Krachuut: A Modification of Banthon Basketry from Self Sustainable Folk Handicrafts to Marketable Products

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Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to study the traditional self sustainable production of Krachuut basketry for household uses of people in Banthon, and the developmental process in its production for business marketing purposes. The study employed the participatory action research methodology. Data collection procedures including in-depth interviews and small group discussions were conducted with two major groups of participants. The first group comprised Krachuut basketry makers in Banthon and the other group included the community leaders, learned men and government officials responsible for the Krachuut basketry products. Research instruments consisted of in-depth interview questions, small group discussions and participatory observers in group activities. Data obtained were categorized according to relevant topics, transcribed and interpreted and triangulated for conclusion.

Results revealed that the traditional production and uses of Krachuut basketry products in Banthon were due to the availability of the raw natural resources, Krachuut tress, and it was only for everyday use among the villagers. The design and coloring of the traditional Krachuut basketry was plain with no particular patterns, for the purposes of household uses. Firstly, the old-style production and use of these Krachuut basketry products exhibited an excellent relationship between nature and human inhabitants – to live and use their natural resources wisely and properly. Later the production of Krachuut basketry products was supported by the government aiming at promoting local uses to the marketing products. Since then Krachuut basketry products have been manufactured principally for sale and became a major income for the villagers of Banthon. The production procedures of Krachuut basketry products have been changed both in their form and design. The raw material Krachuut plants were cut in mass with a scythe in stead of the conventional pull off the whole Krachuut from its roots. Dying method has also been changed. The basketry products were dyed after they were made instead of dying the Krachuut stripes before weaving. Moreover, the design of the basketry was changed from the colored Krachuut stripes weaved so that the decorated patterns could be spectacled to the painting of the ready-made products or placing the exterior patterns on the basketry products.

The community finance has been changed to the capitalistic system and this has weakened the family relationship in the community from a self-sustained way of living to a more competitive one. It is recommended that the Krachuut basketry products makers of Banthon must learn and adjust their production process to keep to the new ways of business, and at the same time, to protect their traditional handicrafts, Krachuut basketry products.
Background

Handicraft basketry has been one of the oldest arts of human being since the pre-history age. It can be said as the oldest creative handicraft of mankind. The world earliest basketry found in a cave area of Srisawat District in Kanchanaburi Province proved to be older than 4,000 years, in the Neolithic Age (Rachawadee Njamsanja, 1997). Basketry has been related directly and indirectly in human life. It reflects folk culture and ways of living, beliefs and local and social intellectual of the people in the areas.

Krachuut basketry is originated from the combination of local arts, wisdom and availability of natural resources. People in such area traditionally used their cultural wisdom and skills in creating handicraft for household uses without the use of machines or technology. Krachuut basketry of Banthon was originated from folk handicraft created from local, thought, and experience and then was heritaged from the ancestors through the generations until today. This handicraft basketry was well-known as a pride of people in the community and including neighborhoods villages. However, the original purposes of Krachuut basketry was for every day uses in the households. They made general households utensils from Krachuut stalk such as sitting and sleeping mats, rice sacks and other every household utensil.

Due to the globalization in economy and financial system, a great influences and changes are put on the local area finances. Local and folk handicraft skills were less acknowledged and replaced by new financial and commercial management. Krachuut basketry of Banthon can no longer resist the technology for mass manufacturing which was brought in the local area. Without the technology the Krachuut basketry cannot be produced and marketed competitively with the present day markets (Jureerat Buakaew and Somboon Tanasuk, 1997).

Thailand has been westernized, believing to be progressed financially as the western countries. The country finance was planned and controlled under the National Economic and Social Development Plan Issue 1 B.E. 2504. The aim of the developmental plan is to elevate Thailand from an under-developed country to a developing country in finance, politics and cultures (Chattip Natsupa, 1997). The government aimed to combine the local area skills and wisdom with the advanced technology in manufacturing local area handicrafts for the present day marketing of the products. This developmental plan, however, have a great impact to the simple way of living and local finance, changing from the local self-sufficiency finance to the profit-based capitalization system. These changes in financial practices had weakened the
relationships among relatives and neighbors in their original self-sustainable finance and ways of living that has been carried out from generations to generations (Napaporn Hawanon, 1999). At present the traditional way of living has been changed enormously and continually according to the consumer market environment. The government developmental plan as well as the capitalization trends in the world economics has forced the community to adapt to survive in the new commercialized environment.

The Banthon community has been influenced by this economic developmental plan. The Krachuut basketry makers supported and encouraged by the government officials set up the business group of Krachuut basketry makers. Although supported by the governmental projects such as the One Tambon One Product Project (OTOP) and the Social Investment Fund, at the beginning the local people had struggled through trials and errors in manufacturing, marketing and capital problems. They realized the problems and resorted for the solution and at the same time they never rejected or opposed the policies and plans proposed by the governmental organizations.

In brief, changes and development in the Banthon Krachuut basketry to serve the consumer market in the new financial environment together with the supports from the governmental officials to elevate local and cultural wisdom made the people learn and adapt to these changes for the survival of the community finance. This study was conducted to study the changes and adaptation of the Banthon people in producing Krachuut basketry products from the original self-sustained production process to the new process to serve the marketing purpose. Findings from this study can be used in the development of the Krachuut products groups to meet the real needs of the community.

**Research Objectives**

1. To study the original production process of Krachuute basketry products in Banthon Area
2. To investigate changes and development process of the production of Krachuute basketry products from its original process to the marketing products in Banthon Area.

**Research Methodology**

This section describes the research procedure including selection of the study areas and the informants, construction of research instruments, data collecting procedure and data analysis.
The areas selected for the study were Moo 5 (Village) Banthon, Moo 10 Banthon Helae, Moo 11 Banthon Arman and Moo 12 Banthon Na-imm in Tambon (Sub-district) Khok-khean, Muang District, Narathiwat Province. These villages are the areas in which the most of local people are producing Krachuut basketry for living at present.

Informants for the study were divided into two groups local people who are now earning their living on production on Krachuut basketry and a group of local leaders, learned people and government officials responsible for this issue.

Research Instruments were in-depth interview questions, small group discussions and participating as observes in activities of different groups concerning Krachuut basketry production.

Data collection was done firstly from relevant documents and a field survey in the target study areas. The information was used to constitute the open-ended interview questions for the in-depth interview sessions to the two groups of informants. The researcher participated in small group discussions and made some observations on the activities conducted in the areas of study. Triangulation of obtained data from three different sources was done to verify the research findings.

Data obtained from the in-depth interview, small group discussion and participatory observation were transcribed, categorized into relevant topics, verified and triangulated for validation to answer the research questions. The findings were then presented as a description report.

Finding

Banthon is situated as a small fishery village on the banks of Thai Gulf for more than 150 years. The local people earn their living from fishery which is plentiful in their natural environment. Fishery can’t be done, however, in the Monsoon season, so the local people need to have some alternative ways to earn their living in such a harsh season. Many of them work as hired workers in Malaysia, some work in the rubber plantation or have their own small business in food preservation products and others such as bu-du source, salted fish, female scarves, counterfeit Kolae boats and Krachuut basketry. Krachuut basketry which is the subject of this study is described below.

There was no documentation on when Krachuut basketry in Banthon originated. However, it was produced and used in the areas from generations to generations. Information from the research informants explained that it was done as a family job from their great-grand
parents and sent down to younger generations. Some remembered themselves started pulling the Krachuut plants since they were very young. Generally, Krachuut were used to make mats (for sitting or sleeping), robes and sacks used as containers for some products such as rice, grain, sugar or salt. One informant said that:

“I can still remember that, in the past, the most famous design of Krachuut basketry was “Teekaputeh” meaning the white mat in Thai language. It was a mat with the same color. There used to be a lot of Krachuut plants all over the areas of now Banthon Airport and Bajoh Industrial Asset. The area around there used to be Pete swamp forest and there were huge areas of Krachuut shrubs.
(Patcharin Binchehming, interviewed on 17 February 2011)”

The Krachuut basketry was originated from local area wisdom and limitation and availability of natural resources. Banthon is located close to the sea and there is not much land for growing rice. People around the area remembered that they needed to go to other remote villages to buy rice. The informant told a story told to her by a long-time passed away mom about this.

“My mom told us that in her time people in Banthon had to go the remote villages to buy rice. Because of the long journey they needed to take and they needed to by a large quantity of rice, they needed some containers or sacks to carry a large amount of rice to their village.”
(Saroh Mama, interviewed on 18 February 2011)

It can be observed from the interview that the original purposes of Krachuut basketry was for every day uses in the households. People used the large amount of natural resources they had to fulfill their needs in their living. They made general households utensils from Krachuut stalk such as sitting and sleeping mats, rice sacks and other every household utensil. This demonstrated the traditional way of life of the local people in Banthon in using the natural resources to fulfill their living and primary needs in the family. It was later when the Krachuut basketry products were widely used and there were some exchanges of goods among people in the same village or the nearby areas. Simple trading of these Krachuut basketry products began. When people in Banthon went to buy rice in other villages, they bought with them the Krachuut sacks to carry rice back home. People in those villages started to exchange their rice for the Krachuut sacks for their own use. Some bought them for their
household uses. This way Krachuut basketry was widely used among inhabitants in the nearby areas.

“In the past one Krachuut mat was only around 3-5 baht and later it was raised to 7 baht. Now a Krachuut mat is sold in yards. One yard is around 250 baht. The middleman trader bought it that price from local people and sold it at 700 baht a yard. We sold the Krachuut products to the neighboring villages such as Bandugu, Bahjo and Palus.” (Maenah Binbueraheng, interviewed on 17 February 2011)

“Once HRH Queen Sirikit went to Banthon Masjid to visit the people in Tambon Khok-khean and the nearby areas and saw the Krachuut mats made by the villagers for covering the floor. The queen told me to tell the local people to combine all the patterns they can design within one mat. I looked for the person who was the best Krachuut mat maker in the area, Mrs. Leemoh Chehteh (passed away) and asked her to make it as advised by HRH the queen.”
(Dilok Siriwanlop, interviewed on 21 February 2011)

Information from the above interviewees, it was evidenced that the original production of Krachuut products was done for local and household use for very long time. But since the products were seen by HRH Queen Sirikit and due to her acknowledgement of the products and her desires and advices to conserve and expand the local wisdom of the Krachuut products, the villagers worked together to collect around ten best Krachuut product makers to learn and practice on this among each other and help train other novice in doing the Krachuut products so that it is maintained as Banthon heritage through its younger generations.

In the original production process of Krachuut products for household use, it was found that most villagers made the products in their own houses and they did not work together in a group. The production procedure was carried out among the younger generation in natural ways of learning from seeing and observing the elder generation in the same family making it. They could therefore make Krachuut basketry products by themselves when they grew up. The patterns and designs of the products were simple and could be copied easily.

“In the past, people in Banthon didn’t have a permanent job. They did whatever they could to earn their living. Men went out to fish, collect Krachuut stalks, while women made the Krachuut mats or sacks and looked after the children at home. They made the Krachuut mats and sacks in a very simple and easy way. Later, there were some
orders for different types of sacks, so they created more different forms and designs of the products to serve more purposes of uses and needs of the customers.”

(Armenoh Saleh, interviewed on 19 February 2011)

“When I was young, I made half of a Krachuut container in the morning before going to school and finished the other half when I got back from school. In the past, people earned their living easier and simpler. We didn’t have too much expense. We didn’t go out far or often because we didn’t have good transportation. There were no local roads in those days. Most villagers earned their living by fishing, pulling Krachuut stalk. The Krachuut basketry products were just done very simply and they didn’t make many of them. They normally made them for their own household use and sold them to others if they wanted them”.

(Rokiyoh Tayeh, interviewed on 17 February 2011)

As can be learned from the interviews that the production and use of Krachuut products were originally due to the availability of Krachuut plants in the natural environments and needs for use them in every day living of the local area people. In other words, Krachuut products were originally made and used in Banthon from natural availability and cultural needs. Gradually Krachuut production has been changed and developed for the marketing purposes.

The modification of Krachuut goods from life sustaining to marketing products started when there was a governmental section came to Banthon in 1979 to encourage the local area people to form a group to make Krachuut basketry products. The working group was then formed and had Mrs. Arminoh Salaeh as the group leader. The forms and designs of the Krachuut products were then improved and well accepted in the market. There were both original basketry style such as Krachuut mats and new products such as lady handbags and cylindrical containers in different sizes and styles that can be used for different purposes as containers or as home decorated devices. Most Krachuut products were made by orders. The designs and forms were done according to market demands. In 1982 the Krachuut products were marketed in a wider area and this made a good income to the local area people. The amount of Krachuut shrubs were reduced sharply in 1987 due to the higher demand for Krachuut plants. For mass productions to meet the market demand Krachuut was cut using a sickle and this caused problems of scarcity for the Krachuut roots left from the cuts got rotten and damaged the rest of the shrubs. In production, there were supports from the governmental
sections, sending in experts in product designs and production techniques to train the villagers using the new techniques and production procedure. Trainings and workshops were conducted to support the Krachuut production and marketing. Officials in Department of Rural Area Development supported in budgets and management to help enhance quality and design of the Krachuut products to meet the market trends. New technology has been introduced in the process of preparing Krachuut for more beautiful and better quality products.

“In the year 1990 the Department of Rural Area Development asked me to join Mrs. Arminoh’s group and help train the other local area people. We made only a few types of products such as containers, and mats during those days.”
(Maenah Binbueraheng, interviewed on 17 February 2011)

“The Banthon Arman Krachuut production group was established in the year 2000. Now we have 35 members. We spend the time when we are free from the hired work jobs to make the Krachuut products for sale. Our products are very well accepted by the outer markets and this motivates us to develop our products.”
(Phatcharin Binchehmng, interviewed on 17 February 2011)

Krachuut is now in short supply. The Krachuut plants in our areas are not enough for market demands.”
(Hadinah Binngo, interviewed on 27 March 2011)

As can be seen from the interviews, Krachuut products are, at present, well marketed and a good source for earning money. The villagers could see the importance of Krachuut plants. Krachuut can be a good source of incomes of the family and community in general. Several attempts were done by a group of people in the Banthon community and the government officials to support the marketing of the Krachuut basketry products. In the year 2004, the government endorsed the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project to help the local community to use their local wisdom, culture and resources to develop and market their products. They supported on new knowledge, technologies and management of the business and helped expanding the products to the national and international markets, hoping that this will in turn strengthen the local community. By that time Banthon community had registered for six OTOP groups.
“Our group has registered as an OTOP group in the year 2004. After that we could earn a lot more income. Registering as the OTOP member, we needed to frequently update the forms, patterns and designs of our products.”
(Armenoh Saleh, interviewed on 19 February 2011)

“I must admit that at the present time we need to search for new ideas and format of our products to serve the market needs. The Krachuut products used to be our main sources of income but now there are more and more competitors in the market. We need to search for new ideas and look for new initiatives in our production.”
(Phatcharin Binchehm, interviewed on 17 February 2011)

As can be inferred from the interviews that the Krachuut basketry products group in Banthon can earn more income and so this brings about a much better economics of the family and community in general. The villagers, however, need to be active and innovative in terms of product design and its marketing management. Most importantly, they need to be careful about the way they harvest the Krachuut stalks. Otherwise they might lose the sources of raw materials for the products. The production procedure in general needed to be enhanced to keep up with competition in the wider markets. At present the Krachuut basketry products of Banthon are well known. The up-market for the products is the Royal Jitralada Projects and another important market is the government OTOP fairs in different parts of the country.

At present people in Banthon take parts in almost all important steps in manufacturing the Krachuut basketry products, starting from collecting the Krachuut stalks, preparing the product parts, making the Krachuut products, and even taking the roles of middlemen in sales of the products. Krachuut products are now important sources of income in Banthon community. The exploitation of natural resource of Krachuut stalks without considerations for further use, such as the way they cut off the Krachuut stalks instead of pulling the whole plants and the destruction of swamps can lead to deterioration of Krachuut plantation and this may cause the problems to the economy of Banthon community.

Conclusion and Discussion

1. The Krachuut products of Banthon are originated from the traditional self-sustained ways of living. Krachuut was the local plants people could find in their neighborhoods and these Krachuut stalks were later used to make some household utensils and other everyday life tools such as mats, robes and sacks for their agricultural products and salt. This production process of Krachuut basketry products reflects the folk ways of
living where human beings live on their natural environment. The tools for household use were simply made without a lot of design or colors. As Daranee Meebun (2001) explains that handicraft is a hand-made device made by local people, using things they can find easily in their natural surroundings for their own use. These devices are handed down from the older generations to the younger ones and they later represent folk wisdom and uniqueness of that area. The Krachuut basketry products of Banthon are one of the handicrafts created and used in the areas. They are not only the tools or containers made form Krachuut, but they also represent the social, cultural and natural environment of Banthon. In the traditional stage of the production and uses of the Krachuut products in everyday life, they were not decorated or colored for the goal is purely for use. The process of making the products is done in the sustainable way in which the natural resources were used carefully. In the past it can be said that natural resources were used with respects and understanding for conserving the natural resources for further use and the resources were used just for survival and not in destructive ways.

2. Changes in the production process of Krachuut as a sustainable product to the marketable products started when the government endorsed several projects to promote the local area products and make them marketable nationwide. This leads to changes in forms and production process of the Krachuut products of Banthon. Krachuut stalks are now cut by a sickle and the dying process has also been changed. In the original production process in which the Krachuut stripes were dyed before they were weaved to make a container so that the pattern of the stripes will show beautifully. Now the already made products were dyed and then painted or placed with some artificial flowers. The Krachuut shrubs were almost used up because of the needs for larger amount and the ways they were cut leaving rotten roots and so the new trees cannot grow fast enough for use in the mass production process to fulfill the market. These changes in the production for mass marketing make an unexpected progress of the manufacturing of the Krachuut products. In contrast, the production and marketing of the Krachuut products was not yet well established as other well-known products of the country. This situation might suggest that an attempt to make the rural areas grow and modernize as western countries can risk the weakening among local people in their natural way of living, their natural environment and their every day activities. As Napaporn Hawanon (1999) posits that modernization of the
local community has changed the simple and basic ways of living and community self sustained economy to the profitable production under the capitalization. These changes could destroy the good and relative-like relationship among people in the community. The researcher viewed that the Krachuut products in Banthon is an example of the government project to help elevate the production of folk handicrafts to the profitable and marketable products for the purposes of financial growth. While the changes in spiritual and ways of living of the local people is ignored. It is suggested that success in any of the developmental project must go hand in hand with the acceptance of local wisdom and belief and the project must get along well with the context of living of that community.

Suggestions emerging from the study

The study of changes in the self sustained Krachuut products of the Banthon Community to the marketable products suggests that the developmental plan for the marketing for Krachuut products should be done in a holistic approach. This means that all involved parties such as the Krachuut products makers, the government officials and community leaders should be aware of the problems and needs, potentiality and promptness of each of the group participants so that the developmental plan can be a successful one. Recommendations emerged from the study are as follow.

1. The administration and group management should be supported and strengthened.
2. The ancient forms and patterns in weaving Krachuut products should be revived so that they will not be fade way without any recognition of even the community younger generation.
3. Research should be done to support the development of the Krachuut handicrafts. A study should be done on how the Krachuut stalks should be harvested to conserve the plant for future use. The present method of cutting the plants with a sickle and left their roots rotten made trees cannot grow fast and this is the main cause of insufficiency of raw materials for Krachuut products. An appropriate way of developing and strengthening the group management should be researched to constitute the body of knowledge for the development.
References

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