

Innovative Marketing of Traditional Chinese Handicrafts

Jiayun Meng^{1,a,*}

¹College of the Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State University, PA, USA

a. jxm6787@psu.edu

*corresponding author

Abstract: Traditional crafts are the continuation of the traditional culture and history of the nation. The cultural development of a group is documented by its artifacts, which also record the history of the nation or country and record its rise and fall. Marketing Innovation is an important contemporary marketing concept, and the effective use of innovation can rejuvenate traditional technologies. This paper analyzes the bottlenecks encountered by the contemporary Chinese traditional handicraft industry and provides new directions for the development of Chinese traditional handicraft industry by combining the innovation examples of related industries abroad. It can be concluded that modernizing the product and management structure of Chinese traditional handicrafts with modern advanced technology and management expertise, as well as innovating content marketing models and tools, can effectively enhance the development of Chinese traditional handicrafts. This can benefit the financial rewards of handicraft practitioners as well as the preservation of Chinese traditional handicrafts.

Keywords: innovative marketing, traditional Chinese handicrafts, traditional handicraft dilemma

1. Introduction

Artifacts are the witness of a group's cultural development process, which contains the history of the nation or country, witnessing the rise and fall of the country and nation. The traditional handicrafts and historical relics are in the same lineage, when it comes to the continuation of the traditional national culture and history. According to Yanzu Li, traditional arts and crafts mainly refer to those arts and crafts that were formed during the handicraft era and are characterized by the combination of use and beauty [1]. Traditional handicrafts show the characteristics of each nation, such as the elegant porcelain from the Chinese Song Dynasty, the beautiful batik from Indonesia, and the beautiful cloth woven by hand-cranked weaving technology from Sri Lanka. These are the symbols of national culture, representing the image of the nation and the country in the international arena. Chinese traditional crafts have a long and splendid history and occupy an important place in the whole history of Chinese culture and art development. Since ancient times, Chinese traditional crafts have been famous and enjoyed a great reputation overseas. In recent years, with the gradual replacement of manual labor by industrial machines, Chinese traditional crafts have not been developed in a benign way, and the survival status of manufacturers and sales companies is not profitable, and some traditional crafts production and technology are in danger of being lost. And this phenomenon is not only in China, but in the world is an urgent problem to solve. This paper explores the historical factors

of traditional handicraft development in China and the contemporary dilemmas of traditional handicraft development and explores the applicability of these approaches in China using the practices of relevant foreign industries as a reference point. The paper analyzes the traditional handicraft industry in India and the traditional brass industry in Sri Lanka, explores the means to support the innovative development of the traditional handicraft industry in these two countries, and summarizes three approaches that can be used in China.

2. Historical Factors and Contemporary Influences on the Formation of Traditional Chinese Handicrafts

Most of the early Chinese traditional handicrafts were mainly handicraft workshops, and they were divided into folk handicrafts and government handicrafts. The folk handicraft industry was mainly composed of families and the products were circulated in the market, while the government handicraft industry was hereditary, and the products were not circulated in the market. The folk handicraft industry lacks standardized processes and quality raw materials, and although the output is guaranteed and practical, the quality is not good. The quality of government handicrafts is guaranteed by the government's reputation, but due to the complicated and time-consuming production process, the quality of products is high, but the output is low, mostly decorative and does not flow into the market for sale. The early mode of operation of the handicraft industry has also had a great impact on the handicraft industry in China today. The hereditary nature of the early handicraft industry has gradually evolved into the "master-apprentice system" of today's traditional handicraft industry; the representatives of the early excellent handicrafts such as porcelain and Su embroidery are mostly sold as decorative items in modern times because of the complicated production methods; most of the exquisite handicraft products are not circulated in the market and thus do not have a high reputation among the general public in modern times. Most of the handmade products are not circulated in the market, so they are not very popular among the general public. How to combine the production and innovative marketing of traditional and modern crafts has become the key to reviving traditional Chinese handicrafts. In recent productions, tradition has played a key role in promoting the development of cultural product markets and accelerating the integration of "new" and "old" in creative cultural industries. To transform traditional elements to meet contemporary needs, these elements must be redesigned into new products that meet current socio-cultural trends and contemporary performance and practicality standards [2].

3. The Current Marketing Dilemma Encountered by Chinese Traditional Handicrafts

3.1. Weak Awareness of Content Innovation, Long Production Cycle and Low Output

Many traditional handicrafts still continue the old images of hundreds of years ago in terms of story themes and character design, and the cultural connotation remains unchanged for decades or even centuries, which retains the historical nature of handicrafts to a certain extent, but cannot be combined with current popular culture, making traditional handicrafts lose vitality [3]. Yangzhou lacquerware, for example, has a long history, having first originated in the Warring States period. The most common decorative motifs on lacquer ware are divided into types such as landscape scenery, flowers and various birds representing auspicious symbols, ancient ladies and ancient Chinese fables, which have a high aesthetic appreciation value for modern consumers, but also require a high threshold of understanding. As a result, traditional lacquer culture is not popular among young consumers, and the target consumers are more likely to be older customers with certain financial means. At the same time, a qualified traditional craft requires a great deal of time from the artisan to engage in production, and this results in long production cycles, low yields, and low efficiency, which cannot be compared to industrialized products produced on assembly lines [4].

3.2. Brain Drain and Lack of Successors in Traditional Crafts

Take traditional glazed lamp crafts as an example, the "master-apprentice system" as the means of inheritance is no longer adapted to the production process of modern crafts, and some "traditional customs" are already bad habits that affect the development of the industry in modern times. At the same time, the lack of social and economic status of artisans has caused a large number of young artisans to leave the industry to seek alternative development.

3.3. Weak Brand Awareness and Disorderly Competition in Sales

Chinese traditional handicrafts lack a branding system, and consumers do not have a clear perception of the true value of traditional handicrafts, and the image of handicrafts is not irreplaceable in the eyes of consumers. At the same time, the traditional handicraft industry does not have a scientific and efficient product development, promotion, distribution and service process [3]. Some enterprises lower the price of handicrafts in order to seize the market share, resulting in the bad influence of "bad money expelling good money".

3.4. Weak Publicity, Old-fashioned Marketing Techniques and Lack of Concepts

Traditional crafts are more inclined to "word-of-mouth marketing" and "acquaintance marketing", and do not grasp the essence of modern marketing methods. The old-fashioned marketing methods cannot combine the traditional culture contained in the handicrafts with the trend, and they also impose constraints on the sales of traditional handicrafts.

4. Foreign Experience and Lessons

4.1. Change and Development of the Indian Traditional Handicraft Industry

The Indian traditional handicraft industry faces the same dilemma as that of China, the lack of capital and the loss of the young generation of handicraft talents. The modern Indian handicraft industry and hand-cranked textile industry is the second largest unorganized industry after agriculture. The main body of artisans is composed of ethnic minorities and poor people, and it is difficult for this group of people to have a voice in society, which leads to the social and economic status of artisans being at a disadvantage in local society. Despite the high output of the Indian handicraft industry and the fact that its products are exported to many countries abroad and are in high demand globally, only a small portion of the profits actually go to the artisans and most of them go to the dealers [5]. The lack of support from the relevant trade unions, the absence of government policies to protect them, and the lack of adequate financial support has led to a lack of competition for traditional Indian handicrafts to compete with other goods in the market. This situation has further influenced the younger generation of Indian handicraft workers to switch to other industries with higher incomes, which is more detrimental to the innovation of traditional industries.

From the historical point of view, after the industrial revolution and the British colonial influence, India was transformed into the "factory of the world" with industrialized production as the main industry. The traditional handicrafts were gradually replaced by the time-consuming and labor-intensive traditional handicrafts produced by the machine assembly line, and the traditional handicrafts were gradually transformed into an economically disadvantaged group. More and more traditional handicrafts are produced in small workshops, which are not as efficient as large companies with well-developed industrial systems, and the capital of small workshops is not able to bear the market and financial risks of a larger scale.

Due to these constraints, local Indian companies and related organizations have made many efforts to modernize the Indian handicraft industry. First, they have raised the social status and voice of artisans. Many Indian companies have chosen to introduce innovative organizational models to enhance the well-being of artisans by involving them directly in social organizations. This is accompanied by specialized training for artisans to increase their productivity [5]. Sadhna (a social enterprise that aims to promote the sustainability of its artisans in poor areas and improve the economic income and social status of women) promotes traditional silk weaving by providing a modern marketing platform and innovative design practices to the organization's female poor rural artisans. Sadhna has selected some of the best artisans to be trained in modern garment sewing, cutting and finishing, and selected senior artisans to join the manager and learn management skills to ensure a close connection with the market. Secondly, Indian companies have expanded the marketing of traditional crafts on the Internet. For example, Fabindia (a company that sells traditional furniture and crafts online) has borrowed from modern factory product lines and reorganized its suppliers according to the artisan community within the Fabindia framework, providing artisans with control over production and logistics while spreading the company's financial risk in the marketplace.

4.2. Sri Lanka's Traditional Brass Industry Revitalized Through Reform and Innovative Marketing

Sri Lanka has reformed its traditional brass industry in response to economic liberalization and globalization. The Udu-Nuwara copper industry in the central highlands of Sri Lanka has a history of more than 500 years to date and is closely associated with the local Buddhist culture. In the traditional Sri Lankan handicraft industry, most of the industries are composed of scattered, small and independent units (especially referring to family-based handicraft workshops), and the copper industry is no exception [6]. The current production of mainstream products follows the trend of "fast, iterative and changing", which is very different from the "slow, stable pattern" of traditional crafts. Therefore, it is difficult for the traditional bronze industry to accept new approaches to development. While tradition and close family ties help to preserve deep-rooted local knowledge, skills and values, they also limit the active participation of artisans in creative and innovative development and in responding to market changes [6]. At the same time, the emigration and loss of younger generations of artisans, and cheaper imports have increased competition within the market.

Based on the above, the local bronze industry in Sri Lanka has responded positively. First, the local traditional copper industry has increased its uptake of new knowledge, technology, infrastructure and other advanced support services, improved artisan expertise through training, and broken the shackles of the industry's over-reliance on community and family ties. Secondly, through a selective revival of Sri Lanka's tourism industry, the copper industry has become a niche market for crafts that combines tradition and innovation and makes more distinctive cultural products. Also focus on online marketing, based on media platforms Facebook and Instagram and other social platforms such as WhatsApp and Viber to promote the products to locals and foreigners.

There are many other examples around the world where local traditional handicrafts have been developed through innovation: the revival of traditional industrial products in Taiwan through a focus on sustainable design, the use of innovative materials, and a human-centered product marketing concept; the revival of the traditional batik industry in Indonesia through an open and innovative concept that increases the diversity and innovation of products and services, provides quality service and quick after-sales for customers, and creates a platform to promote the products. Indonesia's traditional batik industry to be revitalized [2, 7].

5. Solutions that China can Learn From

5.1. Innovation of Inheritance Model and Improvement of the Economic and Social Status of Artisans

The "master-apprentice" mode of production should be introduced into the modern enterprise system, and the contribution of artisans and the bonus system should be clarified through the rules, and the knowledge and skills of artisans should be improved through training, and the income of artisans should be increased. Regular academic exchanges between artisans and art colleges at home and abroad not only allow artisans to learn modern aesthetic features and contemporary trends, but also allow art college students to understand traditional skills at a deeper level, and combine traditional crafts with modern artistic expression, so that traditional crafts are accepted by more people and reborn with new vitality [8].

5.2. Awareness of Content Innovation Improvement and Marketing Promotion Means Enhancement

Traditional crafts should combine advanced technologies such as 3Dmax, ZBRUSH and other software for product design, and always pay attention to market trends and improve user adhesion of the younger generation of consumers through co-branding with market-hit IPs and other means [9]. At the same time expand the marketing of traditional crafts on the Internet and interact deeply with users through social media platforms such as Little Red Book and TikTok [8].

5.3. Combination with Local Tourism and Vigorously Experiential Marketing Development

Combining with the unique local workshop production method, it is suggested to use the Internet social platform's dissemination of workshop production methods to attract tourists to the local traditional craft workshops for experiential teaching and drive the development of local cultural industries and product sales through the way of experiential consumption [10].

6. Conclusion

This study found that the main factors influencing the bottleneck in the development of the contemporary Chinese traditional handicraft industry are as follows: a weak sense of innovation, serious brain drain and weak brand awareness. The reasons for these factors cannot be separated from the history of the formation and development of the Chinese handicraft industry. This paper discusses the factors affecting the traditional handicraft industry in India and Sri Lanka, which are facing the same difficulties of lack of capital, lack of successors and fierce competition. Finally, it analyzes the ways to redevelop handicrafts in both countries. One key approach is to improve the economic status and social influence of artisans in order to retain talent in the industry. This involves providing financial support and training opportunities, as well as promoting the social and cultural significance of traditional crafts. Another strategy is to improve traditional craft processes through the adoption of modern production management techniques and technologies. This helps to increase efficiency, reduce waste and improve the quality of the finished product. Finally, developing local tourism around traditional crafts provides a valuable source of income for artisans and helps to increase the visibility of these crafts among a wider audience.

In summary, this paper finds that upgrading the product and management structure of Chinese traditional handicrafts with current advanced technology and management experience, as well as innovating content marketing models and tools, can effectively enhance the development of Chinese traditional handicrafts, which can have a positive effect on the economic benefits of handicraft

practitioners and the preservation of Chinese traditional handicrafts. This paper provides a clear solution for the Chinese traditional handicraft industry by summarizing the development methods of Indian and Sri Lankan traditional handicraft industries, but the re-emergence of Indian and Sri Lankan handicraft industries cannot be separated from the support of local policies, industries and people, and the specific situation of each country is different. Therefore, future research should focus on analyzing the effectiveness of these approaches in the specific context of Chinese traditional handicrafts and related industries.

References

- [1] Yanzu N. *Introduction to Art and Design*. Hubei Fine Arts Press, 2022.
- [2] Chen T Y, Chang W C, Hsieh K J, Chang C T. *Advancing Taiwan's traditional craft products: A modular product design model of manufacturing technologies*. *Technology in Society*, 2022, 71, 102103.
- [3] Jing Y. *An innovative service model for the sustainable development of traditional handicrafts: an example of Pingrun's 5A "one-stop" service marketing system for high-end handicrafts*. *Furniture (01)*, 2017.
- [4] Qiaoqian Y, Bo R. *A new genus of the genus Phyllostachys (Hymenoptera, Braconidae) from China. Conservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage glazed lampwork*. *Shanghai Arts and Crafts (03)*, 2021, 93-95.
- [5] Banerjee A, Mazzarella F. *Designing Innovative Craft Enterprises in India: A Framework for Change Makers*. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 2022, 8(2): 192-216.
- [6] Rathnayake S R, Grodach C. *Transformation and tensions in the Sri Lankan brassware industry: Lessons for craft industry clusters in the global South*. *City, Culture and Society*, 2022, 31: 100476.
- [7] Raya A B, Andiani R, Siregar A P, Prasada I Y, Indana F, Simbolon T G Y, Nugroho A D. *Challenges, open innovation, and engagement theory at craft smes: Evidence from Indonesian batik*. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 2021, 7(2): 121.
- [8] Chao C, Jijiang C. *Marketing innovation of traditional handicraft products: An example of Yangzhou traditional handicraft products*. *China Economic and Trade Journal*, 2012, (19): 58-59.
- [9] Yang Liu, Chen Z Z, ChunXiao Y. *Internet + innovation of traditional handicrafts of Lotus beaten tin in Pingxiang*. *Computer Products and Circulation*, 2018, (04): 150.
- [10] Pan C, Wang L, Gao Q. *Innovative thinking of traditional handicraft marketing under the background of "Internet+"*. *Journal of Economic Research Introduction*, 2021, (19): 55-57.