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## The Essential Role of Master Craftworkers in Preserving Local Content in the Malaysian Cottage Industry in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This research paper investigates the essential role that master craftworkers play in preserving local content within the Malaysian Cottage Industry in Malaysia. The master craftworkers have knowledge of local content that includes traditions which are based on ideas that were inspired by their surroundings. The beauty and creativeness, as well as uniqueness, of the craft always attracts many local people and foreign tourists who appreciate this kind of art. Thus, the availability of master craftworkers in Malaysia should be assessed to explore the value that master craftworkers can bring to the Malaysian cottage industry. The qualitative research approach was used in this study to gather data on the master craftworkers that could be employed by the cottage industry on the East Coast of Malaysia. Based on the findings, there are nine master craftworkers (Adiguru) in Kelantan, six master craftworkers (Adiguru) in Terengganu and Pahang, as well as an additional five master craftworkers (Adiguru) recognized by the Malaysia Government Agency. Semi-structured interview sessions were also conducted with the Guru of Weaving to explore her experience and role as a master craftworker in weaving. This research has identified three main roles of the master craftworkers: as a resource, as an instructor, and as someone responsible for preserving their handicraft products and knowledge. The goal of this research is to explore and outline the significance that the role of master craftworkers play in preserving the local content they possess. The novelty of this research was discovered when new generations of Malaysians highlighted the role of master craftworkers as an important resource in the Malaysian community. Possible collaborations between government agencies as well as other bodies should be established to take advantage of the knowledge that master craftworkers can share with new generations while also preserving the local content that is slowly vanishing in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** information science, cultural heritage, local content, sustainability, cottage industry, handicraft.

### 手工艺大师在马来西亚家庭手工业中保留本地内容的重要作用

**摘要:** 本研究论文调查了手工艺大师在保护马来西亚家庭手工业中的本地内容方面所发挥的重要作用。工匠大师了解当地的内容,其中包括基于受周围环境启发而产生的想法的传统。这种工艺的美丽和创造性,以及独特性,总是吸引着许多欣赏这种艺术的当地人和外国游客。因此,应评估马来西亚手工艺大师的可用性,以探索手工艺大师可以为马来西亚家庭手工业带来的价值。本研究使用定性研究方法收集马来西亚东海岸家庭手工业可以雇用的主要手工艺工人的数据。根据调查结果,吉兰丹有九位大师级手工艺师(阿迪古鲁),登嘉楼和彭亨州有六位大师级手工艺师(阿迪古鲁),以及马来西亚政府机构认可的另外五位大师级手工艺师(阿迪古鲁)。还与编织大师进行了半结构化访谈,探讨她作为编织大师的经验和角色。这项研究确定了手工艺大师的三个主要角色:作为资源、作为指导者以及作为负责保存其手工艺品和知识的人。这项研究的目的是探索和概述手工艺大师在保护他们拥有的本地内容方面所发挥的作用。当新一代马来西亚人强调手工艺大师作为马来西亚社区重要资源的作用时,发现了这项研究的新颖性。应建立政府机构和其他机构之间可能的合作,以利用手工艺大师可以与新一代分享的知识,同时保留在马来西亚慢慢消失的本地内容。

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关键词：信息科学、文化遗产、本地内容、可持续性、家庭手工业、手工业。

## 1. Introduction

Artisan and craftworkers have created unique, authentic, and beautiful craft product patterns and motifs for the sustainable Malaysian Cottage Industry. Craftworkers play a vital role in the survival and growth of the cottage industry which directly contributes to the country's economic growth. The cottage industry is an enterprise that mainly produces local hand-made products and its workforce includes family members who have a low income [1]. The cottage industry is a small-scale industry that hires a small number of skilled workers to produce a variety of exclusive goods. Despite being considered a small-scale industry, it plays an important role in reducing poverty, especially in developing countries around the world. Tasneem and Bismas [2] stated that the industry also provides economic opportunities for the poor and middle-income groups through job and income generation schemes worldwide. The cottage industry consists of people in villages and other rural areas using handlooms to create handicrafts [1]. It is also synonymous with handicraft fields that include woodwork products, amateur artwork, and rural artists [2].

Although the handicraft industry is part of the cottage industry, it represents hand-made products produced using simple and traditional tools [3]. The handicraft industry consists of many handicraft products and not only provides employability and nationwide income, but the products also represent the identity, culture, and heritage of that country. In addition, Yang et al. [4] mentioned that handicraft products reflect the culture, inherited skills, knowledge, and beauty of heritage. Knowledge and skills were handed over generations and maintained in families [5]. Besides, the patterns, motives, and designs of handicraft products are inspired by nature and the environment of the local people. The creativity of local people is visible in handicraft products made by skilled craftworkers in the industry. High quality and unique handicraft products are in great demand and competitiveness because it reflects the characteristics, traditions, and national values of the country [6].

Besides that, local content represents the expression and communication of the community, locally generated, owned, and adapted to the knowledge and experience relevant to the situation of the community [7]. It is important in preserving the local content of a community, especially content that represents the environment and culture of the nation. Communities are content creators, expressing their imagination, creativity, skills, and knowledge in producing products that reflect their own environment within the

community. However, local content usually faces several challenges in terms of lack of local content access across all media or channels, inadequate scope of content, and inadequate provision of Intellectual Property Rights [8]. Despite several challenges faced by local content, the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has come up with several initiatives and actions to address issues such as development of such content through information, communication, and technology (ICT), UNESCO programs for creative content, public service broadcasting, and community multimedia centers. The action taken by UNESCO is meant to facilitate extensive preservation of the country's intangible heritage.

In Malaysia, the Fourth Malaysia Plan [1981–1985] has given due recognition to handicrafts as a sector crucial for the eradication of poverty, especially among rural communities [9]. This industry is essential for rural communities to improve their standard of living and refining their skill at making handcrafted products. Handicraft products are associated with aesthetic, cultural, and heritage values. Moreover, the industry plays an important role in supporting other industries, such as tourism [10]. The handicraft industry was strengthened by the development of the Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC) in 1979 under the Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Arts. Currently, the MHDC has been rebranded and placed under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC). The MHDC has introduced various initiatives to enhance the development of the handicraft industry in Malaysia to ensure that handicraft products are still relevant and complemented by advanced technology. The Corporation also introduced an online platform initiative to assist local entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic by developing mobile apps called “Craft on the Go,” “E-Kraf Bazar,” and “MYCraftsshoppe.” The adoption of digital technology will transform the handicraft market in Malaysia.

In addition, the handicraft industry is home to master craftworkers with skills, knowledge, and techniques for producing handicraft products. The MHDC, also known as Kraftangan Malaysia, acknowledges these master craftworkers by bestowing them with the title of “Adiguru” and “Tokoh Kraf Negara.” The creativity of these titles is not only for their skills, knowledge, and techniques but also for them to create and produce their patterns representing the high sensitivity and identity of master craftworkers in producing traditional handicraft products. The continuous use of traditional motives also demonstrates the role of master craftworkers in preserving Malaysia's

history and culture. The intangible knowledge most valuable to the master craftworkers needs to be preserved and conserved for the young generation. Either family members or apprentices can learn and sustain the intangible knowledge of the master craftworkers to improve their standard of living. This can be a way of sustaining the development of local content in Malaysia.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of master craftworkers in preserving local content towards sustainable cottage industry in the East Coast of Malaysia. The criteria and roles in becoming master craftworkers will also be investigated. The master craftworker plays a vital role in preserving and conserving intangible knowledge from previous generations, especially knowledge related to handicraft products. This is because handicraft products represent the identity and cultural heritage owned by the country. Moreover, it is also a traditional way for people in the past to sustain their livelihood and improve their lives. The aging master craftworkers make it necessary to preserve knowledge and skills and educate young apprentices among the younger generation towards the sustainable development of the cottage industry in Malaysia. Thus, it is also necessary to assess the essential role of master craftworkers in the handicraft industry in the cottage industry on the East Coast of Malaysia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Concept of Local Content

As mentioned earlier, local content represents an expression and communication of a community generated, owned, and tailored to the knowledge and experience relevant to the community situation [7]. All community members consisting of the elderly, women, and men have unique and creative knowledge, especially the knowledge that leads towards sustainable living and improving their lives. The elderly are the creators of the main content repository of knowledge [11]. Then, the knowledge has been passed from one generation to another, including skills, knowledge, and traditional tools, especially in producing such products. Examples of products in the handicraft industry that can relate to local content include the production of songket, batik, keringkam embroidery, carving wood, jewelry, coppers, weaving the mats, and more skills and knowledge that have been passed over the years. Through the production of handicraft products, people can also build understanding, as it reveals the community's identity, culture, and heritage.

Based on the definition of local content, it indirectly reflects knowledge and skills in the production of handicraft products. According to Yavari [12], it includes the basic production stage by hand, providing the bulk of raw material from local resources, having

cultural meanings, lack of need for investment, high value-added, the ability to create and thrive in different areas, experience mobility, production secrets and techniques in oral form or according to teacher and student procedures that are the handicrafts characteristics. Based on these characteristics, local content represents skills and knowledge of craftworkers producing handicraft products themselves. Despite this, the definition of local content is not directly applied to handicrafts, but also based on the definition of local content that highlights the "expression and communication of a community's locally generated, owned and adapted knowledge and experience," which could be defined the skill, knowledge, experience, and expression in producing handicraft products, and "relevant to the community's situation" reflex towards handicraft products represent cultural heritage based on community situations.

In Malaysia, generation has created much local content representing a cultural heritage based on different ethnicities in Malaysia. Malay cultural heritage can be seen on motives in songket and batik and carving wood. Most of the motives and patterns appear in the fabric derived from flora and fauna in the Malaysian environment. According to Hashim and Hussain [13], flowers and plants are often used as motives because they are easily prescribed according to weaver tastes. Based on the findings from Hashim and Hussain [13], the environment also influences the basic elements of crafts making. This has been supported by Awang et al. [14], who mentioned the design of pottery crafts still displays a strong prehistoric influence that has primitive features such as buyung (gourd-shaped) and belanga (pots). These motives, designs, and patterns show a system of knowledge in the community that has flowed from generation to generation in producing traditional handicraft products.

### 2.2. Concept of Craftworkship

The creators of local content in the handicraft industry known as craftworkers have played a vital role in creating and disseminating local content from generation to generation. A craftworker is an individual who makes things skillfully by hand [15]. Based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary [16], craftworkers create and perform with skills or dexterity in manual arts. Based on the definition, craftworkers would use their skills to produce handicraft products with minimal usage of tools. According to Ede and Aluwong [17], master craftworkers have passed training in crafts, including theory and practical training in crafts and business and legal training, which includes eligibility to be allowed in training apprentices. The master craftworkers represent experts with skills, knowledge, and excellent techniques in producing handicraft products. Arts, creativity, imagination, and inspiration

to produce handicraft products could be seen on their handicraft products.

Thus, in Malaysia, the concept of craftworkers has been used in the handicraft industry. Various master craftworkers in the handicraft industry consist of master craftworkers for copper, songket, batik, batik block, weaving, quill trap (jebak puyoh), and more. The government agency responsible for collecting, documenting, and preserving master crafts information is *Kraftangan Malaysia*. Government agencies would also evaluate and acknowledge the craftworkers by giving them the title of "master craftworkers" in the handicraft industry in Malaysia. All state on the East Coast of Malaysia has skilled master craftworkers who produce such handicraft products from scratch until the products can be marketed in the marketplace. Every master craftworker in each handicraft category would be acknowledged by an organization, and the title can be used throughout their lives. The master craftworkers can also be resource persons who provide the necessary information to their apprentices, researchers, academics, students, or others interested in selected handicraft products.

### **2.3. General Requirements of Becoming a Master Craftworker in Handicraft Industry in Malaysia**

The creator of local content in the handicraft industry known as *Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC)* or "*Kraftangan Malaysia*" is a government agency to be mandated to evaluate and acknowledge the role of master craftworkers in the handicraft industry in Malaysia. In this industry, master craftworkers would be given the title of "Adiguru" when they have already achieved a degree of accomplishment in their field. According to *Kraftangan Malaysia*, the criteria for becoming Adiguru are as follows:

- a) Possessing high knowledge and skills in crafts or having expertise in the arts of craftsmanship, creation, product composition, and production of Malaysian heritage crafts;
- b) Playing an important role in conserving and preserving the heritage of arts crafts;
- c) Willingness to provide skills and knowledge to apprenticeship groups so that the heritage of the art craft can continue;
- d) Creativity and innovativeness in improving and increasing the quality of craft products.

The craftworkers should fulfill these criteria to become the "adiguru" or master craftworkers of the handicraft industry in Malaysia. Besides that, in giving the title to master craftworkers, their experience in the handicraft industry is also taken into account. The continuation of the recognition of master craftworkers is a prestigious award for them. In 1998, the title called "Tokoh Kraf Negara". The higher recognitions and awards were introduced to recognize and appreciate the master craftworkers who have contributed to the

preservation of local handicraft products in Malaysia. The nominations are selected among the adigurus title, and the selections are based on their contributions in their respective craft fields. Since 1998, only six master craftworkers have been recognized and awarded "Tokoh Kraf Negara". This recognition has certainly lifted the spirit of handicraft entrepreneurs in enhancing, preserving, and disseminating their skills and knowledge towards sustaining the content of the local community in Malaysia.

### **3. Methodology**

The qualitative research approach was selected to assess the availability of master craftworkers and their role in preserving local content towards a sustainable cottage industry in Malaysia. Qualitative research is defined as multi-methods in focus, involving an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the subject matter [18]. According to Fossey et al. [19], qualitative research aims to reveal the issue of developing an understanding of the meaning and experiencing the dimensions of human life and the social world. This is because qualitative research would interpret experiences based on their daily practice. In gathering data, semi-structured interviews are commonly used for qualitative research to ensure participants, especially those located in rural areas, are at ease during interview sessions. The experience and expression of local people in expressing skills and knowledge related to handicraft products would be assessed in exploring their hardships in surviving in the handicraft industry in Malaysia.

The semi-structured interview session was conducted by researchers with officers at the *Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation*. The responsibility of this government agency is to collect, manage and recognize the skills and knowledge of master craftworkers in Malaysia. The government agency is also obliged to ensure that valuable and authentic local content is preserved and conserved because it portrays Malaysia's culture and heritage. Meanwhile, observation and semi-structured interview sessions were also conducted with the master craftworkers who were experts in producing handicraft products from pandanus or mengkuang leaf. The number of participants involved in the study consisted of 11 respondents, including the master craftworkers themselves. Limited time was a constraint to researchers to conduct interview sessions with other master craftworkers on the East Coast of Malaysia.

The semi-structured interview was recorded using an audio recorder and was transcribed and typed in a word processing document for analytical purposes. Transcriptions of the interview session were written in the Malay language. The accent of each state on the East Coast of Malaysia was recorded, making it compulsory to transcribe them in Malay. Besides that, there were also technical words existing only in the handicraft industry on the East Coast of Malaysia. The

respondents have reviewed the interpretation of the meaning of the technical words to ensure that the researchers obtained an accurate definition based on words. Data on the number of master craftworkers on the East Coast of Malaysia were obtained from government agencies responsible for the handicraft industry.

#### 4. Findings

Table 1 The number of master craftworkers recognized by the Malaysia Government Agency in Malaysia

NO	SPECIFIC HANDICRAFT PRODUCTS	YEAR																				
		1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
1.	Copper	X																				
2.	<i>Tekatan</i>	X							√													
3.	Silver	X																				
4.	<i>Tenunan Dastar</i>	X																				
5.	<i>Tenun Pahang</i>		X													√						
6.	<i>Rombong Weaving</i>		X																			
7.	<i>Quil Trap (Jebak Puyuh)</i>			√																		
8.	<i>Tenunan Rungkus</i>				√																	
9.	Iron						X															
10.	Tembeling Pottery					X										√						
11.	Batik block							X													√	
12.	Wood Carving								X							√		√			X	√
13.	Songket								√					√	√							√
14.	<i>Rebana Ubi</i>									X				√								
15.	<i>Pulau Tiga</i> pottery									√												
16.	Malay Flute										√											
17.	<i>Tenunan Pua</i>											√										
18.	<i>Tenun Mugah</i>												√									
19.	<i>Wau</i>															√						√
20.	Nyonva embroidery															X						
21.	<i>Tenunan Sambit</i>															√						
22.	Mask carving															X						
23.	Malay Traditional Boat															X			√			
24.	Vase Iban															√						
25.	Labu Sayong Pottery																X					
26.	Metal																	X				
27.	Rattan weaving																		√			
28.	<i>Bergerang</i> weaving																			√		
29.	<i>Pandanus/ Mengkuang</i> weaving																				√	
30.	Ceramic																					√

\* X: Dead √ : Alive

Table 1 shows the number of master craftworkers awarded with the title "Adiguru" based on their handicraft products. The Malaysia Government Agency has recognized the skills and knowledge of craftworkers in their respective handicraft products category. Songket craft products showed the highest number since 1995 to date. More than 10 handicraft products have only one master craftworker awarded with the title. Almost 20 master craftworkers have died, and other master craftworkers are getting old. Other handicraft products should be preserved by appointing apprentices or family members who inherit skills and knowledge in producing handicraft products. Inheritance issues are crucial issues that government agencies should discuss to ensure that Malaysia's culture and heritage would not vanish. Without such

The table below shows the number of master craftworkers (Adiguru) recognized by the Malaysia Government and awarded with the title of "Adiguru". This award is one of the ways to lift the spirit of master craftworkers in preserving Malaysian culture and heritage and safeguarding the local content of the local people in expressing their traditional arts and designs and portraying it as a handicraft product.

recognition from government agencies, these handicraft products may disappear and would not be recognized by future generations. Since 1987, many master craftworkers have aged, and some of the above data shows master craftworkers have died after being awarded the title "adiguru" by the government agency.

##### 4.1. Master Craftworkers in East Coast of Malaysia

Handicrafts are produced by craftworkers with excellent skills, knowledge and techniques [20]. Those that are recognized in their field for their accomplishments and experience thus earn the title of "master craftworker" [21]. They play an important role in the Malaysian handicraft industry, as they not only produce high-quality arts and crafts, but also help preserve local traditions. In recognition of their value

to their communities, many Malaysian states already have their own master craftworkers who have been awarded by the Government of Malaysia the title of “adiguru” [22]. At present, 44 master craftworkers are recognized as “adigurus,” majority of whom reon the east coast of Malaysia, as the states located in this region (Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang) have different cultural heritage and a wider range of handicraft products compared to other states. The designs and motives of handicraft products characteristic of these regions are essential for preserving cultural heritage and traditional processes, while providing opportunities for improving the living standard in rural communities located on the east coast.

However, as very few young people are willing to learn the craft from the masters, there is a risk that this valuable tradition will be lost. As indicated by Abdullah (September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]), “In the 60s, the village’s weaving community was around 90% were still involved in the handicraft industry especially for weaving. Nowadays, the number of rural population involved in weaving is only 10%. This is because the younger generations are unwilling to learn to produce these handicraft products.”



Fig. 1 Adiguru Mrs. Khelsom Abdullah



Fig. 2 Adiguru certificate

Mrs Kelsom binti Abdullah is a typical example of the issues affecting this industry. She is a master craftworker on mengkuang weaving who was conferred the title of “adiguru” from one of the Malaysia Government Agencies in 2018. Born on 20 March 1954 in Chendering, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, she has been involved in handicraft industry for almost 46 years now. Her career started when she worked in one of the handicraft agencies in Malaysia. Despite her retirement, her passion for producing handicrafts never cased and she presently specializes in weaving pandanus and mengkuang leaf. She lives in Kampung Rusila, Marang, Kuala Terengganu. Mrs. Khelsom explained that she inherited her skills, knowledge and techniques from her grandmother and mother:

*“I inherited my skills in producing weave products from my grandmother and mother. I saw my mother weaving using mengkuang leaf, and tried to make it myself. If you already know the basics, you can produce your handicraft products within several months.”*

In her designs, Mrs Khelsom incorporates the motives and designs from previous generations:

*“In weaving, the motives and designs are inspired by previous generations. I have used several designs, such as bamboo shot, bunga berembang, pucuk jala, bunga tanjung and many more. There are various motive names, but when we combine some of the motives, the final product is called Cik Kedah Ketampang. This traditional motive represents the creativity of the previous generation inspired by the flora and nature itself”* (Abdullah, September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]).





Fig. 3 Handicraft products using *mengkuang* leaf by Khelsom Abdullah



Fig. 4 Clutch bag by Khelsom Abdullah

Nowadays, Mrs. Khelsom shares her knowledge with students or others willing to improve their living standards by selling handicraft products.

*"My children are not interested in engaging in this industry. However, I teach and share knowledge with others who want to learn to weave using mengkuang leaf. I also taught some trainers from handicraft institutes in Malaysia, and within six months, they would master the basics of weaving. Later, within two years, they can master the process of producing weaving kind of handicraft products."* (Abdullah,

September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]).

Master craftworkers like Mrs. Khelsom showed a high spirit in transferring information and knowledge on weaving skills in using mengkuang leaf to apprentices and trainers. Her passion for sharing knowledge represents ways of preserving local content towards a sustainable cottage industry in Malaysia. Through the knowledge transfer mechanism, she has successfully transferred knowledge related to the weaving of mengkuang leaf. Some of her apprentices have opened their businesses to improve their standard of living and generate income for the families. Icons such as Mrs. Khelsom deserve the title of "Adiguru" among handicraft players in Malaysia.

#### 4.2. Role of Master Craftworkers to Sustain Cottage Industry

Based on the story from Mrs. Khelsom, the master craftworker plays a significant role in preserving the development of local content towards a sustainable cottage industry in Malaysia. This is because master craftworkers play an active role in transferring their skills, knowledge, and apprenticeship techniques that can lead to sustaining the livelihoods of rural communities. The main role of the master craftworkers in the handicraft industry is to become resource persons within their categories of craft products. A resource person is someone with expertise in certain areas who may be called upon for performing tasks or providing information [23]. A resource person is someone with knowledge of a certain field who could provide accurate information about it. In the handicraft industry, the master craftworker knows the process of producing handicraft products. Moreover, they also owned and know the traditional motives and design of the product itself. For example, Abdullah (September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]) stated:

*"In the weaving field, I can weave all handicraft products, including weave using rattan. I also have the knowledge of preparing raw materials to weave handicraft products from A up to Z. Processing raw materials plays an important role in ensuring handicraft products made through weaving have high quality. Some kelarais will break up if they do not cook properly during the "melayur" process. Furthermore, I also know how to produce certain colors rather than buying that raw material with others. If I buy raw materials with others, the color does not exactly meet my required criteria".*

Besides that, handicraft agencies in Malaysia would also invite master craftworkers to become instructors to students who are interested in producing handicraft products. A master craftworker plays an important role in ensuring trainers at the institute could improve their skills in weaving.

*"At the National Craft Institute, there are about 1000 students in weave handicraft products. In 2 years, they can master a wide variety of handicraft products especially weaving products. Besides that, the handicraft agency and I also went to other villages to teach how to weave, including Sabah and Sarawak. This is my role as an instructor, especially in the weaving field in this cottage industry"* (Abdullah, September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]).

Master craftworkers are also responsible for preserving and conserving craft products and knowledge in the Malaysian handicraft industry. Through their role as instructors, the master craftworkers would indirectly preserve and conserve local craft products' contents in the industry. The traditional motives and designs used by master craftworkers preserve the tradition of handicraft products. Most of the handicraft motives come from floral and nature. Other products, such as songket designs, are derived from local plants, fruits, flowers, and animals surrounding the life of the weavers [24]. Abdullah (September 6, 2020, Personal Communication [Interview]) stated:

*"Most of the motives and designs for weaving come from previous generations. We still use traditional motives and designs in weaving, such as Bunga Tanjung, cermat motives, berembang flower, and many more. For example, there is a design called Mok Mek named after the creator of that design called Hajah Semek. The word "Mek" is from her name is then use in her design".*

An adiguru or master craftworker should preserve the industry from vanishing in the handicraft industry in Malaysia. The skill and knowledge of the master craftworker need proper documentation in preserving that knowledge for future generations. Besides that, the knowledge transferred by master craftworkers could also become a business model for rural communities to begin exploring the business world for income generation in handicrafts.

## 5. Discussion

The findings in this study have shown that the availability of master craftworkers in preserving local content for certain handicraft products in Malaysia is decreasing. The master craftworkers are getting older, and without apprentices from the young generation, the handicraft industry can vanish in no time. The data revealed that songket products significantly have more adigurus or master craftworkers rather than other handicraft products. Although wood carving has more adigurus than songket, some adigurus already died. There are also other kinds of handicraft products that do not have apprentices in replacing the deceased master craftworkers. Such a trend would threaten the skills and knowledge related to handicraft products. It is important to develop informal training whereby

skills are obtained through apprenticeships and training [25].

Based on an interview session with Guru of Weaving, it has exposed the important roles for the master craftworkers in preserving the state or nation's local content and cultural heritage. There are several main roles of master craftworkers: the resource person, instructors, and the ones preserving and conserving craft products and knowledge in the handicraft industry in Malaysia. Each master craftworker primarily knows the types of raw material needs, raw material processes, skills, and techniques in producing handicraft products. Moreover, the Guru of Weaving has also mentioned that without proper ways in preparing the raw materials would influence the quality of the product itself. Surprisingly, this master craftworker learns to produce the weaving handicraft products by watching her grandmother and mother weaving and practicing it daily. According to De Silver and Kundu [26], there is no theoretical way to learn such skills; everything must be learned through practice.

UNESCO [27] stated that the skills and knowledge involved in craftworkshop are important rather than handicraft products themselves and suggest that the knowledge is safeguarded instead of asking the craftworker to continue producing crafts and deliver that knowledge to other generations in their generation. From the author's point of view, it is necessary to communicate knowledge and skills to the future generation to ensure that the knowledge is sustained, especially on the nation's cultural heritage. Heritage can be interpreted as a continuation of the culture inherited in an age that gives a sense of craftworker attachment and the roots to which we belong [28]. The continuity of culture and heritage is important in exploring Malaysia's origin, especially the hardships of previous generations to survive and generate income during or after the Independent of Malaysia. The skills, knowledge, and techniques of craftworkers are authentic, valuable, original, and exclusive because the knowledge contains Malay traditions, cultures, heritage, and other values that Malaysians need to preserve. This is why such types of knowledge need to be disseminated, preserved, and documented properly.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the master craftworker plays a vital role in preserving the content of local handicraft products towards a sustainable Malay Cottage Industry in Malaysia. This is because master craftworkers possess important and valuable skills and knowledge that portray the Malaysian tradition. Besides that, the skills and knowledge can also help them improve their standard of living and generate income for families. The master craftworkers are also expected to pass on their skills and knowledge to their apprentices among family members or trainers passionate about making handicraft products. Most master craftworkers in



Malaysia are getting older, and the knowledge may vanish if it is not transferred. The findings have identified several surviving master craftworkers who can transfer their knowledge and skills to sustain handicraft products in Malaysia. However, there are also master craftworkers who have died and thus require solutions in preserving the skills and knowledge of handicraft products. This knowledge is in danger without proper steps to document, preserve and make it available to the current and future generations [29].

Thus, the Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC) plays an important role in tracking apprentices or family members who inherit skills and knowledge related to handicraft products. The Malaysia Handicraft Development Corporation needs to collaborate with the National Archive of Malaysia and the National Library of Malaysia in preserving, documenting, and archiving records relating to handicraft products. Such collaboration would assist the industry to be sustainable as well as to preserve local content representing Malaysia's identity, culture, and heritage. Some of the actions are suggested to be taken by Malaysia Government through collaboration with other agencies conducting an oral history with the master craftworker and then making the biography documentation. Other than that, technological advancement also plays an important role in preserving local content in Malaysia. The information on local content should be preserved for future reference. The traditional processes recorded in the production of handicrafts should be implemented, and local content repositories that could store information on handicraft products should be made available for future reference; these are some solutions that could assist the handicraft industry to not disappear in the future.

The novelty of this paper lies in new knowledge that has been discovered by the author when the role of master craftworkers has been highlighted as key resource persons, as referred by the new generation. The knowledge possessed by master craftworkers is primary knowledge that is genuine and contains a traditional value in producing craft products that exist nowadays. Previously, most scholars highlighted the product itself; however, the researcher tried to focus on the essential role of master craftworkers in preserving local content, especially in Malaysia. The knowledge possessed by master craftworkers is unique in every other country. According to Janif et al. [30], conserving traditional knowledge and local content is important because it represents a unique experiential record of the cultural diversity of the community. For instance, the motif of songket or batik, which is inspired by nature within the Malay community, has been used in producing the motif of handicraft products. Malay fabrics often include various floral motifs, such as

hibiscus, pitcher plant, rose, and frangipani [31]. The role of master craftworkers is to make sure that their knowledge of using traditional motifs is sustained so that the future generation preserves and uses it in Malaysia.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, this research was limited to conducting one respondent in one handicraft industry rather than a whole category of handicraft industries within Malaysia. The researcher has only interviewed master craftworkers that weave mengkuang, rather than other gurus. Therefore, the researcher should interview other master craftworkers to discover and explore their perspective towards their role in preserving the local content towards sustaining the handicraft industry in Malaysia. Second, the researcher should extend the investigation on functional requirements in preserving the local content of a cultural heritage product. This data and information would assist the developer in producing a suitable local content management system, which could help with preserving the local content in the future. These limitations should be tackled in future research of preserving current local content development, especially in Malaysia. There are suggestions on future research, such as identifying the functional requirements of a local content management system, developing a local content management system, application or repositories in storing the local content of culture heritage products, and conducting an oral history with master craftworkers recognized by the Malaysian Government Agency in preserving the primary data on producing handicraft products. This research could be extended to make sure the field of study on the local content development could be explored more by other scholars.

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