

Development of Phanan Pandanus Handicraft Design for the Furniture Industry in Promotion of Creative-Based Economy

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Abstract – *This research study is a qualitative research which aims to (1) study the background of Phanan pandanus weaving handicraft, (2) study the problems encountered in development of Phanan pandanus weaving handicraft for the furniture industry, and (3) determine appropriate ways to develop suitable pandanus handicraft designs to promote the creative economy. The target area of this research was composed of three Thai provinces; Trang, Krabi and Satun. The research methods were study of books and printed matters, observation, interviews, group discussions and a workshop. The research findings revealed that the background and current status of Phanan pandanus weaving in each target group was similarly initiated as an ancestral legacy. Learning skill was acquired through observation without any particular textbooks. The learning activity was first started with small groups, which were extended into large groups with 20-30 members. The average age of group members is 40 years and older, with educational levels between Prathom 6 (upper primary) to Mathayom 6 (upper secondary). The products made by each group are similar. In terms of the marketplace, each group aims at the domestic market. Each member earns approximately 2,500-6,000 baht per month. In terms of the problems of Phanan pandanus weaving, handicraft production mainly suffers from a lack of designers, lack of support from the government sector, unaffordable costs of hiring designers, lack of creativity in producing new products and inability to produce large quantities of products due to time consumption. According to the research findings, there are 3 guideline areas for development of Phanan pandanus handicraft design for the furniture industry in promotion of creative-based economy: (1) Guidelines for development of pandanus handicraft design; (2) Guidelines for management; (3) Guidelines for the incorporation of other equipment and materials.*

Keywords – *Phanan pandanus weaving handicraft, furniture industry.*

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the production of folk handicrafts is very varied, depending on the environmental conditions of the particular region. Examples of these folk handicrafts are pottery, basketry, cloth weaving, carving and metal crafts. If we consider the customs and cultural identity of Thailand, we may call it the land of weaving handicrafts since we can find this kind of handicraft being developed in every regional area of Thailand. The Southern region has long been regarded as a popular part of the country for handicraft weaving, since it is a region rich with various kinds of plants that are suited to weaving, such as bamboo, rattan, Phanan pandanus, Lipao and Kajood. These available resources have caused the Southern region to be full of woven handicraft products [1].

Woven handicrafts made from Phanan pandanus is one of the outstanding products of the Southern region since there are plenty of Phanan pandanus plants growing along the seaside and swamp forests. Formerly, the group of Thai-Muslims along the southern seashore were mostly able to take advantage of the Phanan pandanus plants by producing family utensils. However, the value and benefit of Phanan pandanus has been realised over time in the form of many southern cultural products. For example Phanan pandanus is appropriate for prayer mats or used as part of the dowry for proposing a marriage.

Wiboon Leesuwana has described the problems in the production of woven handicrafts in various localities [2]. These problems include the design or model of weaving machinery, which has not been studied in more

detail, causing similar problems to occur in other localities. As a result, many similar weaving product designs are found all over the country and particular local identities have disappeared.

According to the above-mentioned problems the researchers of this study identified an interest in developing a model of Phanan pandanus handicraft design that has not yet been imitated by others. The aim is to use Phanan pandanus to create household furniture and respond to market need, both nationally and internationally.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The three research objectives of this investigation are: 1) to study the background of Phanan pandanus woven handicrafts; 2) to study the problems encountered in development of Phanan pandanus woven handicrafts for the furniture industry; 3) to find out ways to develop appropriate designs of pandanus handicrafts for promoting the creative-based economy.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative research. The researcher has selected 3 target provinces where Phanan pandanus woven handicrafts have been produced on a wider scale. These 3 provinces are Trang, Krabi and Satun. One Phanan pandanus woven handicraft group was purposively selected from each province, making 3 groups all together in 3 provinces. The procedures to be undertaken in accordance with the objectives of this research comprise 3 steps. The data collection methods were review of information in academic literature, which are documented in the introduction and discussion sections of the paper, participant and non-participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews with pandanus weavers and business owners and a workshop with the same individuals to conclude an appropriate development method. All data was validated using data triangulation methods and analysed by inductive analysis. The results are now presented as a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the study reveal that the three weaving groups have similar ways of establishing their tasks. This kind of skill has been transferred from ancestors, who trained them without any formal way of learning through textbooks but rather accumulation of skills from learning by doing. In terms of forming their weaving groups, they formerly started with small

groups and later on expanded into big groups with more members. Each group has been initiated for more than 15 years, and these 3 groups have all been rewarded by the community for their accuracy and production standards. Each group has 20-30 members who are older than 40 years, with educational levels ranging from Pratom 6 (upper primary) to Mathayom 6 (upper secondary). Their main occupations are rubber plantation and farming. Every group produces similar products for sale in Bangkok and neighboring provinces. Every group member earns from 2,500 to 6,000 baht per month.

In designing the model for Phanan Pandanus handicrafts for the furniture industry in promotion of creative-based economy, it was found that the main problem is the lack of experienced outstanding designers. Most of the designers in each group tend to do their own designs or look for designs in journals or newspapers. Experienced designers are unaffordable, since the groups receive little support from the government sectors. These problems have caused the group members to be less alert to development of better products and none of the groups are able to produce large quantities of woven products due to the lack of effective equipment and materials.

It was concluded that appropriate designs for development should concentrate on three concerned necessities. The first concern is the design of handicraft models that can reflect both long-term and short-term needs. Through short-term designing, it is recommended that experienced professional designers or designers from furniture factories are invited to construct the designs. As for long-term design, group members should be trained to enable them to design their own products. Another recommendation is to support the idea of sending family members to take courses in Phanan Pandanus handicraft design for the furniture industry. Besides, the support of best practices using local wisdom may be integrated into the present weaving technology. The outstanding handicrafts of the designers in every target area should be put up for competitions in order to select new, up-to-date innovations as handicraft models.

In terms of administration and management, an appropriate method for handicraft development should include the building of trust and belief among the group members themselves. They should also be encouraged to promote the identity of their outstanding products. Besides, a management system in support of the increased products should be considered in order to

develop a network for those who feel interested to join the Phanan Pandanus handicraft community. This will enable groups to distribute their products rapidly on a wider scale and meet production standards.

In terms of the adoption of Phanan Pandanus handicrafts for making furniture, it is recommended that Phanan Pandanus should not be used alone due to its softness. Supplementary types of other products should be integrated to add strength to the furniture, such as wood, iron, aluminum, cloth and fabric.

The background of every Phanan Pandanus woven handicraft group was found to be very similar. All groups have been established for over 15 years and knowledge and skills have been transferred from ancestors. Every group has been developed from a small group and has progressed into a larger group. This corresponds to a research study on the development of community creative economy through Krajoed handicraft production by Kanlaya Kaewpradit [3]. Kaewpradit described the history of local Krajoed handicraft wisdom in Southern communities as being significantly related to community status, causing two directions of local wisdom. The local wisdom of Krajoed handicrafts has long been in existence and it can be seen in the communities where there is an availability of Krajoed growing naturally. According to this, people have realised the opportunity in having this natural Krajoed resource and agreed that they should make use of it to gain more benefit for the community. This idea is also related to the studies of Phra Rattakorn Sook Ouan who analyzed local wisdom in terms of conservational development and rehabilitation of earthenware handicrafts for community economy in Sisaket Province [4]. He found that the transfer model of local wisdom has been achieved through demonstration, trial and error. The parents themselves undertake their roles in verbal teaching and telling their children the right way of production. The community villagers act as gurus and then transfer their knowledge and technical skill to family members as appropriate to their lifestyle.

The climate conditions and the national dimension impact the production of Phanan pandanus handicrafts. Communities where this kind of handicraft is produced are mostly located near to the sea because of the availability of Phanan resources. This information also confirms the research findings of Kanlaya Kaewpradit, who revealed that the local wisdom relating to Southern Krajoed handicrafts has been caused by the factors of the natural environment, the location of the

communities and the weather where the community is located [3]. Therefore, the community are given the opportunity to make use of their natural resources and to adapt the according to their lifestyle.

When talking about the problems with development of Phanan Pandanus handicraft design for the furniture industry, it was concluded that the main problem of Phanan Pandanus woven handicraft production in every group is how to design the handicraft models. This is due to a lack of professional designers, no support from the government sector, no alertness of the group members in producing new products, no ability to produce large quantities of the product and no skill to maintain better product standards. These problems all agree with the research findings of Kaewpradit because she revealed that the design models of the Krajoed products were not up-to-date and their qualities were not yet standardized [3]. Besides, the steps of production and sales were not outstanding but followed the old sales channels and markets. Only non-local groups followed new sales and distribution channels. This information corresponds to the research findings of Sathita Yadewa who undertook a study of a Krajoed mat-making group in Ampur Kuon Muang, Songkhla Province [5]. She studied about the appropriate ways to develop Krajoed products and revealed that the target group had many problems regarding the lack of appropriate knowledge and skill in improving the products. Besides, there were no appropriate up-to-date equipment and materials for production, a lack of effective administration and group management and a lack of continued development, which caused the production to fail to meet the needs of the community.

In terms of the methods and guidelines for developing the design model for Phanan Pandanus handicrafts for the furniture industry, it was concluded that there were some short-term and long-term methods that could be implemented. In the short-term, professional designers or designers from furniture factories should be hired and invited to help design appropriate models that are of interest to the consumers. In the long-term, training of designers should be organized for the group members to enable them to have skill in making their own handicraft designs. Besides, group members may also encourage their family members to attend the training courses. In addition, competitive activities concerning product design may be organized. In terms of the administration and management, the group should increase production quantities by controlling the quality and standard of the

products. These suggestions are in compliance with a research study done by Wipakaew Parnkan, who analysed guidelines for development of bamboo handicrafts for promoting community economy in Nakhon Ratchasima [6]. She revealed that there were four guidelines for development of bamboo handicrafts: (1) raw material development, (2) production development, (3) product design development, (4) development of product quality. This study was also in accordance with the results of Phra Maha Chutipol Chatikorn, who undertook a study on Morn Kit (Kit Pillows) at Ban Sri Tarn and their development as an imported product [7]. He revealed that there were 2 appropriate guidelines for development of bamboo handicrafts: 1) the needs of marketplace, 2) development of product design. In his study, he also revealed that there were four guidelines for development of products design. These were 1) attending study visits to other production venues, 2) applying the knowledge and experience gained from the study visit to improve the products of the group, 3) producing products according to the needs of consumers and 4) undertaking market surveys and then improving the products of the group.

However, according to this research study on development of Phanan pandanus handicraft design for the furniture industry in promotion of creative-based economy, it was revealed that the design should be developed to include the integration of other materials for the production instead of using the pandanus handicraft alone. Adding other materials would make the product more attractive, more valuable and more sustainable. Through the said development, the researchers raised a summary of information regarding the samples of 5 pieces of outstanding furniture. These were a table, chair, partition, bed headboard and lamp. The researchers also described the principles of production and the principles of model designing. These were the application, safety, strength, convenience, attractiveness, worth, price, ease of repair, raw materials, production process and transport methods. These descriptions were found to be in compliance with the opinions of Vatcharin Charungjitsoonthorn on the design and handicraft production process to raise economic value [8]. He revealed that there were 6 guidelines for development of the handicraft products. These were 1) the value of local identity and culture, 2) material and production process appropriate to the locality, 3) interest and attractiveness of the product, 4) convenience for carrying, 5) reasonable price and 6)

usefulness of the designed product. These descriptions also complied to the research findings of Rewat Sooksikarn, who found from his study on development of Krajoed handicrafts in Nakhon Sri Thammarat that the producers were in need of applying the integration of other kinds of materials for design development, such as banana string, Lipao material and other local raw materials [9].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings showed that the background and current status of Phanan pandanus weaving in each target group was similarly initiated as an ancestral legacy. Learning skill was acquired through observation without any particular textbooks. The learning activity was first started with small groups, which were extended into large groups with 20-30 members. The average age of group members is 40 years and older, with educational levels between Prathom 6 (upper primary) to Mathayom 6 (upper secondary). The products made by each group are similar. In terms of the marketplace, each group aims at the domestic market. Each member earns approximately 2,500-6,000 baht per month. In terms of the problems of Phanan pandanus weaving, handicraft production mainly suffers from a lack of designers, lack of support from the government sector, unaffordable costs of hiring designers, lack of creativity in producing new products and inability to produce large quantities of products due to time consumption. According to the research findings, there are 3 guideline areas for development of Phanan pandanus handicraft design for the furniture industry in promotion of creative-based economy: (1) Guidelines for development of pandanus handicraft design; (2) Guidelines for management; (3) Guidelines for the incorporation of other equipment and materials. This research concluded that the products being developed through the local wisdom and local materials, both in the past and the current time, may have less economic value. However, if the products are promoted and their designs developed, the production of Phanan pandanus handicrafts for the furniture industry should improve. The best products should integrate the use of other additional materials apart from the Phanan pandanus, which can increase the sustained value of the economy, both physically and culturally.

The major limitation with a study of this small-scale nature is the limited applicability elsewhere. For this reason, the researchers have some recommendations for the application of this research:

1. Every sector and organization concerned with the promotion of natural resource conservation as well as development of local wisdom may adopt the outcomes of this study for identifying appropriate strategies to promote local occupational development.

2. Provincial industrial entrepreneurs and the Community Industrial Standard Office, as well as other concerned sectors related to the planning for development of folk handicrafts, may apply this information for increasing product value.

3. The Office of the Provincial Community Development, Provincial Industrial Office and Department of International Industrial Promotion may use these research findings to promote trade at a community level and an international level.

Technology Phra Chomklao Chaokhuntaarn,
Ladkrabang.

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