

An Overview of the Issues facing the Craft Industry and the Potential for Design, with a Case Study in Upper Northern Thailand

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This paper presents initial findings from an ongoing research project that explores opportunities for design to contribute to a sustainable future for the craft industry. The research asks “Are there potential areas for design to make a positive contribution to the craft industry in upper northern Thailand to help ensure its viable future, and if so, in what areas can design best contribute?” The research consists of three main components: (i) background research into crafts; (ii) identification of a specific study site; (iii) investigation of craft practices, products and issues of concern in the context of the study site. Background research includes: persistence of crafts in a period of Mass Production; principles of craft today; genres of crafts; relationship of crafts with tradition and design. The upper northern region of Thailand is identified as a major craft production area, with historical, cultural and socio-economic significance. Craft in this region are classified and the challenges for design and design management are identified. It is found that there is a need to integrate: (i) ‘designers’ and ‘craft-makers’ in practice; and (ii) traditions in commercial craft-product design.

Keywords : Design; Craft; Sustainability; Thailand

Introduction

Contemporary understandings of sustainability have long been linked to 'the local' and ideas of localization (Van der Ryn and Cowan, 1996, p.68; Scruton, 2012, p.36, p.71). In a time of globalized mass-production and product distribution, traditional crafts offer an example of long-standing 'local' approaches to material culture that are often socially, environmentally and economically reifying. However, around the world, traditional crafts, which are often located in rural areas, are in decline as younger people migrate to urban centres for work and the attraction of 'modern' lifestyles. Design researchers that are examining the relationship between *design for sustainability* and product design are increasingly looking towards traditional crafts, and their revitalization (Nugraha, 2012), as a way of manifesting functional and decorative goods that are: environmentally responsible; that provide skilled, satisfying employment opportunities i.e. 'good work' (Schumacher, 1980); that offer income opportunities in ways that inherently 'internalize' true costs (rather than externalizing costs as is often the case in today's mass-production systems e.g. Nair, 2011, p.52); and which produce a material culture that is culturally significant and meaningful.

This paper presents the initial findings from an ongoing research project that explores opportunities for design to contribute to a sustainable future for the craft industry in upper northern Thailand. The key question is: *"Are there potential areas for design to make a positive contribution to the craft industry in upper northern Thailand to help ensure its viable future, and if so, in what areas can design best contribute?"* The research consists of three main components: (i) background research into crafts in general; (ii) identification of a specific study site; and (iii) investigation of craft practices, products and issues of concern in the context of the study site. The background research examines the persistence of crafts in a period of mass production and consumerism; principles of crafts in the twentieth-first century; classification of crafts into three main groups; and relationships of crafts with tradition, human intimacy and design. Major craft producers worldwide are identified and Thailand is addressed as a country with crafts in decline. However, the upper northern region is highlighted as a major craft-based production area in the country, with important roles in terms of its historical, cultural and socio-economic significance. This research provides information on craft classification in the region and the challenges to design for the development of craft enterprises. In conclusion, it is found that there is a need to integrate: (i) 'designers' and 'craft-makers' in practice; and (ii) traditions in commercial craft-product design. Further research into sustainability is needed, as crafts are claimed to be a key to sustainable development in the twentieth-first century, so as to make a strong connection between crafts and design for sustainability – from the past to the present.

Terms and Definitions in the Research Context

Craft(s)

'Craft', as a noun, means an activity involving skill in making things by hand. In the plural, 'crafts' refer to objects or artefacts. As a verb, 'to craft' means making or processing something by hand (Macmillan Dictionary, 2009; Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the term 'craft' began to be widely used to refer to handmade decorative arts; the Arts and Crafts movement and the writing of John Ruskin and William Morris, which critiqued the consequences of industrialization, were especially influential in these years (Shinner, ed. By Alfoldy, 2007, p.34).

Handicraft(s)

The term 'handicraft' has a similar meaning to craft(s); however, it is mostly used to refer to 'decorative / beautiful' objects (Macmillan Dictionary, 2009; Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides a definition of '*handicrafts*' as follows:

“These can be defined as products, which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Mechanical tools may be used as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Handicrafts are made from raw materials and can be produced in unlimited numbers. Such products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.” (UNESCO, 2001, emphasis as per original)

In this research, the authors prefer the term 'craft', which is more generally used internationally, rather than 'handicraft'. However, in the context of Thailand, the term 'handicraft', namely 'Hat-Ta-kham' or 'Ngan-Fee-Mue', is widely used because it conveys a set of words that bring 'hand' and 'action or doing' together; saying 'craft' sounds incomplete in the local vocabulary and usually articulates skill.

Design

'Design', as a noun, has various meanings: a drawing that shows what something will look like when it is made; a process of deciding how something will be made, will work and look like; a pattern that decorates something; a plan or idea; the study of how to make things, especially for shape and appearance (Macmillan Dictionary, 2009; Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). As a verb, 'to design' means: to decide upon the appearance and function of thing by making a detailed drawing of it (Oxford, 2012). Design practitioners generally describe 'design' as an idea and a process of how we think about users' needs and wants that will become tangible – a concrete expression of design outcomes (Hunter, 2010; Walker, 2011, p.119) in various forms, e.g. packaging, home furnishings, websites and street furniture. In relation to crafts, this paper will use the term 'design' specifically to refer to the areas of *industrial design* or *product design* and *design management*.

Research Method

The project aims to deliver effective design management/strategies to contribute to a future for the craft industry that is in accord with the principles of sustainability. In the first stage, the research method is based primarily on a literature review supplemented by the acquisition of qualitative data from key informant interviews among crafts stakeholders including craft enterprise owners, craftspeople, retailers, customers and government and NGO representatives. This primary research data will be analyzed and coded to develop conclusions and recommendations for design and design management strategies.

BACKGROUND TO CRAFTS

The Perseverance of Crafts in the Era of Mass production,¹ and Consumerism²

For over three centuries, it has been said that crafts are on the verge of extinction, affected by the legacy of the Industrial Revolution³, the ensuing development of mass-

¹ Mass Production, ca. 1901-2000 (Walker, 2011a).

² The term "Consumerism" was first used in 1915.

³ Industrial Revolution, ca. 1750-1900 (Walker, 2011a).

production technologies, and the disinterestedness of high modernists, particularly in Europe and North America, in, for example, traditional pottery, yardage weaving, basketry, and boat making, together with the end of the guilds (Mohanty, 1990; Alfoldy, 2007, p.3; Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.6). Particularly in the nineteenth century, manufacturing structures changed rapidly and significantly: (i) from domestic handwork for the family, to community-based and outwork production for others, and later to mechanized manufacture; (ii) from small- to large-scale production for greater quantities; (iii) a new emphasis on manufacturing goods for export and trade (Mohanty, 1990; Bowie, 1992; Walker, 2011a). Mass production stimulated the rise of consumerism, deliberately going beyond the basic needs for survival; factory-made products became abundant in the marketplace and consequently crafts, which were more time consuming and more costly to produce, declined sharply (Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.6). During the twentieth century, the expansion of this kind of industrialised production became problematic in terms of its social and environmental effects, including unemployment, urban migration, the overuse of natural resources, consumerism and disposal via landfill (Schumacher, 1993; Walker, 2011a). By the late twentieth century, achieving socio-economic justice and environmental responsibility had become major concerns (Schumacher, 1993; Walker, 2006, p.17). Ironically, crafts re-entered the marketplace in response to consumerist values, particularly gifts and home furnishings (Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.6).

Crafts in the Twenty-First Century – A Key to Sustainable Development

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the concept of sustainability – a way of living responsibly in terms of environmental issues, social justice and economic equity – has become generally and positively recognized by governments, business and society as a whole (Walker, 2006, p.17; Bhamra, 2007). Crafts are identified as a key strategy for sustainable development that can provide opportunities for employment, especially in rural communities, as well as contributing to economic growth and environmental stewardship (European Conference of Crafts and Small Businesses, 1994, 1997; UNIDO, 2007; UNCTAD, 2008). The European Conference of Crafts and Small Businesses (1994, 1997) also identified handicrafts as a feasible focal point for business ideas, market competition, innovation and economic growth.

Genres of Craft Consortiums from Past to Present

Crafts can be broadly classified into three main groups: 1. traditional (conventional), 2. contemporary and 3. modern (neo-) (Alfoldy, 2007). *Traditional crafts* have recorded multicultural history, especially of societies, in the form of objects (Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.6). *Contemporary crafts* are guided by art and/or design – a combination of aesthetics, individuality, function, customer service, problem-solving, rational analysis and technology (Ihatsu, ed. by Harrod, 1997, p.303). *Modern crafts* can be “characterized by decorative and vernacular attributes as well as maintaining the political badge of handmade” (Greenhalgh, cited in Alfoldy, 2007, Foreword).

Relationship between Crafts and Tradition

The power of tradition has been identified as a core component of the persistence of crafts (Harrod, 1997). Craft objects can be suggestive of what has been termed ‘traditions of medium specificity’, that is, the materials, skills and technologies that evolved before the advent of mass-production; these play a role in seamlessly connecting the past to the present (Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, pp.5, 19-20).

“Craft looks to the past for techniques, visual cues, meanings, and ideas. Even today, craft depends on the continuous revival of pre-industrial technologies. ...Craftspeople also look to historical production for reference and inspiration. ...Craft looks at society as a continuum, not a new invention. A firm connection to the past is both possible and desirable. ...To craft, tradition is not necessarily backward, corrupt, or a restraining force in civilization; it is not an anchor, but a rudder.” (Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007: 19-20, emphasis as per original)

Relationship between Crafts and Human Intimacy

William Morris, the English reformer, suggested that pre-industrial technologies, i.e. handmade objects, should be preserved for their social usefulness, essential humanity and nature (Harrod, 1997; Metcalf, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.25). Crafts can create a sense of intimacy and personal value for their makers and users, especially through materials with functional use and bodily touch (Ihatsu, ed. by Harrod, 1997, p.304; Walker, 2006; Neidderer & Townsend, 2010). Crafts always entail the properties of specific materials, either a single material such as wood, glass, metal, clay, paper, plastic or stone – or materials in combination. Materials are especially important to the appearance of crafts (Adamson, 2007, p.39; Bassett, 2010). Craft products that use different choices of materials include, for example,⁴ wool or silk scarves, willow or bamboo baskets, wicker or wooden furniture, glass or ceramic tableware etc. Miller (2009) suggests that crafts are able to influence social, cultural and philosophical values through a human relationship with materiality – either how craft workers make them or how people use those objects (in Neidderer & Townsend, 2010, p.5). With respect to environmental considerations, Walker (2006, pp.48-50) suggests that an object that is a deeply meaningful personal possession can be enduring – resulting in reductions in consumption and disposal via landfill.

Relationship between Craft and Design

Craft is situated between art and design (Ihatsu, ed. by Harrod, 1997; Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007). In a changing world, traditional crafts have two potential directions for endurance, towards ‘industrial design’ and towards ‘fine art’ – hence the emergence of ‘craft-design’ and ‘art-craft’ in recent decades (Ihatsu, ed. by Harrod, 1997, p.303). Four factors that bring these directions together are hand, material, mastery and use (Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.39). Use (functions of objects, how objects serve users) is an area common to both industrial design and craft – more specifically, physiological needs – sitting, eating, warmth via clothing, and adornment (Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.40). Craftspeople who include design in their process tend to call themselves ‘designer-craftsmen’ or ‘designer-makers’ (Ihatsu, ed. by Harrod, 1997, p.302; Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.41). Such craftspeople also tend to focus on exploring a particular area of materials, whereas conventional industrial designers consider any number of materials to solve problems (Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, pp.39-40). With respect to the handmade factor, it is the only area within the three main ‘craft’ groups, mentioned above, where the use of other tools, for example CAD, CAM or fabrication teams, is considered acceptable for production (Shiner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.39).

IDENTIFYING THE STUDY SITE – WHERE CRAFTS EXIST

Major Craft Producers Worldwide

According to UNCTAD (2010, p.128), total exports of all art and craft goods reached US\$ 32,323M in 2008, a rise from US\$ 17,503M in 2002. A significant proportion of exports comes from developing countries, accounting for US\$ 20,715M in 2008,

⁴ Domer, 1997; UNESCO Bangkok, 2001; Adamson, 2007; Bassett, 2010; Traidcraft, 2011.

approximately 1.8 times greater than for developed countries (UNCTAD, 2010, p.128). Crafts made in Asia have a leading position in the global market, dominated by China (UNCTAD, 2008, pp.116-117). Among developing economies, the top ten exporters in art and craft goods are China, Hong Kong, Turkey, Korea, India, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Egypt and Pakistan, in that order, whereas the leading exporters among developed economies are Belgium, US, Germany, Italy, France, Netherlands, the UK, Spain, Austria and Japan, respectively (UNCTAD, 2010, p.141, data available to 2008).

Thailand – A Country with Crafts in Decline

According to Cohen (2000, pp.9-10) and Wherry (2008), old Siam (the former name of Thailand) was known for its sumptuous ceremonies and ornate arts and crafts, this relates predominantly to tradition. In Thailand today, art and craft production is a visible industry contributing to the country's national economic and social development (UNCTAD, 2008, p.110), and providing employment to over two million workers of whom half work full time (UNESCO, 2009, cited by Howkins, 2010, p.29). Over recent decades, globalization and trade have penetrated into Thailand via imports of manufactured goods and through tourism, resulting in changes in Thai cultural traditions, social practices and lifestyles – including the making of crafts (Cohen, 2000; Wherry, 2008). The decline of craft production is particularly severe in the central region, while it is less pervasive in the northern, north-eastern and southern regions (Cohen, 2000). In some isolated areas in these regions, craftspeople continue to produce items using the same techniques and designs as their ancestors, especially in the hill tribes of the north and in the north-east of the country. Nevertheless, some traditional crafts are in decline, for example basketry in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai provinces (Cohen, 2000). In addition, the situation of craft production and their markets, particularly *commercial crafts*, have been unstable due to a variety of changing conditions stemming from globalization. Change is found, especially, in the structure of production processes, in the way that components of the process, e.g. raw materials and techniques, are disassociated from traditional spatial, cultural and social connections to locality (Cohen, 2000, pp.20-21). Involvement with exports lead to radical “heterogenization” and to an absence of a relationship between the cultural background of the artisans and their craft products; thereby craft producers are dependent on or unfamiliar with constantly changing international contexts and demand for craft commodities, especially customer taste and preferences (Cohen, 2000, p.20). However, research in this specific area is lacking – “...only [a] few researchers conducted any systematic work on recent developments in Thai arts and crafts” (Cohen, 2000, p.1); some groups of Thais see crafts in commercialization as “an unretrievable debasement or corruption of Thai crafts, not worthy of serious attention” (Cohen, 2000, p.1). There is a critical need to integrate traditions in commercial craft-product design with design management (for examples, skills, materials, stakeholders, markets, retails, customers, etc.) in order to address sustainability agendas effectively. The relationship between design for sustainability and localization is critical – though this is neither well understood nor much emphasized in the field of commercial craft-product design.

Upper Northern Region of Thailand – Specific Region for Study

This region plays a significant role in terms of historical, cultural and socio-economic aspects. It includes eight provinces – Chiang Mai, Lampang, Lamphun, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae and Nan. Historically, it used to constitute the Kingdom of Lanna, for more than seven hundred years from the thirteenth century, thereby establishing a unique identity of art and culture, known as Lanna (Lannaworld.com, 2006). Much of this identity has been retained through traditional ways of living, including the making and diversity of crafts, especially by ethnic groups and hill tribes, thus contributing to its renowned identity and the success of handicrafts in Thailand (Suriya et

al., 2007; Ministry of Culture, 2009; OSMEP, 2010). Crafts in this region have served local consumption and knowledge transfer for generations, cultural traditions and income generation as an alternative to urban migration (Bowie, 1992; Humphreys, 1999; Cohen, 2000; Wherry, 2008). The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (OSMEP) (2010) identifies the upper northern region of Thailand as the area strongest for handicraft-based production, with a high density of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

INVESTIGATION INTO CRAFTS IN UPPER NORTHERN THAILAND

Classification of Crafts

This section poses the question: “*What do the handicrafts in this region encompass?*” This suggests different ways to look at crafts: (i) material experience; (ii) active skills; (iii) artwork (Adamson, 2007, p.4). Other ways of considering crafts appear in other sources of literature,⁵ and have emerged through initial interviews⁶: These include: (iv) market value; and (v) market structure and customers. This section gathers information from a literature review on the classification of handicrafts and presents them as an inventory (see Table 1).

- **Materials** – these encompass animal-based materials such as silk worm; plant-based materials such as wood, bamboo, wicker, cotton and mulberry paper; ceramic and earthenware; gemstones; metals; and synthetics such as recycled plastic (DIP, 1999a; DIP, 1999b; NOHMEX, 2009; Bassett, 2010).
- **Skills & processes** – *Sketching*: drawing, pattern-making; *Forming*: casting, modelling, moulding, pottery-making, sculpting, turning; *Decorating*: carving, embossing, engraving, etching, printing, weaving, yarn colouring; *Finishing*: gilding, lacquering, painting, surface inlaying (Fine Arts Department, 2006; Department of the Ten Crafts, Maehongson, 2009).
- **Products** – beads, candles, Christmas decorations, furniture, games, gardenware, garments, gifts, home decoration, household, jewelry, lacquerware, miniatures, painting, potpourri, souvenirs, stationery, toiletries, toys, umbrellas (DIP, 1999a; DIP, 1999b; NOHMEX, 2009; Howkins, 2010; DITP, 2012).
- **Market Value**

Appearance, production and quality are key to justifying the value and types of crafts in the marketplace; the relationships between markets and products are identified as follows (UNIDO, 2007, p.29):

– ‘*High-End Market*’ and ‘*Traditional Fine Crafts*’

Fine crafts demonstrate ethnic, traditional and cultural heritage and are considered to be works of art. They are often produced as unique or one-off pieces and may be exhibited in museums or galleries, or purchased by collectors. In short, high-end crafts have high value but are produced in low numbers.

– ‘*Medium-High Market*’ and ‘*Artisanal Crafts*’

In producing artisanal crafts, artisans may work with design consultants to adapt their work to meet market requirements. Historical background and ethnic

⁵ *Literature review*: Bowie, 1992; Humphreys, 1999; Cohen, 2000; Wherry, 2006; UNIDO, 2007; OSMEP, 2009; DITP, 2012.

⁶ *Initial interviews*: Sangkhawuttichaikul, 2011; Jutidharabongse, 2012.

appearance are retained through the use of traditional elements. Large-volume production may be possible if planned. Outlets include speciality stores, exhibitions and design centres.

– *'Low-Medium Market' and 'Commercial Crafts'*

Commercial crafts are made in traditional ways, but adapted to suit buyers' preferences with support from mainstream buyers or designers. Large volumes can be produced for mass markets. Outlets include speciality stores, exhibitions, design centres, lifestyle shops, importers, tourist shops and mainstream buyers.

– *'Low Market' and 'Manufactured / Mass-Production Crafts'*

At the lower end, commercial so-called 'crafts' are mass produced in large quantities, using machines or large networks of artisans. They reflect trends, not traditions, though they retain some ethnic appearance. They are designed specifically to be distributed through outlets such as tourist shops, mainstream buyers and global chains. *Such mass-produced 'crafts' are excluded from the scope of this research because they are not true crafts.*

▪ **Market Structure and Customers**

Considering the market structure of crafts, Sangkhawuttichaikul (2011) notes that three significant markets are local, tourist (sub-divided into local and foreign) and exports. Jutidharabongse (2012) advises consideration of consumer channels. In the larger context there are two main market channels – domestic and for export. Moreover, the export market is subdivided into indirect exports (tourist market) and direct exports (shipment to overseas customers). Crafts largely flourish in the tourism and leisure markets (Howkins, 2007; Wherry, 2008). However, Cohen (2000, p.20), after continuous research on commercial crafts for 20 years, suggests that the domestic market is the principal market for commercial craft products, especially Thai urban middle-class customers with a taste for 'traditional' craft products. Other domestic customers are tourists, middlemen and shopkeepers (Cohen, 2000, p.15). Foreign tourists prefer objects that are useful, decorative or otherwise suit their lifestyle, while being less concerned with authenticity or tradition (Cohen, 2000, p.20). Suriya (2007, pp.2, 4-5) notes that souvenir products are sold in significant numbers to foreign tourists in Thailand. Humphreys (1999, p.57) reveals that female expatriates in Bangkok are also primary supporters of craft organizations, especially Japanese, British and American. UNIDO (2007, p.32) reports that crafts continue to grow in global markets through exports. The largest craft-importing countries are those in the European Union, the USA and Japan. At the regional level, China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia are key importers (OSMEP, 2009).

Table 1: Inventory of Crafts Classification in Upper Northern Thailand

<i>Materials</i> ⁷	<i>Skills & Processes</i> ⁸	<i>Products</i> ⁹	<i>Market Value</i> ¹⁰	<i>Market Structure</i> ¹¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal-based • Plant-based • Fabric / Textiles (silk & cotton) • Bamboo & wicker • Wood • Mulberry paper • Ceramic & earthenware • Gem stones • Metal • Natural synthetics • Synthetics • Recycle 	<p>Sketching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing • Pattern-making <p>Forming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casting • Modelling • Moulding • Pottery-making • Sculpting • Turning <p>Decorating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carving • Embossing • Engraving • Etching • Printing • Weaving • Yarn colouring <p>Finishing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gilding • Lacquering • Painting • Surface inlaying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beads • Candles • Christmas deco • Furniture • Games • Garden ware • Garments • Gifts • Home decoration • Household • Jewelry • Lacquer-ware • Miniatures • Painting • Pot-pourri • Souvenir • Stationery • Toiletries • Toys • Umbrellas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-End <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Fine Crafts • Medium-High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artisanal Crafts • Low-Medium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commercial Crafts • Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mass Production crafts 	<p>Customer Channels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic tourist - Foreign tourist - Expatriate • Tourist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic tourist - Foreign tourist • Export <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indirect (tourist) - Direct (shipment to customer abroad) <p>Importing Countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe • USA • Japan • China • Singapore • Hong Kong • Malaysia

Challenges to Design in the Development of Craft Enterprises

▪ Shortages of Skilled Labour and a Need for Skills Development

Craft enterprises face a shortage of skilled labour (Howkins, 2010; SACICT, 2010; OSMEP, 2010). There has been a decline in the number of basket-makers in Maehongson and Chiang Mai (Cohen, 2000). Simultaneously, young women tend to leave local weaving and textile production because of: limited and unreliable markets; impatience with complex, time-consuming and repetitive procedures of production; seeking freedom and financial independence (Humphreys, 1999). For local textile production, it is vital that craft-based organizations run more marketing and design training programmes in order to develop new products from existing skills, as well as to find appropriate markets with lucrative income for the younger generation (Humphreys, 1999, p.62). Woodworking and painting skills will need to be improved in order to meet international standards (Creative Thailand, 2011, p.18). On the other hand, Thai artisans have high skills in welding, jewelry-making and dressmaking, winning many awards in international competitions for best practice (Creative Thailand, 2011, p18). However greater capacity building will be needed to maintain the exceptional level of skills required to compete in globalised markets, specifically in terms of free trade and technology (Laisatraklai in Creative Thailand, 2011, p.5).

⁷ (DIP, 1999a; DIP, 1999b; NOHMEX, 2009; Bassett, 2010)

⁸ (Fine Arts Department, 2006; Department of the Ten Crafts Maehongson, 2009)

⁹ (DIP, 1999a; DIP, 1999b; NOHMEX, 2009; Howkins, 2010; DITP, 2012)

¹⁰ (UNIDO, 2007)

¹¹ (Humphreys, 1999; Cohen, 2000; UNIDO, 2007; OSMEP, 2009; Sangkhawuttichaikul, 2011; Another informant, 2012)

- **Market Information, Customer Preferences, Product Design**

Craft enterprises face a lack of knowledge and information about markets and buyers (Howkins, 2010; SACICT, 2010; OSMEP, 2010). Few companies know how to satisfy distributor or buyer demands, particularly in the tourist and export markets (Howkins, 2010, p.29). A classification of two distinct markets, “internal and external” [domestic and export], is insufficient; several kinds of “public” [markets], reached through export channels, have to be distinguished – for example, domestic tourists, foreign tourists and customer abroad (Cohen, 2000, p.20). There is a need to seek input from designers to help connect craft makers with customers through product design for particular markets (UNIDO, 2007, p.35). Ruskin and Morris initiated this kind of approach in the late nineteenth century, where the contributions of designers and makers become integrated in the development of crafted works. However, designers and makers are often found to be separated in practice (Shinner, ed. by Alfoldy, 2007, p.34). In addition, a lack of clear direction in product design is a root cause of poor customer perceptions (Suriya et al., 2007). From a customer perspective, old-fashioned design, ubiquitous imitations, poor quality, impracticality, low price points and lack of creativity, uniqueness or identity can all contribute to a poor perception of crafts (SACICT, 2010; OSMEP, 2010). To improve the opportunities for enterprises to achieve upper-market value and/or increase their market share, they have been advised to compete on quality, not just on price, through product design (UNIDO, 2007, p.33, OSMEP, 2010; Howkins, 2010, p.40). Products advertised as environmentally friendly and fairly traded can also have an advantage (UNIDO, 2007, p.33). Generally, furniture, home decoration, gifts, toys, garments and jewelry have high market shares (UNIDO, 2007; Ministry of Culture, 2009; OSMEP, 2010). Jewelry and toys are frequently traded, with high volumes of export goods (UNCTAD, 2009, cited by Howkins, 2010, p.20). Carpets, celebration items, yarn products and wickerwork are considered to have greater opportunities to enter global markets (UNCTAD, 2008, p.116).

- **Production and Techniques in Attention for Design**

The production of textiles and wooden furniture is suggested as having potential but in need of special attention for market and business development (UNIDO, 2007; Ministry of Culture, 2009; OSMEP, 2010; Howkins, 2010). Small-scale production gives designers and craft-producers greater flexibility to experiment in product innovation and/or material exploration (Bassett, 2010). A combination of production and distribution activities is very important for crafts if they are to be commercially successful in the market (UNIDO, 2007, p.17). Advanced technology may be introduced to production processes to enhance quality and expand choices of materials (Ryalie, 2009; Bassett, 2010). There are opportunities for ‘Original Equipment Manufacturers’ (OEMs) – manufacturers that produce products or parts for contracted companies or retailers under those contractors’ brand names or rights – to integrate design into their manufacturing processes and develop their own brands and own-designed products (Ryalie, 2009, p.20). This would be a paradigm-shift from OEMs to ODMs – ‘Original Design Manufacturers’.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Three main findings concerning the challenges to design in the development of craft enterprises in Thailand ironically call for a need to integrate the contributions of ‘designers’ and ‘craft-makers’ in practice. In addition, there is a critical need to integrate

traditions in commercial craft-product design with design management, for example, skills, materials, stakeholders, markets, retails and customers. On the other hand, as crafts are mentioned as being key to sustainable development in this era, a strong connection between crafts with design and sustainability has not been made explicit – in this stage of the research. To address sustainability agendas effectively in the next stage, the relationship between *design for sustainability* and localization is critical and has been emphasized in the field of commercial craft-product design – so this is a focus for the next stage of the research. This may be pursued by asking: “How will producing what customers want act to preserve traditional ways of working and sustainable development?”

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