

07th Asia-Pacific International Conference on Quality of Life

Wina Holiday Villa, Kuta, Bali, Indonesia, 30 Sep – 02 Oct 2023

Influence of AEM Model on the Sustainable Development of Traditional Ethnic Handicraft

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Abstract

This study, based on a transcontinental perspective, establishes an AEM model aimed at fostering the sustainable development of ethnic handicrafts. The objective of this model is to facilitate the development of ethnic handicrafts from three dimensions: artistic creation, education, and the market economy, while simultaneously promoting cross-regional integration of ethnic cultures. Throughout the research process, the researcher primarily employed field surveys, literature analysis, and studio research methods.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v8i26.5183>

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research background

In an effort to preserve traditional ethnic cultures and foster innovation and development in traditional handicrafts, this project focuses on researching the traditional weaving crafts of the Malay ethnic group in western Malaysia, the Dong ethnic group in Guangxi Province, China, and the She ethnic group in Zhejiang Province, China. Throughout the research process, the researcher discovered that these ethnic groups, namely the Malay, Dong, and She, not only preserve their distinct ethnic cultures but also share some commonalities in terms of aesthetics and traditional skills.

For example, the Malays are the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, and their preference for decorative patterns tends to be "North Coast". "The so-called 'North Coast', in terms of historical, cultural and trade history, includes southern Burma, southern Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, southern and southeastern Sudan, the trading ports of Kalimantan, the eastern Islands, and even the coast of Southern India and southern China." (Lee,2007). The Malay people are affected by the port trade economy, and their aesthetic taste will also be affected by the cultural exchange. Therefore, similar to the triangular decoration at the end of the cloth "dunbang pattern", pay attention to the symmetry, order of flowers and vegetation, butterflies, geometric patterns, and even "based on Chinese patterns, one of the "butterfly flower" in the title of the sarong is a typical sarong style in Singapore and North Karang Nyonya" (Lee,2007) The Dong people worship multiple gods, and they believe that everything in the world has spirituality and can be used as an object of worship. "After entering the class society, the personification of God led to the humanization of God, and gradually formed the worship of the goddess 'Samar'" (Qin&Li&Ma,2022) Therefore, in the traditional living environment of the Dong people, various animals, plants, characters or mythical gods and beasts will appear as decorative elements. She people believe in ancestors and Panhu, and also have

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the tendency of pantheism and deism. Among them, “the Panhu legend is of great significance in the history of the She ethnic group. It is not only regarded as a totem worship, but also as the ancestral story and the origin history of the ethnic group.” (Li, 2022) Phoenix is also a divine animal worshipped by She people. “Phoenix plays an important role in She culture, is one of the representatives of She culture, many She ethnic art creation is derived from the phoenix, in the folk songs there are also a lot of phoenix praise.” (Duan, 2022) In addition, She people like to decorate with Chinese characters, pictographic symbols and geometric figures, not only because they are constrained by the warp and weaves of weaving techniques, but also because She people have good expectations for life. Researcher have found similarities in the traditional crafts of the three mentioned ethnic groups, such as a preference for decorating with patterns that exhibit continuity and a focus on auspicious symbolism. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to promote the development of ethnic traditional crafts through the fusion of different ethnic traditions, utilizing artistic creation as a means.

1.2 Research objective

AEM model mainly refers to the organic integration of "Art & education & Market". The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that AEM model has a significant impact on the development of traditional ethnic handicraft industry.

First, The concept of artistic innovation can make the traditional handicraft present in front of the world in a new attitude, and its function will be continuously developed because of the public's understanding and love of it. Secondly, Teachers can devote themselves to the construction of curriculum culture of ethnic arts and crafts, and students will have more space to experience and create ethnic arts and crafts. AEM model advocates making ethnic arts and crafts a part of academic culture with the help of teachers and campus platforms, which will help improve the recognition of ethnic arts and crafts and the influence of ethnic culture. Finally, The development of traditional handicraft can not only rely on handwork, but also develop mechanized production lines while retaining apprenticeship to teach traditional skills. Only increase production and expand marketing sales so as to improve economic benefits. According to the following figure, we can understand the structure and relationship of AEM schema. (Fig.1)

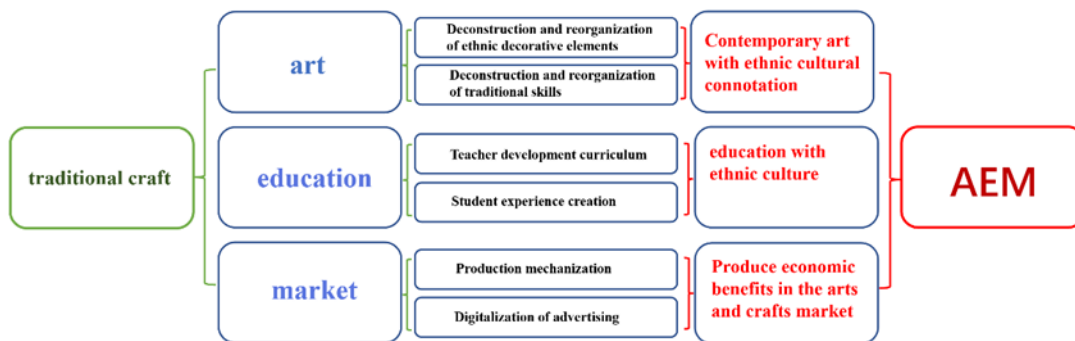


Figure1. Structure of the AEM model

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The theory of cultural re-creation

Hobsbawn & Ranger (1983) put forward The theory of cultural re-creation in The Invention of Tradition. The author believes that traditional culture should develop in a fluid way, which should not only develop or compare in one direction, but promote the development of culture on the basis of protecting traditional culture and emphasizing history. This view supports the AEM model proposed in this study, because the promotion of the AEM model is based on the principle of protecting the traditional ethnic culture to carry out innovative research on the development of traditional handicrafts.

2.2 Material Culture multidisciplinary theory

Richardson (1987) in his book the 'Forward', Material Culture: I Approaches to Material Culture Studies mentioned in the Material Culture multidisciplinary theory, although traditional handicraft is a kind of intangible culture in theory, it is the spread of traditional skills. However, such skills need to be expressed by material media, and will involve multi-disciplinary fields in the creation or innovation development.

2.3 Art stimulating emotion theory

“art stimulating emotion theory pointed out that art has emotional mobilization effect on audience, which can stimulate people's empathy for artistic works.” (Hegel.2019) Researcher try to make use of ethnic fiber art creation and combine the creative thinking of contemporary art to create fusion of different ethnic cultures, traditional manual techniques or materials. Ethnic fiber art works can not only enable the audience to appreciate and interpret the works, but also feel the dialogue between different national politics, culture and art.

2.4 the arts and crafts movement

As early as the late 19th century, the arts and crafts movement promoted in Britain greatly improved the social status of traditional handicrafts. “The reformers of the arts and Crafts movement tried to recreate the harmonious relationship between architects, designers and artisans, bringing the craft into production and designing good quality but affordable everyday objects.” (Elizabeth & Wendy, 2019) Undeniably, the thought of arts and crafts movement also provides a constructive theoretical framework for the research findings, such as the market economy mining of traditional crafts.

3.0 Methodology

During the research process, the researcher primarily employed methods such as expert interviews, field investigations, and studio research. Additionally, she analyzed the collected literature and interview data.

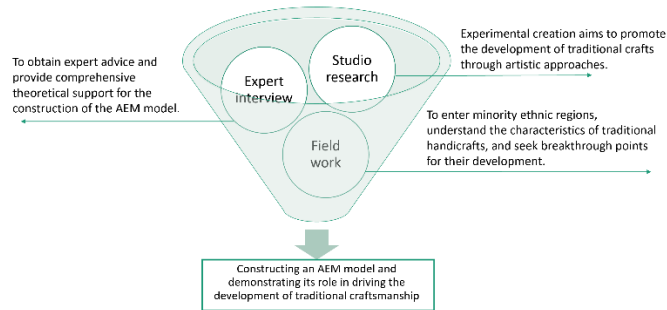


Figure2. Research methodology design diagram

3.1 Field work.

In order to understand the ethnic culture and traditional craftsmanship of the Malay, Dong, and She ethnic groups, researcher conducted field investigations in various regions, including the National Textile Museum in Malaysia, Malacca, as well as areas in China such as Guangxi and Zhejiang. (Table.1)

Table.1 The site of the researcher's field work

Research purpose [↵]	Research place [↵]	Research object [↵]
Understand the technical characteristics of textile in Malaysia [↵]	museum of Malaysia, [↵] Malacca [↵]	Batik, Malay textile, Batik artisans [↵]
Understand the characteristics of Chinese Dong weaving techniques [↵]	Guizhou, China; [↵] Guangxi, China; [↵]	Dong's brocade and weaving, Dong's handicraftsmen [↵]
Understand the characteristics of weaving techniques of She in China [↵]	Zhejiang, China [↵]	She's ribbon, woven goods, She's handicrafts [↵]

3.2 Experts interview

The researcher invited three experts with extensive experience in public art, traditional weaving craftsmanship, and fiber arts for interviews. Through these discussions, researcher aimed to gather professional insights from the experts regarding the development and innovation of ethnic traditional crafts. The following is the list of interviewees: (Table.2)

Table.2 List of experts

name [↵]	research field [↵]	work units [↵]	Title [↵]
Qing hua Wei [↵]	Ethnic brocade [↵]	Sanjiang Dong ethnic Embroidery Museum [↵]	Master of Chinese arts and crafts [↵]
Luo Hong [↵]	Fiber art [↵]	Guangxi University of Arts [↵]	professor [↵]
Yan gen Zhang [↵]	Public art [↵]	Guangxi University of Arts [↵]	professor [↵]

3.3 Studio research method

The researcher explored the creative forms of integrating different ethnic handicrafts through a practice-based research method such as studio research. For example, she engaged in experimental ethnic fiber art creations using traditional embroidery techniques and modern abstract symbols, aiming to accumulate more creative experiences.

4.0 Findings

The researcher obtained three significant findings through methods such as data compilation, analysis of artworks, and experimental creations:

I . Finding on the artistic dimension. Only in the field of art can the traditional ethnic handicraft actively realize the role transformation - from traditional image to modern modelling, from concrete and complex to abstract generalization, from religious belief to cultural creation, the traditional ethnic handicraft will have a qualitative change in the artistic and spiritual level.

II . Finding on the educational dimension. The infiltration of traditional ethnic crafts into education -- the "infiltration" refers to the two-way infiltration and influence. Traditional ethnic crafts not only need to enhance their influence with the help of campus platforms, but also need to rely on school art teachers and research workers to give more innovative ideas, and even get more inspiration from students' practical creation.

III . Discoveries on the market economy dimension. Excavate the economic value of traditional ethnic crafts, and strive to push traditional ethnic crafts to the market.

The researcher found that these three research viewpoints are the core content of AEM model, and adopting corresponding innovative means from these three levels will accelerate the pace of traditional craft inheritance and ethnic culture development.

5.0 Discussion

Based on the aforementioned research findings, the researcher further elaborate on the "Art," "Education," and "Market" dimensions involved in the AEM model. For instance, on the artistic dimension, the researcher argue that traditional craftsmanship needs to transition from being mere "historical artifacts" to becoming "artworks" that are integrated into the contemporary lives of people. Naturally, this transformation will result in a greater diversification of its forms. Additionally, the infusion of traditional craftsmanship into the realm of education, particularly through cultural education that embodies the spirit of education, is seen as the fundamental means of inheriting and developing traditional culture at its roots. Simultaneously, robust exploration of the current market economy will serve as the fundamental guarantee for the sustainable development of traditional craftsmanship. Therefore, investigating the avenues for developing the market economy of traditional craftsmanship is a key focus of this project.

5.1 Role transformation of traditional ethnic handicraft in the field of art

The researcher believe that the integration of different ethnic handicraft techniques and decorative styles helps to foster a sense of cultural exchange and dialogue, thereby promoting the development of traditional ethnic handicrafts. As an example, the artwork "Aggregation" showcases the use of wool as the primary material, along with basic embroidery techniques and needle poke method in its creation. (Plate.1-2)



Plate1. The technique of flat stitch embroidery used in the work
(Source: by researcher)



Plate2. Ethnic Fiber art work "Aggregation"
(Source: by researcher)

In summary, if traditional ethnic handicrafts expand beyond their social functions and incorporate more characteristics of contemporary art styles in their forms, while also catering to the aesthetic needs of modern people, their role and position in people's hearts will undergo a transformation. This change will contribute to their long-term sustainable development.

5.2 The infiltration of traditional ethnic handicraft into education

Traditional ethnic crafts not only reflect the development of human civilization, but also leave an imprint on some material cultural heritages. In order to keep traditional ethnic handicrafts alive, craftsmen and scholars try their best to protect the inheritance of traditional handicrafts and study their development ways. Researcher believe that university campus culture and university classes will be a broad platform for the inheritance and development of traditional ethnic culture. The infiltration of ethnic culture and traditional handicrafts into university courses will be conducive to the promotion of ethnic cultural exchanges and the enhancement of ethnic cultural self-confidence. In universities, the innovation of traditional ethnic crafts should not be limited solely to artistic creation; its influence should be extended to encompass multiple disciplines.

The researcher found that in many colleges and universities, arts and crafts related majors or even arts and crafts courses have been set up. For example, at Hunan Provincial Civil Affairs Vocational and Technical College, they have established the Museum of Arts and Crafts (Plate 3). According to the director of the college, this is an art platform for the teachers and students of the Faculty of Art, and also to enrich the leisure time of students of other majors. As Professor xiaoming Jiang said, "To reasonably guide leisure life, we need to make full use of leisure time, cultivate people's aesthetic consciousness through knowledge imparting and leisure experience, and guide people to beautify their hearts in nature, refine their humanity in social beauty, and get pleasure in artistic beauty, pursue truth, goodness and beauty, oppose false, evil and ugly, and actively improve their spiritual realm." (Jiang, 2021.05)



Plate 3. Museum of Arts and Crafts
(Source: by researcher)

It can be seen that as members of society, students should have a sense of mission in preserving ethnic culture. When it comes to traditional ethnic culture or traditional handicrafts, they need to undergo a gradual process of understanding and then creating.

5.3 Excavate the economic value of traditional ethnic crafts and push it to the market

According to surveys, a considerable portion of traditional handicrafts are facing challenges such as conservative designs, limited functionality, inability to meet the aesthetic and lifestyle needs of modern people, intricate craftsmanship, high labor costs, and a shrinking production scale. Given this development situation, researcher suggest that traditional handicrafts should be innovatively improved following the AEM model.




























5.3.1 Innovation of shape and function of ethnic handicraft

If these traditional handicrafts are circulated as commodities in the market, it is difficult to create considerable economic value. “The word ‘market’ has existed in Chinese Middle Ages, and its original meaning refers to the specific place where ordinary people carry out Commodity Exchange (buying and selling) activities, that is, the commonly called ‘bazaar’” (Zhou, 2022). Even in modern times, the concept of “market” is still closely related to commodity circulation. If a ethnic handicraft market is formed, there must be handicraft commodities that can be circulated, and the value of these commodities will change according to the needs of producers and markets.

In other words, to improve the economic value of ethnic handicrafts, we must first consider their market demand and producers’ labor costs.

“When traditional culture enters the market as a product form, what it faces is how to operate effectively to obtain greater economic benefits. Correct target positioning, product positioning, consumer psychology and consumer group positioning, and management positioning are the key to product promotion in the market” (Li & He, 2006). Therefore, improving the artistic taste of traditional handicrafts and expanding their application functions are non-negligible preconditions for enhancing their economic value. Taking the integration and innovation of traditional ethnic patterns as an example, the researcher extracted part of implied moral patterns from the traditional designs of the Malay, Dong and She ethnic groups and analyzed and compared them.(Table.3)

Table.3 Common patterns and meanings of Dong, Malay and She ethnic groups

Dong ²		Malay ²		She ²	
pattern ²	Name or meaning ²	pattern ²	Name or meaning ²	pattern ²	Name or meaning ²
	The spider pattern symbolizes light ²		Hibiscus rosa-sinensis ²		Mouse tooth ²
	Copper coins symbolize happiness ²		Hibiscus rosa-sinensis ²		thunder ²
	Flowers symbolize beauty ²		cirrus ²		source of water ²
	Two consecutive "rhombus" pattern, symbolizing continuation ²		leaf ²		start ²
	Two consecutive "rhombus" pattern, symbolizing continuation ²		vine ²		spider ²
	Eight horn flowers, symbolizing peace and good luck ²		Petal ²		Symbol of pregnancy ²
	The dragon pattern symbolizes warding off evil and peace ²		plant ²		Phoenix, a symbol of procreation ²
	Fish stripes symbolize many children and good fortune ²		cirrus ²		The "田" pattern symbolizes inheritance ²
	The "回" pattern, symbol of peace ²		butterfly ²		"Fish" pattern, symbolizing many children ²

Researcher took the patterns of these three ethnic groups as the main elements of design. For example, the researcher deconstructed and reorganized the patterns of “mouse teeth” and “fish” of She, and symbolically arranged them in two continuous or four continuous forms, which can be applied to textile pattern design. (Plate.4-5) Hibiscus rosa-sinensis is the ethnic flower of Malaysia and the favorite flower of the Malay people. Researcher have creatively designed its color and shape, which can be used as a separate pattern in the design. (Plate.6)

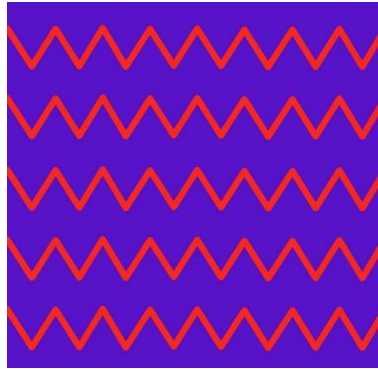


Plate 4. Deconstruction and reorganization of "Mouse teeth" pattern of She

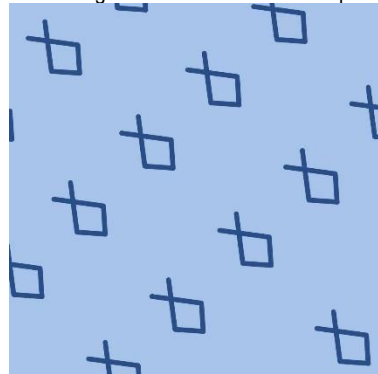


Plate 5. Deconstruction and reorganization of "fish" pattern of She

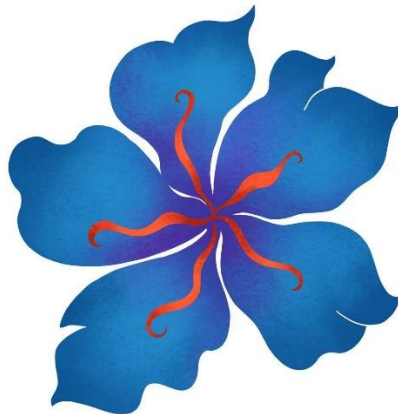


Plate 6. Deconstruction and reorganization of the Hibiscus rosa-sinensis pattern

The deconstruction, reorganization or fusion cases of these patterns are enough to show that the culture of the Malay, Dong and She ethnic groups are actually equipped with the conditions for integration in terms of patterns, colors or traditional techniques. In addition, the researcher also applied the innovative ethnic patterns and ethnic decorative elements to the design of furniture products. For example, the combination of sofa and coffee table (Plate.7). The furniture are made with the help of embroidery and weaving techniques, inspired by ethnic elements of the Malay, Dong and She ethnic groups. The main feature of this product design is to make full use of Dong embroidery and brocade technology for decoration. The pattern of the embroidery is the Hibiscus rosa-sinensis favored by the Malay ethnic group. In order to highlight the ethnic elements of the decoration, the researcher used black flannelette as the main material, with dark blue, purple and red embroidery or woven texture patterns and throw pillows. Researcher took into account the importance of soft decorations for the home environment, play a finishing touch, therefore, the design of the sofa pillow was also carefully thought. The researcher chose "mouse teeth" and "fish pattern" of She. The shape of the coffee table designed by the researcher was also refined from the phoenix image of the She ethnic group and the vine image of the Malay ethnic group, showing a smooth and elegant modelling beauty in the form of S.



Plate.7 Model furniture design (source: by researcher)

The above experimental creation cases fully illustrate that deconstructing and reorganizing symbols and patterns of different nationalities is an important innovation breakthrough for integrating traditional ethnic culture. If this innovative concept is applied to the design of contemporary home products, it means that traditional ethnic handicrafts will no longer be limited to the identity of a historical relic or just displayed in the window for people to enjoy.

5.3.2 The innovation of ethnic handicraft skills

In order to improve the production profits of artisans and create economic benefits for the works of arts and crafts, traditional ethnic handicrafts should enter the life of contemporary people and become all kinds of commodities with cultural connotation and artistic beauty. Since it is a commodity, it needs mass production, therefore, mechanized and artificial intelligent production machines, such as mechanical looms, digital design software, the Internet and other modern technologies will replace traditional manual manufacturing. However, the emergence of high-tech means should only be a booster for the development of traditional handicrafts rather than covering the traditional handicraft culture, and the traditional ethnic culture and handmade art with local characteristics should retain its essence. Therefore, high-tech and traditional crafts should not stand in opposition to each other, but should go hand in hand to support each other. Researcher have found that the She is ribbon or the Dong is brocade has begun to appear mechanized production. However, it is rare for Dong and She is weaving craft to have commercial production scale.

5.3.3 A two-line promotion model of “experience + marketing”

Through the investigation, the researcher found that some traditional handicrafts of Chinese ethnic minorities began to sell and promote their own handicrafts through digital media means, and began to accept privately customized handicraft orders online, expanding the sales channels of traditional ethnic handicrafts. The Qinghua embroidery brand is a Dong brand created by Qinghua Wei, an inheritor of Dong embroidery in Guangxi, China. According to reports, Master Wei and his team will sell the brand's embroidery products and promote the Dong embroidery culture through participating in costume competitions, skill training and the Dou Yin platform. (Plate.8)



Plate 8. Offline experience and product sales model organized by Wei Qinghua team
(Source:by Qinghua Wei)

Traditional ethnic craft products must be presented in a new art form, such as designing them into ethnic craft products with contemporary fashion sense and artistic sense, changing the bad image of “outdated and obsolete”, combining market sales with digital marketing model, and ethnic craft products will be recognized because of the widening of the audience. Researcher found that on the Xiao Hong Shu website some innovative bloggers would integrate traditional Malaysian batik with wedding dresses and Chinese cheongsam to form a fashionable clothing element. (Plate.9) This is an innovative concept integrating fashion design concept and cross-national culture with the help of modern technology, which is worth learning from.

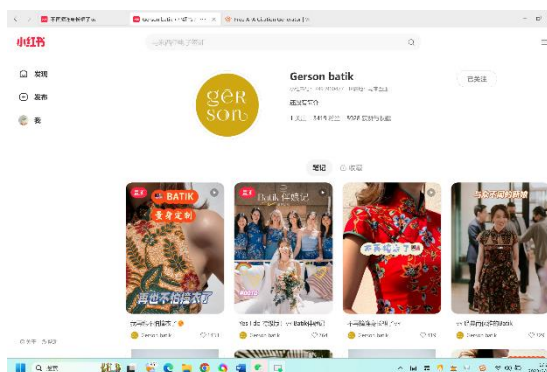


Plate 9. Malay Batik clothing custom shop
(source: <https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/63fdb4500000001001c929>)

In addition, researcher believe that traditional ethnic handicrafts can also take multiple forms of promotion, such as cooperating with some fashion clothing and furniture brands to decorate ethnic handicrafts in fashion brand packaging or product decoration. Researcher suggest that incorporating ethnic decorative elements or handicrafts into influential fashion brands can not only enhance the cultural significance of the products but also promote traditional ethnic culture through the influence of brands and celebrities. This approach can lead to a win-win situation for both the fashion brand and traditional handicrafts in terms of economic benefits and influence.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The research shows that the AEM model refined by the researcher according to the research findings has a positive role in promoting the traditional handicraft industry.

To sum up, only by analyzing from multiple angles, just like AEM model, it has been thoroughly studied and demonstrated by researcher no matter from the level of art, academic to market, or from the expression form of traditional handicraft to the mining of artistic value and economic value. In the future, researcher still need to carry out longitudinal research or even interdisciplinary research on this project, such as quantitative analysis combined with disciplinary concepts such as marketing and product packaging design, so as to find more ways to promote the sustainable development of the traditional handicraft industry.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Jamil, for his exceptional guidance, unwavering support, and invaluable insights throughout the course of my research. His expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping my academic journey.

I am profoundly grateful to Master Qinghua Wei and Master Yanlan Lan for generously providing the invaluable data that formed the foundation of this study. Their willingness to share their expertise and resources has significantly contributed to the success of my research.

I am also indebted to the leaders and teachers of Guangxi College for Preschool Education, Guangxi College of Arts, and Hunan Vocational and Technical College of Civil Affairs in China. Their steadfast support and assistance to the research institute have played a crucial role in enabling me to achieve significant results in my research.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the faculty members and colleagues who have provided valuable guidance, stimulating discussions, and insightful feedback throughout this journey. Their contributions have been invaluable in shaping my understanding and expanding the horizons of my research.

Furthermore, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends for their unwavering encouragement and continuous support. Their belief in me has been a constant source of inspiration, and I am truly grateful for their presence in my life.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the countless individuals who, directly or indirectly, have contributed to my academic growth. Although it is not possible to name everyone, their influence has been profound, and I am sincerely appreciative of their contributions. This work would not have been possible without the support and assistance of these remarkable individuals and institutions. I am honored and privileged to have had the opportunity to work with them, and their contributions will forever remain etched in my academic journey.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Art and design field, Ethnic cultural exchange, Marketing, Brand design and other fields

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