

TERENGGANU BRASSWARE HANDICRAFTS INDUSTRY AND GLOBALISATION: A REVIEW

*(INDUSTRI DAN GLOBALISASI: KRAFTANGAN TEMBAGA
TERENGGANU: SEBUAH ULASAN)*

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Abstract

For every country, the potential value of handicrafts as representative of local material culture and traditions is surprising. Numerous scholars and organisations have reported the potential relevance of preserving handicrafts in the era of globalisation. However, the effects of globalisation have changed the nature of brassware craft ecology and community especially in Terengganu and have caused significant challenges to the survival of the traditional knowledge of craftsmanship. This paper reviewed numerous relevant literatures regarding the brassware crafts and its potential towards sustainability. Craft and handicraft have been distinctively defined and interpreted by scholars in a wide variety of ways. The accelerating processes of globalisation supported by technological advancement, which provides new opportunities and challenges, have changed the landscape of the brassware handicrafts sector not only in Terengganu but worldwide. Innovation and commitment in the creative craft business should be among the essential elements found in every artisan in order to develop craft products that have contemporary relevance while also retaining the ethical and aesthetic values of Malay culture. Obviously, the craft industry and its practitioners urgently need changes through innovation as well as fresh ideas in all respects to ensure sustainability of their craft and to make a living. The findings of this investigation have important implications for future practice in sustaining the culturally significant products, designs and practices of brassware crafts.

Keywords: Terengganu brassware, crafts, Malaysian crafts, cultural heritage, globalisation

Abstrak

Bagi setiap negara, potensi nilai kraftangan sebagai perwakilan budaya dan tradisi bahan tempatan adalah mengejutkan. Ramai sarjana dan organisasi telah melaporkan potensi perkaitan memelihara kraf tangan dalam era globalisasi. Walau bagaimanapun, kesan globalisasi telah mengubah sifat ekologi dan komuniti kraf tembaga khususnya di Terengganu dan telah menyebabkan cabaran yang ketara kepada kelangsungan ilmu tradisional seni kraf. Makalah ini mengkaji banyak literatur yang berkaitan mengenai kraf tembaga dan potensinya ke arah kemampuan. Kraf dan kraftangan telah ditakrifkan dan ditafsir secara tersendiri oleh para sarjana dalam pelbagai cara. Proses globalisasi yang semakin pantas disokong oleh kemajuan teknologi, yang menyediakan peluang dan cabaran baharu, telah mengubah landskap sektor kraftangan barangan tembaga bukan

sahaja di Terengganu tetapi di seluruh dunia. Inovasi dan komitmen dalam perniagaan kraf kreatif harus menjadi elemen penting yang terdapat dalam setiap artis bagi membangunkan produk kraf yang mempunyai perkaitan kontemporari di samping mengekalkan nilai etika dan estetika budaya Melayu. Jelas sekali, industri kraf dan pengamalannya amat memerlukan perubahan melalui inovasi serta idea-idea segar dalam semua aspek untuk memastikan kemampanan kraf mereka dan mencari rezeki. Hasil penyelidikan ini mempunyai implikasi penting untuk kegiatan masa depan dalam mengekalkan produk, reka bentuk dan amalan kraf tembaga yang penting dari segi budaya.

Kata kunci: *Tembaga Terengganu, kraf, Kraf Malaysia, warisan budaya, globalisasi*

INTRODUCTION

The richness of artistic beauty and the uniqueness of Malaysian handicraft products that express local identity are fundamental to the production of these cultural heritage products. The handicraft industry is recognised as part of the Cultural and Art Creative Industry section of the Malaysia Creative Industry Framework (Mohamad et al. 2013a). The state of Terengganu has always been known as the capital of the traditional brassware handicraft industry, especially Kampung Ladang with a sizeable population of highly skilled artisans (Ahmad 2000; Ismail 2009). Kampung Ladang is located close to the palace, the administrative centre and the main trading activities (Payang central market) in Kuala Terengganu (Wahab 2013; Mohamad & Walker 2019). Siti Zainon Ismail in Parlan (2016) further states that the king is regarded as the "influence" that "hires" or "orders" the craftsmen who have been appointed as capable of making the creation. It was a common sight in Kuala Terengganu to see brassware handicraft production workshops operate close to living quarters and this legacy has been passed down for generations spanning a few hundred years (Mohamad 2021). The existence of these family-run workshops is largely a result of development of earlier civilisations in Terengganu, which flourished over time (Wahab 2013).

Brassware making has been practised for more than 300 years, mainly due to royal house patronage and support for the arts (Muhamad 2008). During his reign, from 1839 to 1876 (Shariff 2010), Sultan Omar introduced a policy to promote handicraft industries in the state capital. He encouraged skilled brassmakers (*Orang Pandai Tembaga*) and skilled ironsmiths (*Orang Pandai Besi*) to develop the industry. "*Pandai Tembaga*" and "*Pandai Besi*" are two terms bestowed upon the highly skilled artisans who could turn their respective metals into highly prized works of art (Shariff 2010). According to Mohd Noor (1978), Sultan Omar also imported skilled artisans from countries like India to settle in Terengganu provinces and train local craftspeople. The sultans who succeeded Sultan Omar also supported such policies, especially Sultan Zainal Abidin III (Abd Wahab, Sulaiman, Mohd Noor, Abdullah, 2022). He encouraged locals, especially fishermen in Kampung Ladang and Kampung Tanjung, to continue their forefathers' legacy in preserving their family heritage of brassware craft. According to Awang (1984), metalwork artisans resided within the royal court compound with an allowance and tools provided by the royal house. In return, the royal court regulated every aspect of production and technique.



Figure 1. Among the brassware household items made by the local artisan

Sources: Mohamad 2021

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions and conceptions of craft

Craft has numerous definitions depending on personal interpretation. They vary over time, geographical context (Basole 2014) and philosophy (Fillis 2012, p. 24; Pöllänen 2013, p. 219). The word “craft” can be used to refer to a product that is a tangible thing and also a process of making (Dodd & Morgan 2013, p. 13). It shares some perceived attributed understandings of authenticity (Jones & Yarrow 2013) and quality (Basole 2014, p. 6) associated with the words “handmade”, “workmanship” and “genuine” (McIntyre 2010, p. 5). In addition, it is a word that is associated with the terms “personal” and “for everyone” (McIntyre 2010). In Allen's review of Risatti's *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*, he remarked that modern thinking on the creation of craft is about beauty and arts. Because of its beauty, craft goes beyond functionality (Allen 2009, p. 517) because it indicates a relationship with the hands that make and use the work, ensuring human well-being (Pöllänen 2013) and personal meaning (Walker 2013). Elliot (2016, pp. 19-20) interpreted craft as a process of self-expression and transformation which has both power and secret knowledge (Greenhalgh cited in Dormer 1997, p. 5). Since the term “craft” is hard to define specifically due to its broadness (Dodd & Morgan 2013, p. 14), it tends to be influenced by changes across a very wide range of intangible skills, practices and product types (Cultural Industries Growth Strategy [CIGS] 1998, p. 8).

Malaysia handicrafts

The Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC), (2014) through 222 Acts *Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia* 1979 has defined a “Handicraft Product” as any product that has artistic or traditional cultural attractions, which the making process depends solely or partly on the hand skills. Definition adopted by the UNESCO/ITC Symposium “Crafts and the international market: trade and customs codification”, Manila, 6-8 October 1997 – “*Craft or artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant*” (UNESCO-UIS 2009 and ITC, 1997) in (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2016, p. 95).

Malaysia is listed in the upper-middle-income economies in the World Bank Classification by Income Group (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS] 2016, p. 98). Up to the late 1960s, the traditional handicraft sector in Malaysia was an unorganised sector that was referred to as the “backyard” of Malaysia’s economy. The sector consisted of only household production units (Frost & Sullivan 2005, p. 333). However, in 2003, Malaysia was ranked 23rd on the world’s overall export value of craft with the value of \$2.56 billion and the 6th largest handicraft exporter in Asia (Frost & Sullivan 2005, p. 332). It has more recently been highlighted as one of the leading exporters of cultural goods over the last ten years (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS] 2016, p.11).

The handicraft industry in Malaysia contributes significantly towards national economic development and growth (Isa, Isa & Ali 2011; Flew 2014); it also contributes to the prestige of national cultural heritage. This is supported by the fact that Malaysia is a signatory of the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 2014, p.18). Malaysian handicrafts are classified into five categories according to their predominant material types: earthenware, forest-based, metals, textiles, and various (MHDC 2014). In 2015, there was a total of 5,130 handicraft entrepreneurs registered with the Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC). Of these, 12.7% (651) were producing metals-based handicrafts, but only 2% (13) were involved with brassware handicrafts (Mohamad et al. 2013b; Data.gov.my 2016).

Table 1. Malaysia craft category

Malaysian Craft Categories				
Earthenware-based craft	Forest-based craft	Metal-based craft	Textile	Various craft
Iban pottery Sayong pottery	Weaving Rattan Coconut shell craft	Brassware Silver craft Black-smith Filigree	Batik Songket Kain sulaman Sulaman nyonya Seni telepok Tenunan pua Tenunan dasar	Fine carving Aboriginal craft Kompang Serunai Sumpit sarawak

Sources: MHDC 2014

Malaysian handicrafts hold a significant cultural place in Malay court protocol (Haron et al. 2014, p.170). The use of luxury handicrafts as ceremonial items, including metalwork and woodwork products, together with a person's clothing style, often helps determine and affirm a person's position and reputation within the hierarchy of the Malay court and society (Cheah 2013, pp. 166-167; Norkhalbi & Wahsalfelah 2014, p. 35). Artefacts required for special ceremonies are regulated by custom (*adat*), as demonstrated in the instructions set out in the *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu* of 1779 (Sudjiman cited in Cheah 2013, p. 166). Malaysia's history indicates that a large number of handicraft products in the country can be attributed, at least in part, to migratory patterns in ancient times due to wars and instability, in addition to active trading activities (Ismail 2009).

The origin of the brassware handicraft industry in Terengganu

The art of handicraft is said to have reached Terengganu via trading activities throughout the Malacca Straits. Shariff (2010) suggested that the art of brassware was brought to Terengganu by Chinese immigrants from Funan during the Dong Son period (Ahmad 2000). Among those who migrated were skilled miners, artisans and fishermen who were well known for their fine craftsmanship, particularly metalwork (Wahab 2013, p. 144). Their migration centred primarily around Cambodia, Singapore and the Malay Archipelago (Awang 1984). Mohd Noor (1978) suggested that the brassware craft industry in Malaysia originated from India. This theory was established after considering several factors, such as raw copper being acquired from India via Singapore. About 180 years ago, Singapore was famous for its brassware crafted by Malay artisans in Gelam; the Malay artisans there learned their skills from artisans who came from India (Mohd Noor 1978). However, in 1964, two large bronze drums (Dong Son drums) dating from the Dong Son period (approximately 300 years BC) were discovered by Ali bin Abdullah in Batu Burok, Kuala Terengganu (Abdullah 1993). This discovery suggests that the Bronze Age in Malaysia began over 2,500 years ago; it also indicated ancient links between local Malay communities and mainland Southeast Asia. Through this discovery, scholars began to realign their theory of the origins of brassware craft with the idea that Terengganu was once the centres of the ancient brassware industry, attracting traders from as far as Indochina (Awang et al. 1992).

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the data collection process comprises desk research as it involves collecting and reviewing previous literature related to the research topic from various sources. Sources include international journals, conference proceedings, books, reports, working papers, newspapers, magazines and other secondary sources related to the scope of studies as well as through the Internet (acquired online and offline). Extensive review was done according to the main subject of research comprises; a general review of craft/handicraft; brassware as one of Malaysia's handicrafts; sustainability and design, and analyse the data from the study area, in order to answer the primary research questions; "What is the effect of globalisation towards brassware craft sector and its community in Terengganu, Malaysia?". In this research the approach selected to analyse the data of

the main study was thematic coding analysis because the researcher was looking of emerging themes and areas of concern regarding the brassware craft sector in Terengganu, Malaysia and globalisation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Terengganu brassware handicraft is in decline

In recent decades, the brassware handicraft industry in Malaysia has been in decline. The decreasing number of skilled artisans has caused the industry in the primary brassware region of Terengganu to stagnate (Mohamad & Walker 2019). In the 1980s, approximately 150 artisans actively produced brassware and this decade is regarded as the high point of this handicraft in Terengganu (Ismail 2013 cited in Mohamad 2014). Nowadays, however, brassware handicrafts are no longer a primary source of income for the region (Data.gov.my 2016). The effects of commercial development in the city of Kuala Terengganu have resulted in the demolition of houses and brassware workshops in several villages, especially in Kampung Ladang and Kampung Tanjung (Mohamad & Walker 2019). As a consequence, most entrepreneurs and artisans have moved away from Kampung Ladang and no longer produce brassware handicrafts (Mohamad 2014). In addition, the effects of globalisation and a slow-moving economy have gradually eroded inter-generational knowledge transfer and traditional knowledge of brassware craftsmanship and have led to the near extinction of the industry (Senevirathne et al. 2010, p. 6; Lah et al. 2015, p. 3). Moreover, according to Rogerson (2000, p. 211) and Singh & Singh (2015), several challenges and crises also existed regarding gaps in technology, skill, infrastructure, the increasing price of raw material, and competition from low-cost Chinese products and market (Mandal et al. 2014, p. 41).



Figure 2. The transformation of Kampung Ladang, 2010 and 2020

The effects of globalisation towards handicrafts sector

The effects of globalisation have changed the nature of craft ecology and community and have caused significant challenges to the survival of the traditional knowledge of craftsmanship, local natural resources and creative industries (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS] 2016, p. 12; Hosagrahar et al. 2016, p. 7). Margetts (2010, p.373) states that the virtue of slowness in traditional craft must be reconsidered as modernisation destroys the traditional craft industry. Modern industry, through global-scale corporations, produces mass production factory-based "craft" products that imitate traditional crafts and threaten the livelihoods of many local craftspeople (Walker 2013, p. 105; Basole 2014, p. 1). Similarly, in the context of the world craft market, Frost & Sullivan (2005 p. 10) state that the handicrafts market is in a state of transition. They argue that Asian countries like China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are responsible for a massive influx of low-

cost, imitation, and fully and partly mass-produced 'craft', which has detrimentally affected the traditional handicraft market.

The effect of modernisation means that the slow-moving craft economy has diminished, and, with it, there has been a decline in inter-generational knowledge transfer. This, in turn, leads to the extinction of the traditional knowledge of craftsmanship and the industry as a whole (Senevirathne et al. 2010, p. 6; Lah et al. 2015, p. 3). The revitalisation of local knowledge held within craftsmanship is worthy of investigation because it can still be significant, even in this era of globalisation (Teijgeler 2015, p. 43). The 2003 UNESCO Convention shifted the focus of preservation from craft products to *the essence of skills and local knowledge in craftsmanship*. The convention encouraged artisans to develop more craft and to focus on skills and knowledge transfer to others. Many craft traditions involve 'trade secrets' that by tradition should remain strictly within the family (www.unesco.org, n.d.). Worryingly, a lack of interest among younger people could lead to a total extinction of a craft practice along with all the knowledge that has been passed down over generations. However, Holroyd et al. (2015) argues that design and innovation could provide new methods of knowledge transfer from one generation to another.

The aesthetic understanding of traditional designs, products and practices is less understood by society as a whole (Fillis 2012) and therefore the role and status of artisans and skilled craft labour are overlooked (Banks 2010, p. 317). For traditional craft to be preserved in this modern era, its values and meanings have to be promoted, understood, recognised and appreciated by the wider society (Risatti 2008, p. 258; McIntyre 2010, p. 48; Fillis 2012). Therefore, it is important to find ways of enabling society to understand and appreciate the cultural values of craft and craftsmanship, and why things made in this way have greater significance (British Museum 2011). According to Ferraro et al. (2011, p. 20) and McIntyre, (2010, p. 48), a growing appreciation and understanding of traditional craft values would increase the demand for craft products.

Brassware craft in an international context

The potential of brass to accommodate societal needs resulted in increased innovation with evidence of various attempts from several professionals worldwide such as Sachan et al. (2013), Basole (2014), Prasad et al. (2015), Jayawickrama, et al. (2016) and Mohamad (2021) in the context of brassware and its relation to design and sustainability. The demand for brassware has led to the rise of inventive research and design innovation in many aspects associated with brassware craft such as developing new services, applications and production. For instance, appropriate technologies have been introduced by implementing permanent mould casting and die pressing technology as well as developing a portable furnace in the Sri Lankan brassware community. Similar attempts to enhance the manufacturing value of brassware have also been developed by Mohd Nor (2012) in Malaysia by introducing new moulding material for investment casting of brassware, in which she used local silica sand taken from nearby beaches mixed with Plaster of Paris or gypsum and other ingredients to shorten the production time of brassware making. This new innovation was adapted and validated by Mohamad et al. (2013a) in designing a new design concept of Terengganu brassware handicrafts.

Therefore, from the analysis that had been done, it is found that the impact of globalisation, industrialisation and modernisation has eroded the use of brassware products. The impact of globalisation has largely driven this change, in ways that are both positive and negative. The essence of the artistic and cultural life of the Malay people has survived the passage of time, and the more delicate features of this proud cultural heritage form a solid foundation for the evolution of national identity. In the 21st century, these cultural traditions are increasingly being reassessed and revitalised, as the richness of the values and meanings associated with locality and sense of community are recognised as having great potential to promote local identity and achieve social well-being.

CONCLUSION

Craft and handicraft have been distinctively defined and interpreted by scholars in a wide variety of ways. The terms can refer to a tangible product or object, and to a process that requires skill, creativity and imagination that portrays uniqueness, authenticity, quality and so forth. In a broader perspective, craft and handicraft are usually seen as areas of human endeavour that contribute significantly towards socio-economic growth for all countries, including Malaysia. The production of crafts and associated components have benefited almost everyone, from a sole maker to a large manufacturer (mass production, mass customisation, mass commercialisation). Malaysia's handicrafts hold a special place in traditional Malay culture and custom or *adat*. However, in this modern age, the industry and its associate practice are facing critical issues due to the impact of globalisation, which has contributed significantly to its decline; a decline that reflects and lack of appreciation and understanding by contemporary society, a cessation of intergenerational knowledge transfer, and disappearance of skills and context-related knowledge, and other inter-related issues. Growth in the production processes of mechanisation in the modern age slowly reduced or suppressed the role of the craft practitioner.

Today, some part of the crafts traditionally practised in the past are now considered as a kind of hobby. On the other hand, the interest shown towards original, handmade unique objects is increasing, which creates new opportunities for businesses and holds considerable potential, especially in tourist regions. The increasing demand for Malaysian handicrafts affects the development of the local craft entrepreneur in terms of their willingness to innovate, their commitment and their enthusiasm to succeed in their business. Demand is related to a sense of appreciation of the hard work of local artisans. This issue strengthens our appreciation of craft and design as critical in reforming relationships with the environment. Innovation and commitment in the creative craft business should be among the essential elements found in every artisan in order to develop craft products that have contemporary relevance while also retaining the ethical and aesthetic values of Malay culture. Obviously, the craft industry and its practitioners urgently need changes through innovation as well as fresh ideas in all respects to ensure sustainability of their craft and to make a living. Improvement of the quality of products, production capacity and market viability, are elements that potentially could be among the factors for the craft industry to move towards a better future.

Brassware craft is not like other traditional material cultures. Knowing how it is made and what it is made of, it is evident why brassware craft can still be seen today. The durability of this craft is astounding, and the versatility of the material is wide-ranging. The creation of brassware craft is closely connected to the highly skilled artisan with technical uniqueness, knowledge and wisdom. That is why these traditional artefacts, as well as the related knowledge, are passed down from one generation to the next. However, in this modern age, the practice of brassware making is declining due to the impact of globalisation. This means that the related traditional knowledge and wisdom are threatened. The declining factors and the threat of cultural significance of the brassware industry in Terengganu in the context of design, product and practices come from inside and outside of the community itself. Brassware artefacts embody knowledge, practices and modes of living that, for various reasons, are regarded as meaningful and culturally significant. There is a significant relationship between these artefacts and contemporary understandings of sustainability.

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