

‘Well-Being’ beyond ‘Well-Made’: Craft-Friendly Cases of Cultural Crafts Products in South Korea

This paper explores current Korean cases in the craft sector focusing on cultural crafts products (CCP) through the idea of sustainability. For Suojanen, sustainability in the craft sector balances cultural, social, economic and ecological sustainability.¹ This paper manifests these aspects through CCP of Korea. However, this analysis suggests a way for a co-owned future of craft because we all stand on the same horizon of the new civilisation beyond the 20th century.

This paper illustrates what ‘cultural crafts product’ means within the scope of craft as symbols playing a crucial role that resists cultural uniformity in globalisation, and representing cultural identity via distinctive locality. UNESCO states that ‘there should not be an internationally accepted definition for cultural crafts products’; yet they are products created by artisans either by hand or with the help of tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component to present the essential value of the final product with raw materials from sustainable resources in terms of quantity and usability in crafts features.² It varies from limited editions by craftspeople-based art to works made by small-sized enterprises. In this paper, CCP is defined as a product combining cultural values and crafts, and a superior concept to tourism products for both tourists and native people in order to improve their lives. This concept of CCP provides new value in sustainable craft.

This paper elucidates how CCP can align craft with contemporaneous affairs of the 21st century, such as ecological concerns. The ecological theory is a direct drive to re-estimate craft in terms of material and use because craft has represented sustainable and eco-friendly lifestyles. Focusing on ecological sustainability of crafts within a ‘craft-friendly’ frame, the present status of Korean governmental support (KOEKO and KCPF), CCP in harmony with nature (e.g. recycling), and emerging green consumers, are examined through in-depth interviews and observation. Cultural sustainability, which stands for development in harmony with artisan and consumer culture and values, is revealed through CCP using Korean traditional skills such as natural dyeing and lacquering. Importantly, among innovative makers, new approaches that apprehend crafts as meaningful social activities and valuable experiences beyond well-made objects encourage craft’s social sustainability. Both craft-therapy targeting the disabled or elderly, and child education toward anthroposophy and creative play, such as the hand-made Waldorf dolls of non-toxic material,³ are exemplified to what extent craft can be socially expanded.⁴

Through the cases of Korean crafts, this paper concludes that possibilities of economic sustainability exist via CCP for the global niche market, and value in social welfare is suggested for further study. For social domiciliation of the ‘craft-friendly,’ well-established consumer studies in craft and craft policy are needed.

¹ Miettinen, Satu (ed.) (2007). *Design Your Action*. Finland: Taik.

² Definition adopted by the UNESCO/ITC Symposium 1997.

³ Sealey, Maricristin (2001). *Kinder Dolls*. U.K: Hawthorn-Press.

⁴ Choi, Bum (2006). *Eyes on Korean Design*. S. Korea: Ahn-graphics.