

**Craft Communities in Urban Space, Bangkok: Authenticity,  
\* Transformation and Preservation**

**ชุมชนหัตถกรรมในพื้นที่เมือง กรุงเทพ : ความเป็นของแท้ การเปลี่ยนแปลง และ การอนรักษ์**

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**Abstract**

Handicraft is one of the significant intangible cultural heritages of Thailand as a country of craftsmanship. This study investigates the survival of the handicraft communities in Bangkok, in the context of globalization and industrial thinking in the 2010s. The objective is to study the changes in intangible heritage and in handicraft, related to global culture and economic strategy in the twenty-first century. The research is also contributed to preserving the craft communities in Bangkok.

The study has concentrated on three handicraft communities of Bangkok where mostly the original craftsmen still work. They are Ban Bu community, Pradittorakan community and Ban Batre community which are known as old, craft-based communities. Ban Bu is a bronze craft community which produces the traditional bronze water jars. The Pradittorakan community has also produced handicraft from bronze but in forms of cutlery, with a mini-factory production system rather than the usual behavior of local handicraft production. And lastly, the Ban Batre community works on religious craftwork in the form of the monk's alms bowl which is, apart from its function, an object embedded in national culture through the strong belief in Buddhism.

Site visits and open-ended, in-depth interviews are used for the data collection, to explore those communities regarding their evolution. The key informants are heads of craft houses, craftsmen, local residents, handicraft sellers and buyers, and also the government officers who interact with such communities. The analysis deals with topics of authenticity and nostalgia, craft transformation as luxury craft and souvenir craft, and the possibility of preserving an urban handicraft community.

Result of the study has shown the tendency of the transformation of handicrafts to craft art products in the craft business in Bangkok. The craft occupation and urban space nowadays seem unable to reconcile. However, the survival of craft communities is depended on the local communities themselves.

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## Introduction

Handicrafts are one of the key elements in defining a community's cultural heritage. They are a source of civic pride as evidence of the intellectual life of the community. Handicraft will reflect the identity of a culture, its wealth, level of prosperity of that period of time, including ways of lives and livings (The Thai Junior Encyclopedia Project, 2009). It may thereby express thoughts, dreams, even impressions of the society and place of the people who make it.

Thailand's handicraft tradition was engaged in the elegant accessories and ceremonial objects of royalty, ritual objects related to Buddhism and the temple and, certainly, the household items used in daily life. The early art and craft of Thailand has been revealed as borrowing and adapting from Cham, Khmer and Chinese sources (Warren & Tettoni, 1994). Thai handicrafts are a symbol of the civilization of the country in its struggle against colonialism and in that context had been exhibited internationally. Thai craftsmanship had been introduced to other countries, most notably through its display in La Cour de Versailles in 1686 (Galois, 1971).

We understand that cultural heritage can be defined as both tangible objects and as intangible matters. In the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, *traditional craftsmanship* is defined as one of the categories of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). It is should be noted, however, that handicrafts precincts as intangible cultural heritage have both tangible and intangible characteristics. The products created are tangible artifacts, while the skills that enabled the creative activity are intangible. Therefore, in the cultural heritage precinct, the skills are mainly considered as intangible cultural heritage and the artifact is the associated part.

In addition, both the tangible (craft pieces) and intangible cultural heritage (skill) has a strong relationship with the tangible heritage of places (community). For the most part, handicrafts have the capability to provide a reason for people to stay in a place and preserve their own area and its heritage.

The research has attempted to elicit the impact of globalization and industrial thinking on the handicraft occupation, to understand the changing forms of handicraft of these communities and of the handicraft field. Additionally, in the present situation that globalization has already spread over Bangkok for many years, the research has investigated on the authenticity of each craft communities to emphasize the origin of craft makers and craft

production which helps to analyze the impact of globalization and industrialization more clearly.

The data collection process uses documentary analysis, field observation and in-depth interview. Secondary sources will outline the role of handicrafts in a new paradigm, which will support those primary data collections.

### **Authenticity**

Handicraft is indeed a traditional practice and therefore its original creation and evolution are of significance. The ‘authenticity’ of handicraft relates to ‘the ability to understand (that) the value attributed to the heritage depends on the degree to which information sources about this value may be understood as credible or truthful’ (UNESCO, 2008:21). Authenticity is a tool to describe the integrity of a place, object or activity. Authenticity is expressed in the physical material, collected memory and intangible traditions that remain from the past (ICOMOS, 2002:8, 21). The Operational Guideline (UNESCO, 2008:21) has recommended assessment of authenticity by investigating several aspects such as form and design, uses and functions, materials, traditional technique or even feelings.

Nostalgia is known commonly as a yearning for the past of time, place, circumstance or event. Linda Hutcheon (1998) explained that nostalgia is about emotion, a concept referring to a longing for past memories. Nostalgia ‘...may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal.’ It is to reproducing the favoured old memories provoking the desire to return to that state. She also explained that nostalgia may involve unreal experience of the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. And, paradoxically, in the present time, nostalgia is seen as a key component of contemporary culture today. Nostalgia becomes a new concept associated with nationalism, chauvinism or even innocent forms such as the eating of familiar foods. Nostalgia is an issue related to the authenticity of product for its past and memory of its origin.

As handicrafts are one of cultural product, authenticity and nostalgia concept are the components that make the craftworks appealing to consumers.

### **Globalization and Industrialization**

In the 1990s the term ‘globalization’ began to be applied to the international economy as the result of communication and transportation developments throughout the world. In recent years, the term ‘globalization’ was rapidly growing in use and became a familiar term in most economic activities. Trade and investment are increasingly able to move freely worldwide and borderless.

‘Industrial thinking’ refers mostly to the industrialism which originated in Europe during the past centuries. The industrial revolution had influenced on people around the world because of the transformation of the mode, and relations of production, and the benefits of machine productions. Factory production has become an inescapable force when the modern globalization era has developed. Paul Krugman (1994: 62-78) has explained his ‘Asian economic miracle’ term as the results of industrial thinking, as new technology has been transferred and invested across the continents. Industrialization has allowed cheap production for several goods which now seem affordable to consumers in developing countries. It raised the economic growth rate of Thailand and Southeast Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, more sharply and quickly than in other parts of the world.

Handicraft was also implicated in such change. As handicrafts are hand-made objects and costly to produce in terms of labour time, therefore handicrafts were also pulled into the realm of industrial thinking.

### Cultural Marketing Activities

Many nations now adopt ideas and policies in the name of the “creative economy”, which is about developing and nurturing the creative capacities of a nation to enhance the competitiveness of its goods. This idea began in the United Kingdom in 1997 and has been applied further by the UNCTAD. Terms such as “cultural industry” or “creative industry” have arisen, which basically suggest that the mass industry of the twenty-first century is combined with the cultural value of products in terms of freedom of expression, cultural diversity and economic development (UNCTAD, 2008:11).

As a result, handicrafts are not only involved in industrialism but also have been seen to play a major role in new economic development and have become known as a source of product-generated income in the 21st century.

The corporate sector has reflected the imagination of ‘the mystery of craft’ in recent years. For example, in 2007, Gucci reproduced its famous Jackie bag, called New Jackie, which needed 36 hours of complicated work per piece; Gucci strongly insisted that ‘...It is very important to create this expectation of quality, authenticity and uniqueness. If you lose one of those, you lose the trust and the future. You lose everything that our history had taught us.’ Also Prada has similarly insisted on ‘using crafts to reconnect, intelligently, with its own history’ (Craft Magazine, 2011:44-49).

A most powerful and dynamic event advancing the craft industry was created in the design trade fair as Milan Salone Internazional del Mobile 2009. The fashion house of Fendi cooperated with Design Miami to present an art-like performance event, ‘Craft Punk’. This

event invited international designers to live and create pieces in a specific workplace, to emphasise their innovations that can attract the industry's powerbrokers, though celebrating design crafted by hand (Sheila Kim, 2009). This expression was intended to absolutely declare the power of craft in the contemporary product design business.

Thailand also has moved forward by setting up the National Creative Economy Policy Committee, established in 2010. It started with tasks relating to: cultural heritage, wisdom and biodiversity; art and culture; craftsmanship; media and software; design and creativity; and factor-driven creative economy (Varakorn Samakoses, 2010).

### **Situation of Handicraft Business in Thailand**

Obviously, Thai handicraft today is fully involved in wider trade activities, not only products for local or regional consumption. Duanjeun Poonpol and G., et al., (2004: 72-78) has claimed that these are businesses to earn a profit. This change is because craftspeople today need money for buying other utilities in a modern way of living.

However, this has not been an easy step for Thai craftspeople. In research into craft communities in Bangkok (Withthaya Mekhun, 2007:2), it has been shown that communities adapt themselves to new technology and tools, but the capacity of local business is still inferior. Industrial (factory) production has invested in advanced technology and produced in larger volumes; therefore such companies can get more opportunity in marketing than the local craft communities can.

The following is a story relating to change (or development, as local residents claimed) in one rural craft community. Pimwisa Into (2012), the head of the craft house, explained about the change that happened with the bamboo basketwork business, a famous Thai traditional handicraft of Angthong province. Over the last fifteen years, the traditional bamboo basketwork has been declining because of the old-fashion style. At the same time, there has been the scarcity of the craft materials, bamboo and rattan. Pimwisa refers to a Danish customer offering a job for a new design basket made of plastic strip material which he brought along. Pimwisa decided to respond to such a request as the traditional basket business was nearly at its end. It appeared as a change of material, form, and the process of making, sequentially. However, the community accepted these changes and thereby this has become their occupation until today. Some other communities nearby also became involved.

The case of Sripuran sub district farmwomen's group demonstrated that the craft people may change their cultural and traditional work when the earnings are unsure. It has shown that the cultural business (handicraft) needs to earn a profit and thus culture becomes moveable with unexpected tasks.

Another change in handicraft is via the booming tourism trade of the present, whereby many craftworks are recognized as souvenirs from places we visit. Those may be called ‘tourist handicraft’. Nevertheless, handicrafts become an issue in order to bring a degree of attraction to a village tour by way of experiencing craft activity (Ni-on Sanitwong Na Ayudthaya, 2009).

From the above information, this study has been designed to raise a series of linked, basic questions:

1. To what extent is a sense of tradition and authenticity understood by both locals and the wider public?
2. How have the craft communities in Bangkok faced the problems related to their capital city location, which is different from those of a rural craft community?
3. Does Thai *handicraft* elevate to the higher level implied in the term *craft*?

The background information for each community will be collected from documentary material and by site visit. This includes the history of the places, evolution of the craft community, types of handicraft product, the population and their earnings from craftwork, numbers of craftsperson, handicraft skill and craftsmanship genealogy. Field observation and open-end question were arranged with the communities to observe the current situation and difficulties. According to the objective, the change in intangible cultural heritage related to global culture is explained using qualitative analysis methods.

### **Bangkok Craft Communities**

#### **Ban Bu Community**

Ban Bu is a bronze work handicraft community located on the Thonburi side of Bangkok, along the bank of Khlong Bangkok Noi. The craftsmen believe that their ancestors moved from Ayutthaya following its 1767 destruction. There are eight family names associated in the community. According to the story of the migration, the craftsmen claim that their ancestors brought their craft tools, such as wood blower, lathe, or wood hammer, to their new settlement (Ban Bu) from Ayutthaya.

The handicraft of Ban Bu focused on bronze water jars. The name ‘Bu’ came from the sound of metal beating when craftsmen work on their products. The older people of the community claim that there were almost 50 craft houses in the past. The community was crowded with small houses and no road access, only walkways, therefore the sound of metal beating was clear and gave the community its name.



Figure 1: Pictures of Ban Bu bronze wares

There were two types of craft house: individual craft house and cartel house. The craftsman in an individual craft house can produce bronze water jars by engaging in every process, while the ‘cartel’ house gathers several craftsmen and divided the work according to their specific processes including forming, spinning or polishing.

Their specialty is a process called *thong long hin*, of polishing bronze ware by stone. The stone polishing makes the ware sparkle, taking on a gold-like sheen. The most successful time of the water jar business was around 1940 to 1945 when the reputation of the bronze working spread from Ban Bu to other districts of Bangkok. In trading, Ban Bu needed the system of middleman, specifically Chinese merchants, who would trade the wares at the biggest Chinese market in Bangkok, called ‘Sampheng’.

The business of the Ban Bu water jar had been successful, although it had declined several times. In the peak period, around 1940, one large cartel house named Jeam Sangsujja had operated up to 17 furnaces. Another cartel house, Kaesorn Khanhirun, had about 100 craftsmen. Around 1950, the shortage of materials and imitation products made from poorer material meant that only ten craft houses could survive.

The Ban Bu craftwork had been suppressed by the invention of the aluminum water jar from factory production which almost ended the hand crafted water jar of Ban Bu. In 1970, the Ban Bu bronze craftsmen began to produce Westernised items, e.g. plates, sugar and cream sets. They also added decorative traditional patterns onto some items for the tourist market. The Sampheng market was no longer suited to their trade. The craft houses had to seek new places to sell their products, such as in jewelry shops and souvenir shops. Such development brought success to the Ban Bu craft business again. The Sangsujja house had about 70 craftsmen; another cartel house, of the Khanhirun family, had more than 100 once more. However, this successful time could not last as the mass produced aluminum ware offered more function to the user. Hence, the bronze business again went into decline.

There were also changes in craft skill in Ban Bu. In the past, making bronze water jars was to melt metal in the furnace, using sasswood and hand-pushed air blowers (made from wood), to reach high temperature. Around the 1970s, however, the process was replaced with electric blowers. Also in the past, the local craftsmen used a hand-driven wooden lathe for spinning and correcting the shape of the ware but this has also now been replaced by a modern, motored lathe. Most significantly, the original stone polishing technique (*thong long hin*) is also now motorised.

In the 2000s, bronze ware production has continued in only few numbers. The number of craftsmen has quickly reduced. One cartel house named Khunhirun has lost its forming craftsman; then it changed to work in stainless steel which cut off all the furnace jobs. Eventhough, the products are similar to the bronze, they can serve only some customers. However, some locals do not accept these as the traditional handicraft of Ban Bu. The Kongchunsin craft house has completely closed its workshop. The only craft house that can remain producing original works is Sangsujja craft house. Therefore, today there are only two craft houses in Ban Bu, of which only one remains traditional pattern of production. The traditional craftworks exhibit excellent fine skill but the price is quite expansive than other craftworks.

It should be noted that those Western style pieces are not the popular items for the Ban Bu handicraft business. However, the original items are still the most favoured. People recognize Ban Bu for its water jar handicraft, though reducing numbers, those handicrafts continue to be sold till the present time. Customers explained that such traditional items reflect the past Thai way of life which their parents had experienced.

The place of Ban Bu community has also changed with time and social development. Although the older craftsmen here still feel ‘pleasant’ with this home-based occupation, the new generation prefers urban occupations rather than bronze craftsman’s work. They have more comfortable jobs, are paid more and are able to buy a car and a new house outside the community. Their old houses, then, were leased with cheap price rental because of no road access. In Ban Bu today, half of the original people have passed away and the middle-aged have moved out. Nowadays, most people who live in the community are the newcomers, but they are not interested in any traditional issues relating to the famous handicraft of the community.

### Pradittorakan Community

Pradittorakan community occupies Phahonyothin sois 47 and 49 in the Chatuchak district of Bangkok. Both sois have a network of many walkways that connect together. In the

past the area was called Bang Bua (lotus land). There were settlements in the area, mainly for rice fields and plantation. Around 1950, people began migrating to the area from the dry and barren eastern provinces of Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Nakhon Nayok and Chonburi. Continuing migration has made Bang Bua to become a residential area for people looking for jobs in Bangkok (Jiroj Tungsakul, 2004: 60). Soi 49 was eventually named Pradittorakan following the name of an elite government officer. Subsequently, combined with soi 47, it became known as Pradittorakan community.

Pradittorakan work seems to have been inspired by the famous of Ban Bu bronze craft (around 1950). One significant person in the beginning of Pradittorakan handicraft was Sumran Pulsawad who had been trained in bronze craftwork in a craft production community, Trok Sarapadchang, in Thonburi (which is near Ban Bu). He lived in Bang Bua, setting up Pulsawad craft house. In 1951 he founded a bronze craft company, S. Sumran Thailand Co. Ltd, on Phetchaburi road of central Bangkok. Their products were bronze tableware and cutlery. He also trained many of his friends and relatives in Bang Bua to work for his company. S. Sumran Thailand became one of the leaders in the bronze craft business, successfully selling into the international market. Subsequently, with the full support of Sumran, some craftsmen set up their own bronze craft business from their home in Bang Bua, typically on its ground floor or in its garage. Two other significant families, the Seangsuwan and Hongkajorn families, also moved to Bang Bua around this time from Chachoengsao province, establishing craft houses there. Therefore, by 1954 there were three large craft houses in Pradittorakan, together with many other craft families. The community came to be known as Rong Chon (spoon factory) Bang Bua, as they regularly produced spoons.

Around 1967 there were American military bases in Bangkok participating in the Vietnam War and there was a new demand for Western-style items. Firstly, the products were forks and knives, and then expanded to the full range of cutlery. The products have shown their uniqueness in two styles, the wooden handle and the Thai pattern impressed on a metal handle. These products are well-known for their durable quality. Trading was mostly to foreigners or tourists via middlemen.



Figure 2 : Two styles of bronze product from Pradittorakan craft community

Source : Secretary of Pradittorakan Bronze Craft Center, 2010

Although the handicraft business had declined after the end of Vietnam War, in 1982 there were still almost 200 houses working in the bronze craft. However, at that time, they faced the problem of production exceeding demand, hence falling prices. The price cutting problem occurred among Pradittorakan craftsmen themselves as they sought to survive their own business.

The middlemen would sometimes request a new design whereupon the craftsmen developed their products according to a sample picture from the customer. The Pradittorakan craftsmen accordingly had the benefit of many experiences in producing new products. At the same time, many of them had learnt marketing process and how to seek out new customers by themselves.

Later, as in the case of Ban Bu, the market for bronze craft declined because there were imitated products of lower quality by using poorer materials and cheaper price. In 1987, Pradittorakan decided to improve their craft business by being registered as an 'occupational group' with the corporation with the Chatuchak district office. An elected local committee was able to solve the problem of price undercutting and resolve the disagreement among craftsmen. This collaboration system includes business activities, cooperation in purchasing raw materials and a working capital fund.

In 1989, during promoting tourism of Thailand, Pradittorakan craft works joined the souvenir market because the old export business had declined. They produced new items for tourists and traded at Chatuchak Market, at souvenir shops in Pattaya and some jewelry shops on Silom road, Bangkok. Meanwhile, Pradittorakan also used their craft skill to develop high end products, full sets of cutlery for western diners, and to export them again. However, the number of craft houses continued to fall: 40 houses in 1991, then 16 houses by 2005. By 2012, there were only eleven craft houses and 30 craftsmen left.

Somkid Duangngoen, a senior craftsman who is the leader of the community explained two important things relating to Pradittorakan handicraft. The first one is 'networking', which derives from the collaboration with the Chatuchak district office, helping to connect and participate with outside organizations in doing handicraft business and in understanding the new market place. The second one is the interdependent concept, which has helped to maintain the craft occupation. Pradittorakan community shares all the orders to every craftsman to keep them in a job, in the sense that everyone are relatives and friends. Somkid also argued that doing handicraft business in an urban context is very hard because it is less interested to both city people and government. Bangkok is more to be seen as an industrial than a handicraft city.

It is also significant that the handicraft of Pradittorakan emerges from a factory-production system. The craftsmen have had experience in modern business while the relationship as friends and relatives from the provinces is still a strong point. They are mixed together, and create a quite specific system, as a mini factory. It is effectively a cartel house. The craftworks are produced from each craft house but all the trading are done by one craft house (Somkid's). The profit divided to each craft house equally. All decisions come from the meeting of local committee.

This high level of local self-management has brought about a strength of community. By 15 years, since registering as an occupation group, the community has built a three-storey community office building with library, meeting space, credit cooperative office, training classroom and computer room. The community has also formed a group to establish a sewing business to provide work for women in the community.

The process of craft production of Pradittorakan is almost as the same as in Ban Bu. However, Pradittorakan craftsmen have developed a split clay mold to enable cutlery pieces to be cast rather than beaten from sheet bronze. Machines are used in many processes such as pattern pressing, forge pressing (for the spoon curve) and polishing. The limiting factor in the process is the pressing machine. This pressing machine is expensive and not every craft house will possess one. Therefore, all the craftsmen, in this community, need cooperation and sharing. This brings about the interdependence among them.

While better than Ban Bu, only two of the craft houses (from 11 craft houses) have new generations helping in the bronze craft business. This may be because Pradittorakan handicraft was established much later than Ban Bu, and the stories and the innovations are closer to the young. Even though the parents regret that their children do not follow them in the bronze craft, they rejoice in their children's success in other urban occupations.

In addition, the place of Pradittorakan is near many big universities. Some part of the community land belongs to one university. With the expansion of university business, that land has been reclaimed. Some land areas were sold to build flats, apartments, mansions, and so on. Hence, some craftsmen have quit the occupation.

### Ban Batre Community

Ban Batre community is in the centre of ancient Bangkok, near the Buddhism items market. The community produces the monk's alms bowl and is possibly the only one in Thailand. The community is situated at Soi Ban Batre on Bamrung Muang road. This area has been part of the Buddhism path in the city since its foundation.

The original people of Ban Batre community were from the Ayutthaya kingdom. It is believed that they had moved from the alms bowl market in Khlong Bangphra district in Ayutthaya city. The migration to Bangkok was around the year 1783, at the time of the fall of Ayutthaya kingdom. Evidence of this origin is appeared with the old wood blowers that were brought from Ayutthaya and are still retained in the community. These blowers nowadays become a representative of the god of craftsmanship. Another thought is that the people of Ban Batre community were Khmer who moved to live here around 1850 (Pinyo Kamalaporn, 1972: 2; Worranuch Ngamlertkittiya, 2004).

Ban Batre is a very dense area and can be counted as one of Bangkok's slum areas. It is very small, approximately four rai (1.6 acre), with 136 houses, 473 people in 186 families. Most of the community's land belongs to the Crown Property Bureau, whereby the locals have a right to lease the land at very low rental (in the past, 50 baht per year and recently around 500 baht per year).

The handicraft of Ban Batre is founded within the cultural and religious beliefs of the people. The alms bowl (*batre*- in Thai) is a necessary utensil for a monk who will go out every morning to receive food. The alms bowl, according to the traditional regulation, can be of two types, pottery and iron. Also, there is a legend that the alms bowl of the Lord Buddha was from a mix of four alms bowls thus combining the four directions of the world into one. The representation of this legend is in the seam in the Ban Batre bowl which, in fact, is a result from assembling parts of iron to shape the alms bowl. This production process has been crafted neatly and is to be the correct alms bowl of Buddhism religious (at least in Thailand). The bowls are made in various sizes e.g. 7, 8 or 9 inches in diameter. However, at present, sometimes the bowls of Ban Batre are also made from stainless steel following the monks' requirement to solve a rust problem with ordinary steel.



Figure 3 : The alms bowls handicraft of Ban Batre community

In the past, Ban Batre alms bowls were usually sent to be sold at nearby Buddhist items shops, or via middlemen to trade with other provinces. The successful time of the alms bowl business was around 1950. At that time of the business's success, they were also sold to neighboring countries. However, around 1965, some metal can factories decided to adapt their machines to produce the alms bowl. The machine-made bowl was able to imitate the Ban Batre bowls in the market place and at a much lower price. Although the Ministry of Industries subsequently proclaimed a rule against machine manufacture, around 1970 the Religious Affairs Department allowed the monks to use the machined bowl. This meant acceptance of the disappearance of the seam that once attested to the belief in the Buddhist legend. The resulting situation was somewhat chaotic. Negatively, some middlemen and merchants' shops were also partners in those factory productions. Positively, the government had restricted the alms bowl making occupation for Thais only. In that period, the Ban Batre alms bowl production seems to have ceased.

The unclear situation has continued (even to today) and seems unable to be resolved. However, the government promotion of Thailand's tourism program in 2002 somewhat released the tension in the handicraft business. The smaller bowls were created as souvenir items for the tourist market.

The craft skill of Ban Batre is very unique. They have a special technique of joining metal sheet. The craftsmanship of Ban Batre has also changed with new technology – from the wood blower to an iron blower then to an electric blower (the same as in Ban Bu and Pradittorakan). The underground kiln became a gas burner.

The interesting aspect of Ban Batre community is its location and space. The area is enclosed with the rear sides of shop houses on the Bamrung Muang road, Boripat road and Soi Ban Batre itself, which can collectively be regarded as a fence of the community. Similar to Ban Bu, the community has no road access, and only has small walkways. The community is a hundred of old, small, wooden houses with one and two storeys. The houses generally have a

small open area at the ground floor in keeping with Thai style architecture. The craftsmen used this ground floor area to produce their handicraft.

Later, the community's population increased from family expansion. The area became crowded and very dense. The houses subsequently added more rooms on the ground floor and the craftsmen moved to work in the small public walkways. The community is quite disordered. Some houses look like makeshift homes.

Though, today it is much better than in the past due to improved technology in craftsmanship. The area is also polluted from the smoke and dust generated in the soldering and patinating processes. There is still noise from the metal beating. This has caused stress for the local people. Some locals have moved out and allowed renters to occupy their houses. This is considered as a worse case than in Ban Bu. Many houses were sold or leased illegally at very low price because there was no title deed (as the land belongs to the Crown Property Bureau).

Even with little improvement in the alms bowl business, the craftsmen have found themselves having to compete with each other. Craftsmen act against each other and price-cutting has arisen, mostly in relation to the souvenir alms bowl as it has brought more money than the authentic monks' bowls. Some craftsmen put Thai decoration patterns on the souvenir bowl but this introduces the issue of an anti-religious manner. This controversy distresses participants in the craft occupation and also the locals behave as if in some sort of turmoil relationship. There is no cooperation among craftsmen.

Nowadays, there are only five craft houses remaining in Ban Batre with some 30 craftsmen, some of whom work only occasionally on handicraft. The young generation has some training but they no need to work as craftsman; they instead work as office workers. Today production is much reduced. Items are ordered by church warden or by middlemen visiting the community. The handcrafted bowl is still used by the pilgrimage monks as their belief in the Buddhist legend encourages them to do so, but it is not a regulation. The alms bowl business seems to rely on the souvenir pieces and their trading (foreigners pay over normal price).

The newcomer-renters are strangers to the original Ban Batre people who explain this situation as a 'chaos society'. Local people argue that these low rentals brought unemployment, drugs and destructive behavior. People outside the Ban Batre community also referred to this as conflicted, disruptive and indeed chaotic – a place to be avoided.

The difficulty of the Ban Batre product is that the users/customers are the monks, who completely disconnect from the business world. From the interview, most of the monks

refer to the Buddhism concept as ‘three characteristics’, of impermanence, instability and soullessness. It truly reflects a principle of nature: nothing stays forever. Monks accept if alms bowl disappeared.

### Analysis of the Situation of Urban Craft Communities

The first question to be considered is: **to what extent is a sense of tradition and authenticity understood by both locals and the wider public?**

Following the assessing of authenticity procedures of the Operational Guideline (UNESCO, 2008:21), the three communities reviewed here have shown that there are craft families that evidence their descent from original craftspeople, working with original techniques and ancient tools (metal beating of Ban Bu, clay mold casting of Pradittorakan and the soldering of metal of Ban Batre). This study has referred to credible evidence as follows – it is about original craft families, original place, craftsmanship and the craft production system, and lastly the craft products in their design and functions of use. Therefore, these craftworks have been truthfully represented as an expression of the genius (spirit) that belongs to the communities and are able to be certified regarding their authenticity. The locals, especially craftsmen, are truly appreciated for their traditional handicraft within the community. Ultimately, the research has indicated that authenticity of craftsmanship is part of the ‘advertisement’ of the handicraft of each community.

Working on different designs from the traditional craftwork frequently brings arguments to the community. Difference may not be accepted by local people as it contradicts the craftwork of the community as shown in the case of one Ban Bu craft house that changed its material from bronze to stainless steel. In addition, the study was obvious that those stainless steel works still rely on the original famous bronze water jar tradition which then extends to other kinds of wares. Similarly to the alms bowls with decorative patterns (as items for tourists), these are not quite acceptable within the Ban Batre craftsmen’s society. These adapted items are seen as less authentic than the original work even though they are purchased by the wider public.

On the other hand, the machine bowl is allowed to be used even though this disturbs the belief in the Buddhist legend. The craftsmen of Ban Batre did not accept such change, as the handcraft alms bowl must have those seams deriving from its production method. The Ban Batre craftsmen refuse the change.

The past stories of a life of fulfillment and plenty from the craftsmen (especially Ban Bu and Ban Batre) meet Linda Hutcheon’s nostalgia concept, in sentimentalizing the past of

their living and the previous wealth of the community, albeit sometimes more imagined than real. However, it was found in the present study that the nostalgic feeling of a past plentiful life does not convey a sense of enthusiasm in the craft occupation, as the development of craftwork has shown in very slow rate of advance.

In the Ban Bu case, nostalgic feeling also contributes to the experience of the customers. They are sometimes concerned with the role of these craftworks referring to traditional culture or to their ancestors' livelihood, admired in its aspects of imagined luxury, mantra, ritual and perhaps the rarity of items. This stimulates the eagerness of customers in owning nostalgia-imbued objects.

There is the further question of the significance of handicraft: **does Thai handicraft elevate to the higher level implied in the term craft?**

The present study has clearly demonstrated that bronze water jars, durable bronze cutlery and hand made alms bowls are no longer necessary utensils for present day living. However, these craftworks have been adapted to trade in different direction in order to continue their communities' business. This supports Duanjeun Poonpol (2004:60-65) who mentioned in her paper that today handicrafts are fully involved in trade activities. In the present study, the direction followed by the communities has been to shift their focus to a kind of a high-end product. The Ban Bu works are sold as 'elite' pieces and also as 'retrospective' products, looking back to old time traditional living items. Similarly with Pradittorakan, the craftsmen have added more 'luxury or full function value' for their export items.

This suggests that handicraft today is more likely to be used as decorative items or luxury pieces, with the correspondingly higher price. The new attitude to craftwork changes the meaning of craftwork from 'responding to way of life' to 'representing a tradition and the culture of the maker' – also, more ambiguously, as 'objects of beauty'.

Here it is useful to clarify the distinction between handicraft and craft. Handicraft is skilled work making utensils, and offers deep insight into the way ordinary people live. However, the elegance of line and delicacy of workmanship can achieve something higher in the realm of pleasure and emotion. It might then be called 'art' (Warren, 1998:11). Therefore, it is different. Handicrafts are utensil works. Though, in the case where such craftwork represents fine craft skill, refers directly to ideas of beauty and/or expression and the idea of creativity, above its original utensil work, it is 'craft' or 'craft art' rather than just 'handicraft'.

The handicraft shift to ‘craft art’ has been seen clearly in case of Ban Bu. With the fine craftsmanship and fame of handicraft, it illustrates a spontaneous change of handicraft to craft, approved by the customer without conscious decision from the craftsmen.

The trend to luxury craft art can be elucidated in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s argument that one can earn social status by their own achievements, which is then known as achieved status. Taste in consumption is correlation with an individual’s ‘fit’ in society, whether in forms of food, objects or presentation. The issue of ‘class’, which annoyed the elitist representations of mass production of the Industrial Revolution, was recognized in his theory. The issue of ‘class’, which is defined as much by its ‘being-perceived’ as by ‘its being’, is crucially linked to consumption — which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic — as much as by its position in the relations of production. Therefore, consumption is a ‘sign of distinction’ in order to be fit for inclusion in a class classification (Bourdieu, 1987). In this case, consuming a Ban Bu original water jar satisfies such distinction needs in the form of cultural capital that presents the memory of the culture of a group of people. And perhaps, these crafts can demonstrate the ‘taste’ of such people in a cosmopolitan mode of living. Not only Thai people but also the ‘sophisticated’ travellers will consume such crafts to adorn their houses and assert their ‘cultured’ status.

Another direction in trading handicraft today is for it to become a souvenir. This tourism craft seem to be unavoidable for a capital city, such as Bangkok where tourism has expanded so vastly. Even Pradittorakan needs to ‘shift up’ their handicraft to craft as they advance their souvenir trading, to earn more money. Meanwhile Ban Batre has fully joined this souvenir market because the religious alms bowl business is almost at an end. Although its price is forced to be as low as possible by means of large production runs, its result is outstanding, with its success in continuing such unique craftsmanship and enough earnings to maintain such local business. To be noticed, in this direction of change, the characteristics of craftwork may change along with the shift to souvenir trading. Producing a souvenir piece could cause a reducing quality of craft skill (that is of inherited craftsmanship) due to the piece not being used functionally, as in the case of the original handicraft.

There is the further question: **how have the craft communities in Bangkok faced the problems related to their capital city location, which is different from those of a rural craft community?**

The Thai government had emphasised development of manufacturing industry around 1945, leading to changes related to modernization affecting craft people who had

settled in Bangkok since the beginning of the city. The ultimate crisis issue is definitely land property. The original Ban Bu people moved out because of inconvenience in transportation for their present day life. Houses were let to be leased. New people who moved in have no relationship with handicraft at all. Likewise for Pradittorakan, a university in the district has expanded, and the land was sold to build more student accommodations. Ban Batre is in similar situation to that of Ban Bu but with extra problems because their settlement belongs to the Crown Property Bureau. Local people have no sense of ownership and thereby neglect their settlement. The place is shabby, tatty and dirty. Illegal, cheap rental housing (at the rear side of the Crown Property Bureau) has brought the poor into the community, together with social problems like drugs and crime.

In some sense, the way that handicraft has become luxury goods has perhaps not been in an appropriate manner. Producing luxury goods needs an intermediate practice, advanced business management and a trend of constant updating, all of which are too complicated for local craftsmen even in the capital city. Stated otherwise, in the present situations, local craftsmen may do not feel that they need to trade as a luxury items business but there is the marketing drive to do so. Its profit is worth the effort to join. The weakness is that such a market is sometimes discontinuous; hence the craftsmen's income is not stable.

The idea of 'having more opportunity in the capital city' does not really represent a benefit to the handicraft occupation. First of all, with the influence of globalization, the new urban generations have more focused on high education and admired urban work rather than home-based handicraft work. Secondly, when the craftworks become popular, the imitated pieces are produced easily by industrialized methods, such as in the case of the machine-made alms bowl competing with Ban Batre. And lastly, support in terms of cultural aspects is less in urban contexts than in rural as revealed from the Pradittorakan community's leader.

### Conclusions

Authenticity and nostalgia may function to preserve the traditional handicraft because people acknowledge such authentic handicraft items and always expect to obtain them. Actually, the amount of change in craftworks has depended on the acceptance of each craft community and their consumers. However, the exaggerated self-importance of inherited craftsmanship or having too much protection from change in order to keep authenticity, which sometime became an internal argument, seems to be in conflict with business ability, especially in the urban market.

Obviously, craftwork is not functioned as it used to be. The handicraft business today is in a progressive change, serving two new demands: for luxurious goods and for souvenirs.

Luxury craft, or ‘craft’, rests on the aesthetic value of work, also the richness of craft skill. Tradition and culture are definitely the background elements. This ‘back dated trend’, the popularity of handcrafted products, is the new characteristics of handicraft in the international craft society at the beginning of twenty first century. The ‘local’ product as handicraft is transformed and revitalized to be a ‘global’ product in forms of luxurious craft. This shifting of handicraft to craft, following the new demands of the market, has marked the destruction of traditional and regional handicraft. This research has raised new awareness on how this effect to the significance of handicraft. Shifting to craft can demolish the handicrafts of the locality, and move the tradition to a new ‘professional craft’ class.

For the souvenir trade, handicraft as a souvenir product becomes a representative of culture via the tourism industry. The quality of craftsmanship appears in a souvenir craft to be mostly poorly controlled. In this adapting to tourism craft, traditional or original-authentic craft skill, as an intangible heritage asset, could be ignored.

Beyond these two new progressive changes of handicraft, the real function of handicraft has been ignored. Even though these new expressions of handicraft can satisfy the criteria of authenticity as they attest to the truthfulness and integrity of their makers and place of origin, the issue of preserving intangible heritage assets has raised a question: can these new forms of craft be sincerely counted as expressing inherited skill or conveying the integrity of significance of the objects – of handicraft?

Even though these three communities have embarked on two new transformations of the craft business as described above, they can still maintain its intangible heritage today. However, in the present circumstance, this shifting to luxury craft and to souvenir constitute a new kind of creative economy to which Thailand has aspired. However, the luxury craft business is still perilous and unable to achieve real economic and cultural strength. Tourism craft can hardly maintain the craft business by ensuring earnings appropriate for a city life. Uncertain income may cause the craftsmen to leave this occupation. The immense change in the urban economy may end the traditional occupations and the craft community. The craft occupation and urban space cannot be comfortably reconciled. The guarantee to the survival of the craft community seems to rely on the leadership of community itself and the unity of the local people.

There are two factors for special concern. Firstly, urban craft people prefer to solve problem individually. With this approach, community unity is hard to achieve. Secondly, handicraft trading in the urban context has been turned to a real business where Thai craftsmen may not succeed. The changes in urban life and uncertain income may force the

craftsmen to change their occupation. The attempts at the preserving of a craft community using its intangible heritage may distort the reality of the situation in that the place contains new people but original people then seek a new place to live. The relationship of intangible heritage (handicraft culture) and the tangible heritage (place) is not in a strong bond. The intangible asset (craftsmanship) is more about a deep-rooted knowledge attached to a person who owns it than to the place where it happens. And the human is a vehicle to transport this intangible asset to other places for one's self-specific reason, different from the past motivations for the migration at the beginning of community. Preserving cultural heritage in an urban site may face weaknesses in such a condition.

Original handicraft in the urban contexts has been demolished. The handicraft business is transforming. Keeping the intangible heritage with the place may be possible but only with the acceptance of cultural change. However, the preservation of a craft community based simply on its craftsmanship and inherited talent cannot be promised.

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