

The Development of Indigenous Woven Thai-Krang Products in Central Thailand for the Creative Economy

การพัฒนาผลิตภัณฑ์ผ้าทอพื้นเมืองไทครั่งภาคกลาง เพื่อเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์

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Abstract

Indigenous woven Thai-Krang products of Central Thailand (clothes, decorations and wares) are a heritage and social capital that can be used to generate community income for the creative economy. This research aimed to develop a model for Thai-Krang products in central Thailand for the creative economy. A qualitative research method was used to study in selected communities of Supanburi, Chainat and Uthai Thani Provinces. Data were collected by interview, observation, focus group discussion and workshop. The research results revealed that (1) the Thai Krang ethnic group emigrated from Pookhrang Town, an old town on the West side of the Mekhong River, and first settled down in Nakorn Chaisi and Supanburi in the reign of King Taksin. They carried out and inherited their cultural traditions, especially woven cloth production. All cloth was woven from local cotton and silk, using natural dyes from plants. (2) Thai Krang woven cloth products have been continuously transmitted from generation to generation in the family unit and are produced

in modern society by community enterprises. There are problems with insufficient budget, unskilled workers, weak production quality control, lack of designers, creativity and marketing. (3) The suggestions for application of traditional knowledge are increased creativity to add cultural and economic value to products, organization of conservation projects and greater consideration of consumer needs. Fifteen products were selected by users and stakeholders as prototypes to be incorporated in the creative economy.

Keywords: Central Thailand, Creative economy, Thai - Krang products, Traditional Woven Handicrafts

บทคัดย่อ

ภูมิปัญญาผ้าทอ การแต่งกาย เครื่องประดับและเครื่องใช้ไทโคร่งภาคกลาง เป็นมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมและเป็นทุนทางสังคมที่สำคัญ การวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพัฒนารูปแบบผลิตภัณฑ์จากผ้าทอพื้นเมืองไทโคร่งภาคกลาง เพื่อเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ ดำเนินการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ (Qualitative Research) ใน 3 พื้นที่เป้าหมาย เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลในภาคสนามด้วยการสังเกต การสัมภาษณ์ การสนทนากลุ่ม และการประชุมปฏิบัติการ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1. ชาวไทโคร่งหรือลาวโคร่งในภาคกลางของประเทศไทยมีถิ่นฐานเดิมที่เมือง ภูโคร่งฝั่งซ้ายแม่น้ำโขงใกล้หลวงพระบาง อพยพเข้ามาตั้งถิ่นฐานในประเทศไทย 3 ครั้งสำคัญ มีการสืบทอดวัฒนธรรม โดยเฉพาะการแต่งกายและภูมิปัญญาการทอผ้า 2. ปัจจุบันผลิตภัณฑ์เครื่องแต่งกาย เครื่องประดับและเครื่องใช้ไทโคร่งได้รับการส่งเสริมให้มีการรวมกลุ่มการผลิตเป็นวิสาหกิจชุมชนเพื่อสร้างรายได้เสริมให้กับครัวเรือนและชุมชน แต่โดยที่มีการใช้ผลิตภัณฑ์จากผ้าทอในชีวิตประจำวันในท้องถิ่นลดน้อยลง การใช้ภูมิปัญญาเพื่อเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์จึงมีปัญหาทั้งด้านการผลิตและการตลาด 3. การพัฒนารูปแบบผลิตภัณฑ์ผ้าทอพื้นเมืองไทโคร่งภาคกลางเพื่อเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ แบบผลิตภัณฑ์ที่พึงประสงค์เป็นแบบที่ยังคงอัตลักษณ์ไทโคร่ง มีคุณภาพ สร้างสรรค์ สร้างมูลค่าเพิ่ม สร้างรายได้และเป็นผลิตภัณฑ์ที่ดี โดยต้องพัฒนาทั้งกระบวนการ สมดุลระหว่างการอนุรักษ์และความต้องการของการตลาด ผลิตเชิงสร้างสรรค์ ตามหลักอุปสงค์และอุปทานและการจัดการการผลิตและการตลาดแบบพึ่งตนเอง

คำสำคัญ : ภาคกลาง เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ ผลิตภัณฑ์ไทโคร่ง ผ้าทอพื้นเมือง

Introduction

The global crisis is reflected all over the world. Thailand has been affected from an economic downturn that began in America in 2008. The great depression impacted Thailand because it had to find a way to adapt, whilst maintaining the cultural harmony, lifestyle, traditions, values, knowledge and local wisdom that had been inherited from ancestors over the generations. Thai people accept that they have been influenced by Europe,

America, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea in terms of fashion, entertainment, food and technology (Culture Surveillance Bureau, 2013). Nevertheless, Thai people are rightly proud of their traditional heritage and are keen to preserve traditional knowledge.

The indigenous woven cloth of Thai-Krang was announced as a product of national cultural heritage in 2012, in the branch of traditional crafts, types of cloth and cloth products. It is gorgeous and unique and exquisite techniques are used to weave it. Thai-Krang are Buddhist people. Their way of life is related to religion, culture and traditions. Thus, when they have important religious ceremonies and traditions, Thai-Krang women wear *Pa Prok Hua Nak*, *Pa Ho Kumphi*, *Pa Asana Song*, and *Thong*. These are all traditional ceremonial garments. Besides these, *Pa Sin*, *Pa Khao Ma*, *Mon Noi*, *Mon Thao*, *Mung* and curtains are woven for using in daily life (Piyapan, 1998). Given the recognised beauty and value of the fabric, the researchers were keen to investigate its development further and find ways to harness the potential of indigenous woven products for the creative economy.

Research Objectives

This research aimed (1) to study the background of indigenous woven Thai - Krang clothes, decorations and wares in central Thailand; (2) to study the current conditions, problems and guidance for using Thai - Krang clothes, decorations and wares in central Thailand for creative economy; (3) to develop a model for Thai-Krang products in central Thailand for the creative economy.

Research Scope and Conceptual Framework

The indigenous Thai - Krang woven clothes, decorations and wares in central Thailand are related to culture, way of life and background of the community (Rassameephaiboon et al, 2005). They are inherited and have become part of the plethora of Thai local wisdom that should be promoted for value, careers and income of Thai nationals. The development of the model for Thai - Krang products used in central Thailand was based on the principles of structural-functionalism and the creative economy. Structural-functionalism stresses the importance of each component part in the successful outcome of the whole and, as such, a holistic model will be investigated for application to indigenous weaving practices (Parsons, 1975). The creative economy was a concept developed by John Howkins in 2001 and describes economic systems where value is based on imagination and creativity rather than traditional resources, such as land, labour and capital (Howkins, 2001).

According to the review of documents, there has not yet been a specific study concerning the local wisdom and development of Thai - Krang weaving for the creative economy. Consequently, the researchers designed this investigation following the government policy to develop the country based on the conceptual model outlined in figure 1.

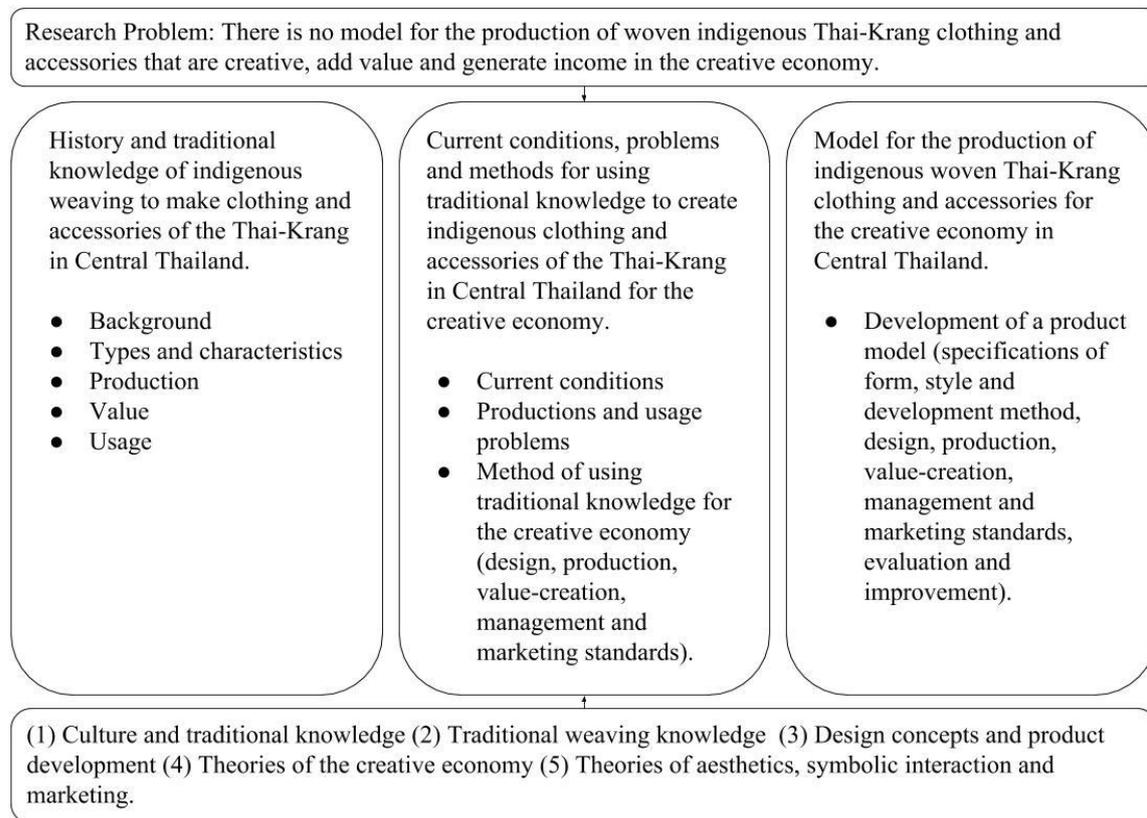


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: A model for the development of indigenous woven Thai-Krang products in Central Thailand for the creative economy

Literature Review

According to the national economic and social development plan, vol. 7 (1992-1996), the government has conducted many projects following the sufficiency economy philosophy of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. It is used for solving economic and resource problems. The government has campaigned for the people to realize the value of this philosophy. They encourage people to realize the importance of culture, traditions and Thainess, as well as knowledge, local wisdom and resources. The Thai government has recently innovated and used the creative economy to apply the philosophy of King Bhumibol to the economic development. This vision began with the national economic

and social development plan, vol. 7, 2535-2539 (1992-1996). (The Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board, 2011).

The concept of creative economy was first introduced in Thailand under the government of Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the ex-prime minister. The creative economy of Thailand was thus established on 31 August 2009, and defined in the national economic and social development plan, vols. 10 and 11. The aim was to promote Thailand as the center of industry in the ASEAN Economic Community using cultural arts and Thai identity (Kaewpradit et al., 2013). The subsequent government of Miss Yingluck Shinawatra realized the importance of the creative policy and cooperated with private and public sectors to develop and build value both of economy and society. The government preserved Thai identity to respond to consumer needs (Phatluang, 2010)

Due to urgent changes in society, the Thai government has developed industry and technology for weaving, so the local weaving methods have been reduced. The intention was to modernise traditional fashions following the increasingly global outlook of Thai society. The models, shapes, colors and sizes of clothing have been developed to be more suitable for modern consumer needs (Patimapronthep, 2005; Pongnil, 2005). In order to solve problems, the government has tried to find ways to revolutionise traditional cottage industries, generate income and inherit the local creative economy. The defining aspect of the second economic relief plan was to conduct a Thai map and cultural calendar for education, exchanging knowledge and supporting production and cultural services (creative products). These make the Thai economy strong and sustainable (Wongpongkam, 2008)

Thai-Krang woven cloth, clothes and decorations are unique depending on their use, value and beliefs. Each product is applied for the customer's needs (Lisuwan, 1989). In a comprehensive analysis of the fabrics of the Thai-Krang people, Jarupatcha Achavasmit (2006) explained how the Thai-Krang cloth is fragmented and comprised of "various individual motifs meticulously placed one after another in a particular way." Achavasmit found that the patterns woven in the fabric narrate local stories and reveal much about the lives of the individual weavers. Joachim Schliesinger (2015) found that Thai-Krang women weave traditional *pha sin* in community weaving groups for home use and for sale in Bangkok. The older members of the communities studied by Schliesinger told how in the past every woman in the village had to know how to plant cotton and produce silk for

their textiles. Some older textiles found in Thai-Krang villages were died from insects, but increasingly the community groups use chemical dyes and threads bought from the markets. According to studies of Thai-Krang communities and weaving groups, there are many main problems with the industry, such as a lack of pride in Thai-Krang handicrafts and woven cloth. This is reflected in the production and development, the reduction of consumers, the weakness of management, quality, producing and selling (UNCTAD, 2008). Furthermore, producers lack knowledge of production guidelines and designs, which do not match the marketing samples. These reasons indicate why product prices may be so low. The weaving groups are not encouraged to preserve and develop their methods. The researchers were thus keen to study and develop quality products that are suitable for modern society and meet consumer needs (Rasmeepaiboon et al., 2005).

Research Methodology

This investigation was conducted from March 2013 to July 2014 in the purposively selected communities of Chainat, Suphanburi and Uthai Thani. A qualitative research method was used to select three groups of respondents: key informants (n=12), casual informants (n=36) and general informants (n=36). The key informant group was composed of three district development officers, three sub-district officers, two local culture experts, three community leaders and a Buddhsit abbot. The casual informant group was composed of three weaving group leaders, twenty-seven local weavers and six heads of local Thai-Krang households. The general informant group was composed of twelve people who buy or use Thai-Krang fabrics. The tools used for data collection during this investigation were survey, participant observation, non-participant observation, interview, focus-group discussion and workshop. All data collected in the field were validated using a methodological triangulation method. These findings were then categorised according to the three aims of the research and analysed using analytic induction and typological analysis techniques. The results are presented here as a descriptive analysis.

Results

The background of indigenous woven Thai-Krang clothes, decorations and wares in central Thailand

The research findings revealed that the Thai Krang ethnic group emigrated from Pookhrang town, an old town on the west side of the Mekhong River, and first settled down in Nakorn Chaisi and Supanburi in the reign of King Taksin. They carried out and inherited their cultural traditions, especially woven cloth production. All cloth was woven from local cotton and silk, using natural dyes from plants. Thai - Krang woven clothing products have been continuously transmitted from generation to generation in the family unit and produced in modern society by community enterprises.

The indigenous woven Thai - Krang products in central Thailand have been inherited from ancestors to new generations since Luang Phrabang. They are unique and more dominant than other groups. The indigenous woven products of Thai - Krang consist of six types, including mantles, loincloth, *Mudmee*, *Teen Jok* and *Khit* fabric. The indigenous weaving of Thai - Krang is a combination of science and art. It is woven with many processes and techniques. In the past the products were used for the family, each family having its own loom. Women were taught weaving when they were young. Weaving cloth was as an occupation that included cotton-plant cultivation, cotton thread spinning, weaving with ancient looms and using the products in daily life. The process of weaving started with thread drying using barks, leaves, roots and other parts of trees. Then, the fabric was woven with ancient looms in many patterns, depending on the weaver's imagination and belief. Moreover, the unique material was a factor of weaving. At present, there are many weaving groups established for producing and selling products with new patterns but they still retain the unique Thai - Krang identity and generate income for villagers.

The indigenous cloth of the Thai - Krang was traditionally woven with a beautiful red pattern, and was used to cover the human body before death (**Figure 1**). *Teen Sin* cloth showed the status and occasion of people. Young girls wore black *Sin Dam Dan*. Women who always were at home wore *Sin Lae*. When they joined festivals, they wore *Sin Teen Jok*. Ladies wore red *Teen Jok* but adult women wore black *Teen Jok*. The charm of the woven cloth was in the reflection of weaver's mind. They showed patterns and natural

colors which have been inherited from ancestors to the new generations. The preservation of ancient woven clothes, decorations and wares are a part of Thai - Krang inheritance.



Figure 1 The traditional red fabric and design of the Thai-Krang indigenous weaving groups

Current conditions, problems and guidance for using Thai - Krang clothes, decorations and wares in central Thailand for the creative economy

At the present time, decorations and wares produced from natural, local materials are declining in the face of cheaper manufactured materials from elsewhere. This has caused the identity of Thai - Krang products to be diluted. Weaving groups have problems with funding, workers and quality control. The indigenous decorations and wares have creative design flaws and there is a lack of skilled craftsmen and, thus, quality of products, marketing, and creative weaving guidance. Woven products should be unique, useful and gain income for the community. The designs should be modern, economic and sustainable. There remain obstacles with insufficient budget, unskilled workers, weak production, quality control, lack of designers, creativity and marketing.

Model for Thai - Krang products in central Thailand for the creative economy

The findings found that the creation of products for the creative economy should be based on five procedures: (1) process development; (2) balancing development of preservation and marketing; (3) creative development for the creative economy; (4) product development based on demand and supply; (5) creative product processing and self-marketing (**Figure 2**).

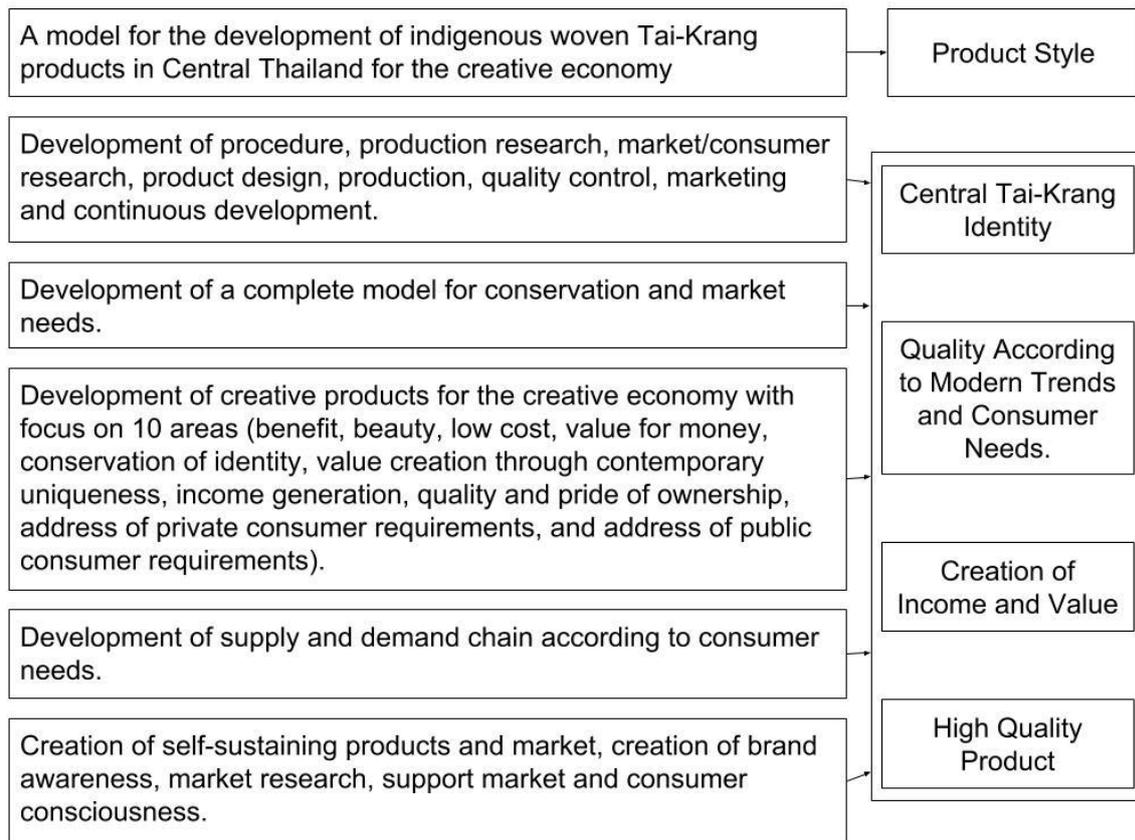


Figure 2 A model for the development of indigenous woven Thai - Krang products in Central Thailand for the creative economy

The suggestions for application of traditional knowledge made by respondents during interviews and focus group discussions are increased creativity to add cultural and economic value to products, organization of conservative projects and greater consideration of consumer needs. Fifteen products were selected by users and stakeholders during focus-group discussions and a workshop as prototypes to be incorporated in the creative economy (**Figure 3**). These products were comprised of five items from each category (clothes, decorations and wares). The clothes chosen to be model products for the development of Thai - Krang for the creative economy were: two Thai - Krang sarongs, a Thai - Krang shirt, a Thai - Krang dress and a sunsuit. The five indigenous decorations chosen were Thai - Krang ribbon hair with Mangabia pattern, Thai - Krang necklaces with Janmanee pattern, Thai - Krang scarves with Phungbubopha pattern, Thai - Krang necklaces with Dao Thai pattern and Phetmanee necklaces. The five indigenous wares were Thai - Krang Mudmee handbags, loincloth handbags, little bear curtains, little girl key rings and colorful napkins. The 15 types of products were chosen based on problem conditions, product development guidance and the study of customer needs. The

designs of products are modern, contemporary, beautiful, valuable and creative. Moreover, the designs chosen reflect consumer demand and are appropriate for the creative economic plan.



Figure 3 A selection of the fifteen products designed as prototypes to be incorporated in the creative economy

Discussion

This research aimed to develop local Thai - Krang products for the creative economy. The researchers adopted a qualitative research method and collected data in the field by interview, observation, focus group discussion and workshop. The research results revealed that Thai - Krang woven cloth products have been continuously transmitted from generation to generation in the family unit and are produced in modern society by community enterprises. The products and their creation process are inextricably linked with the culture and heritage of the Thai - Krang people (Rassameephaiboon et al, 2005). There are problems with insufficient budget, unskilled workers, weak production quality control, lack of designers, creativity and marketing. As a result of the investigation, fifteen products were selected by users and stakeholders as prototypes to be incorporated in the creative economy. Thai - Krang people in central Thailand should organise activities to promote and increase public understanding of indigenous weaving, clothes and wares that they have inherited from their ancestors. Thai - Krang people should also promote, build strength and cooperate with other Thai - Krang local product groups. Related government organizations and local administration organizations can help in this initiative by promoting fabric-weaving and continuous production, focusing on cultural and traditional preservation and many types of clothes. This information can be transmitted through schools, organizations in the local community and production groups and networks. These

suggestions are clearly in line with Thai government policy to promote indigenous culture and traditional Thai handicrafts as an integral part of the creative economy, according to the recommendations of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (The Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board, 2011). This is both a proactive (Kaewpradit et al., 2013) and reactive (Phatluang, 2010) approach to consumer demands.

There remain problems with insufficient budget, unskilled workers, weak production, quality control, lack of designers, creativity and marketing. These findings are consistent with other research projects into Thai - Krang weaving groups and other indigenous producers across Thailand (UNCTAD, 2008). The suggestions for application of traditional knowledge may increase creativity and add cultural and economic value to products. This can be achieved with better organization of conservative projects and greater consideration of consumer needs. There are some suggestions from these findings, as follow. Thai - Krang people in every occupation in central Thailand should promote and cooperate with ancient local fabric weaving groups in the community. This will help spread knowledge of the products outside the traditional circles. Furthermore, fundraising and creative activities for weaving clothes, decorations and wares should be organised. The focus of these activities should be on the designs, weaver creativity and skill, the quality of products, unique patterns and marketing.

The ancient weaving groups should build a knowledge bank and network centre for funding, knowledge exchange among skilled workers and establishment of production controls. This knowledge centre can also act as a hub for design development, training of creative skilled workers and think-tank to combat marketing problems. The weaving should focus on mental values, processes, colors and unique pattern development. Moreover, production should have objectives which focus on usefulness and quality. The creative clothes, decorations and wares should focus on the sustainable local wisdom and community enterprises. Related organizations may support weaving groups and local products continuously by promoting the creative economy, supporting skilled workers, helping with marketing and selling, including advertising the preservation of traditional community culture. As Wongpongkam (2008) attests, it is imperative that weaving groups build a catalogue of collective knowledge to strengthen their own ability to respond to consumer demand and consequently strengthen the Thai economy.

The findings found that the creation of products for the creative economy should be based on five procedures: (1) process development; (2) balancing development of preservation and marketing; (3) creative development for the creative economy; (4) product development based on demand and supply; (5) creative product processing and self-marketing. These are all linked to career and income generation by focusing on systematic quality control, strong organization, strong management principles and dynamism. These areas should be considered during the production of the fifteen creative products concluded in this research. Thai-Krang people in central Thailand should all promote and cooperate with local weaving communities to identify appropriate and popular patterns. Furthermore, market research should be improved continuously. Weaving groups should use the findings or concrete market research to choose the patterns for their products and to develop new patterns. This continued reaction to market forces and consumer trends will enable the weaving groups to stay at the forefront of fashions and adopt an approach advocated by other weaving groups across Thailand (Patimapronthep, 2005; Pongnil, 2005). They must seek continuous professional development by studying other producers and consumers, and should promote continuous product development. Related organizations should support individual weavers, weaving groups and networks and study the needs of the marketing. This will have a positive impact upon the creative economy.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The researchers wish to identify a number of areas for potential further research:

Suggestions for practical application of the research results

1.1) Clothes, wares and decorations should be developed for the creative economy using the model outlined in this investigation, both domestically and internationally; 1.2) Thai-Krang people in the three communities studied should provide activities for promoting knowledge, understanding, realization, and pride in the indigenous weaving, clothes and wares that have been inherited from ancestors to new generations; 1.3) Thai-Krang people in the three communities studied should build networks and cooperate with other Thai-Krang local product groups to share their knowledge gained from implementation of this research model; 1.4) Related government organizations and local administration organizations should promote fabric weaving and continuous production by focusing on cultural and traditional preservation. This can be achieved through schools, organizations within the community and group networks of the three communities studied.

Suggestions for further research

2.1) Similar studies should be conducted continuously based on participatory action research; 2.2) An in-depth study should analyse consumer needs, designing development, mixed marketing, production plan development, integrated quality control, marketing promotion and other factors; 2.3) A study of technology application for local wisdom and weaving inheritance should be pursued. Sustainable creative weaving for promotion and preservation, and creative local weaving of clothes, decorations and wares should be promoted; 2.4) The management of weaving processes, both domestic and abroad, should be compared and analysed; 2.5) A study should be focused on development of creative product design based on analysis of consumer surveys. This will increase the quality of products in the market.

Conclusions

The Thai - Krang ethnic group emigrated from Poo - krang Town, an old town on the West side of the Mekhong River. They carry out and inherit cultural traditions concerning woven cloth production. All cloth is woven from local cotton and silk, using natural dyes from plants. Thai - Krang woven cloth products have been continuously transmitted from generation to generation in the family unit and are produced in modern society by community enterprises. There are current problems with insufficient budget, unskilled workers, weak production quality control, lack of designers, creativity and marketing. The suggestions for application of traditional knowledge are increased creativity to add cultural and economic value to products, organization of conservation projects and greater consideration of consumer needs.

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