Thailand is the design and the product development of local wisdom, which is consisted with the goals of The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016). This plan specifically emphasizes the importance of the creation of different external product shapes by using traditional knowledge to secure design copyrights and patents.

According to the theories and problems of the development of creative economic folk toys in central Thailand, studying local wisdom of folk toys in central Thailand will help to develop children's growth, increasing incomes and develop the creative economy of central Thai communities. By studying local wisdom integrated with creative ideas and aesthetic design, the local identity remains related to the customers' need. Thai toys are beautiful and useful for children's development. When sold, they increase income for each family or community and make use of local natural materials and human resources. Production can increase local income based on the principles of a creative economy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This qualitative investigation aimed to study the indigenous folk toys in central Thailand; the toy production problems and solution guidelines; and the toy production development for the creative economy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research method. The target group consisted of six purposively selected communities in Nonthaburi Province, Ayutthaya Province and Suphanburi Province and folk toy sources. The informants were: 15 folk toys enterprise presidents, government officers and local experts as the key informants, 45 folk toy enterprise members as the casual informants and 45 customers as the general informants. Data were collected by means of interview, observation, focus group discussion and workshop during field study from October 2010 to April 2014. Qualitative data were analyzed by an inductive analysis method with triangular validation and the research results were presented as a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results revealed that folk toys in Central Thailand were derived from local indigenous

knowledge that was created and transmitted through the generations for at least 700 years. Most of the folk toys in Central Thailand were produced by natural, local and easily found materials, using natural colors. The beauty, styles and quality of natural and man-made children's toys were based on parental competency. Moreover, creation of folk toys is a form of Thai handicraft. Thai people truly believe that toys are symbols of parental love and attention and the tools to build up children's growth in terms of lifestyle and creative mind. The findings show that folk toys in Central Thailand are made of special soil, wood, bamboo, lan leaf, tan leaf and coconut shell. Folk toys are categorized in four groups: 1) fun toys, such as krataewien, explosive bamboo, king drum, nangkop drum, rhythm coconut shell, cap gun, nungstrik gun, whistle, pong-pang, bamboo flute, wote and wihoksaipha; 2) pleasure and imaginative toys, such as kanghan, rotated kanghan, airplane, kalong, chackachan, pla-tapian, waling karian bird and flying bird; 3) games, such as kalakaokwai, wooden alligators, wooden swords and arrows; and 4) models, such as talapcap, trucks, tricycles, boats, lookfat, kites, eko, mokawmokeang, dinosaurs, buffalo, tang, motorcycles, jet planes and house models. Nowadays, toys are made as an enterprise, using more external materials, chemical colors, different styles and models. Furthermore, toy production helps to conserve central Thai identity, child growth and Thai lifestyle.

Due to continuous foreign toy development, technology and telecommunication growth and globalization, the folk toy production problems revolve around the acceptance of foreign toy value by parents and children. This lessens the value of Central Thai toy enterprises, encourages use of external materials, which in turn require higher investment and fewer skilled makers. These changes cause a lack of inheritance from toy makers to the new generations, a lack of interest in creative design careers and a reduction in product quality for the consumers. The respondents in this investigation suggested guidelines to solve these problems. The main recommendations were that it is necessary for local, traditional toy manufacturers to: enhance parents' and children's Thai values, create more product variety and quality of folk toys in central Thailand, advertize more, market the products with promotions, use local and natural materials, inherit traditional production

techniques, encourage creative toy making and strengthen local identity of Thai folk handicrafts.

To develop folk toy production in Central Thailand for the creative economy, producers must survey users and determine the market, create a selection of target toys and design creative, modern products with added child growth value. Based on interview responses and focus group discussions, the researchers recommend production of five creative folk toys in Central Thailand using local knowledge in acknowledgement of consumer demand: earth-ware whistles, ealo, platapean-chackchan, krateawian and tokteak based on traditional models and created using local and natural materials, with incorporation of local identity and adequate qualitative control. Sale of these products, which are all based on local wisdom and local identities, should generate more occupations and more income in the community for a creative economy.

CONCLUSION

The study results revealed that folk toys in central Thailand are created from natural materials and they have different identities. Moreover, they are also the way of life and important factors of society. Folk toys have been developed from the natural environment and society. In the past, folk toys were only invented for children in each family. Later they were exchanged and sold in their communities and nearby communities. At present, production groups have been established in communities to promote and increase villagers income and there are folk toy shops provided in the communities, which are supported by government offices with production development training. Besides, folk toys in central Thailand are various, the production uses local materials and they are produced for use in the community. Villagers believe that children's toys help occupy children and maintain health. Folk toys in each area have their own identity, depending on the belief and materials available in the locality.

Folk toy production problems revolve around the acceptance of foreign toy value by parents and children. This lessens the value of Central Thai toy enterprises and causes a lack of inheritance from toy makers to the new generations, a lack of interest in creative design careers and a reduction in product quality for the consumers. In response, the informants in this investigation suggested enhancing parents' and children's Thai values, creating more product variety

and quality, advertizing more, using local and natural materials and encouraging creative toy making that strengthens the local identity of Thai folk handicrafts.

To develop folk toy production in central Thailand, 5 creative folk toys have been recommended for production based on accepted models, user need, availability of local and natural materials and local identity. All products are based on local wisdom and Thai local identities and they have different playing styles. Once sold, more occupations and more income should be generated in the community to benefit the creative economy.

RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study revealed that the folk toys focused on neat and dedicated designs. The designers used expert skills to produce safe folk toys that suit children's growth levels and the identity of each community. Both the public and private sector, especially the Department of Industry Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and the Department of Skill Development should support and promote group members to develop their skills and knowledge by training, joining seminars and field trips in both public and private areas. The Community Development Department should encourage each group to build networks for raw material price negotiation and marketing and also promote sale by training manufacturers in low-cost folk toy production. This will enable products to generate a healthy profit but continue to be sold at a reasonable price. As most sale groups are under the jurisdiction of the Community Development Department, the Ministry of Commerce and local administrative organizations should support and guide group members for ways to ensure continuous trade. Marketing management should promote and motivate customers to buy products by decorating shops to be more beautiful, neat and convenient and motivating customers to buy products. Producers should also look to utilize the ability of internet and network sales. The government should define a policy for conservation and promotion of folk toys for new generations and support the income of community-based creative economies. production and should study about building networks of handicraft folk toys that are made of natural materials. Ideas can then be gathered as guides for problem solving and folk toy development in all aspects.

REFERENCES

- [1] Juenjaroen, C. (1981). *Play and folk toys for children's development*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University
- [2] Pongsanit, A. (2001). *System and factors in the management of development funds: A synthesis of the overall picture of development fund organizations*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press
- [3] Broom, L. & Selznick, P. (1969). *Sociology*. London: Joanna Cotler Books.
- [4] Taylor, J. (1993). *James Taylor Live: 1993 concert tour* [Concert]. Champaign: University of Illinois.
- [5] Wasi, P. (2001). *Development of education in the future according to plans for future education development*. Bangkok: Office of the Basic Education Commission
- [6] Pongpit, S. (1993). *Culture and the development of traditional rural Thai knowledge*. Bangkok: National Culture Office.

Copyrights

Copyright of this article is retained by the author/s, with first publication rights granted to APJMR. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)