

Treechada Chotiratanapinun

The Emerging and Existence of Sustainable Craft Practices: Case Studies from Indonesia and Thailand

Like most countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Thailand have experienced rapid industrial and urban development and have been greatly affected by the globalisation of capitalism. Folk wisdom and indigenous knowledge have played a less and less important role in making a living within these modernised societies. For a number of craft practitioners to survive the modern world, they have gradually gone through the transition to modernity as they have developed their techniques, created the new aesthetic quality and adapted their perception on marketing. But to pursue the sustainable future, there are a number of factors involved and things vary from one place to another since contexts are different.

Known for its rich arts and craft traditions of woodcarving and batik textile prints, Indonesia is one of the world's biggest craft exporters. Crafted goods labelled 'Made in Indonesia' are available in retails around the world, including Habitat and Harrods in the UK and Neiman Marcus and Target in the States. Unfortunately, natural resources in Indonesia have been exploited for decades by numerous industries, and its various craft industries have produced a number of different distortions in the economic, environmental, social and cultural welfare of the involved communities. While the government continues to focus on cheap-labour policy, questions on sustainability have been raised.

In Thailand, there has always been a close link between craft practices and social equity. Originally, a number of craft industries were widely operated as part of rural development projects nationwide. These cottage industries have enhanced sustainable livelihoods of grass-root practitioners, people with a disability and those who are ethnic minority. Nowadays traditional craft products are not as popular as the old days because Thai people have recently embraced a more contemporary, sophisticated sense of beauty – a combination between modern design, local craft techniques and natural materials. To move towards a creative economy, crafts in many areas have been revitalised and elevated to a new level by designers and marketing people.

This paper presents 3 case studies, 2 from Indonesia and 1 from Thailand. These case studies look at the issues around the notion of sustainability that relate to the local, contemporary craft practices, including:

1. When Balinese Culture Meets Globalisation: Cultural Artefacts versus Productive Communities
2. The Power Structure within the Indonesian Craft Industries
3. Doi Tung Development Project: The Craft Practices for Sustainable Livelihoods of Ethnic Minority in the North of Thailand