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VALUE DETERMINANTS OF INDIGENOUS CRAFTSMANSHIP

a chapter by

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Introduction

Indigenous craftsmanship is mostly referred to as the physical representation of intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage defined intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2023). However, the resolution of the convention gives prime credit to the abilities and knowledge required in the craft. Despite focusing on the actual craft pieces, preservation efforts should encourage craftsmen to continuously produce craft and descending their knowledge and skills, particularly to their heirloom and own communities. Conservation of the indigenous heirloom or buried ancestors' treasure is limited to the tangible heritage that led the exploration estimation to the object values. Predominately, the indigenous knowledge underlying the creation of the craft object and the skills involved in the making of the craft object are varied. Thus, this writing is mainly initiated to provide insight into the determinants of valuing traditional craftsmanship.

Basically, a craftsmanship or handicraft object portrays a traditional value that represents the identity of the indigenous ethnicity according to the region, community, or society of its' origin. The indigenous handicrafts still have their popularity and market segments nowadays. However, the initial indigenous value was degraded due to the simplicity and modernization of the process. A study by Silver and Kundu (2012) investigated the factors that influence the Swedish customers' purchase decision of handmade crafts. The researchers found that the Swedish value the handmade crafts accordingly, as follows:

1. Normative belief: Swedish purchasing is influenced by social influences from influential social groupings. Friends and family have the greatest influence on their purchasing decisions, and Swedish buyers acquire any handcrafted products.
2. Behavioral belief: emphasis that the outlook and quality of handmade items are also motivating factors among Swedish. Product appearance has an impact on their decision making as well, but when compared to the influences of friends and family, product appearance has a lower impact.
3. Social belief: The control belief also describes the judgement of Swedish handicraft customers about their social

position. Furthermore, Swedish people buy hand-made products to demonstrate their socioeconomic status.

Marxist Aesthetics

The theory about aesthetics of Karl Marx involves a dialectical and materialist to which produces a value to the creation. Despite criticism on the Marxism, its application on the cultural sphere provides value to the specific area, which includes art and beauty. Marxists believe that economic and social status, as well as conditions affect every corner of a person's life that comprises spiritual/religious belief, legal system, and cultural framework (Willette, 2010).

The Marxism concept could be applied into the reality of traditional craftsmanship, in which the basic valuation meter consists of three indicators, as follows:

1. Perceived value: every creation has a value (i.e. one's judgement about something that deserves importance, worthiness, or usefulness) that meets one's expectation. The products or crafts created are categorised into two classes depending on the capitalist and industrial system in which we live. First, value is used to indicate the usefulness of the product or craft we buy or create. Second, exchange value refers to the thought that the status or condition of the product or craft switched over. For instance, there are differences in trade process between a Prada tote bag and an artisan tote bag, but they both have the same use value but this accounts for a different exchange value. Even though they both accomplish the same use/purpose, the society values the Prada higher due to its social standing. This distinction occurs due to the fidelity of massive industrial goods, which

invalidates handcrafted work and contributes to the historical devaluation of handicrafts (International Marxist University, 2022).

2. Handcrafted work value: the society needs to consider labour forces in the exchange value of goods. The societal norms separate concrete work from abstract work. The abstract work represents the dominant ideas of creation that involves knowledge, experience, and skills. On the other hand, the concrete work (outcome of creation) creates use value. The false judgement of the creation appears when considering only concrete work and denying the abstract work. In this sense, the treatment received by a surgeon and a carpenter differs because our generation's economic and social ideas determine different exchange values of these works (*What Do Marxists Have To Say About Art?*, 2017).
3. The socioeconomic context: the changes in exchange value and abstract work accordingly to our socioeconomic context help enlighten factors contributing to the devaluation of the creation. It is possible to delegitimize the art of handcrafting, which means that if the craft work is devalued, so will the worth of your work (International Marxist University, 2022).

Commercial value of art

The Marxist theory discussed above attempts to establish craft work according to time, economy, and social value. The principal form of battle for craftsmen against the capitalist and industrial milieu remains a representation and a struggle for appreciation. Hence, the rule-of-thumb in determining the commercial value of art works includes the

following elements:

1. Artist: the artists' position in the industry indicates the social acceptance. Their work's value includes being pioneer and originality. Those refereed or renowned artists more likely to sell creation for a high price.
2. Scarcity: prolific of an artist affects the value of creation that indicates visibility in the market. Rarity of the creation justifies the price and may suggest an exclusive club of ownership.
3. Authenticity: legitimacy is the most vital property of an artwork or creation. Authenticating an artwork is explainable when the artist is alive. Apparently, documentation is crucial and this may impact on the creation price in the case of a deceased artist.
4. Subject/style: a specific identity of the creation creates a story behind the creation. Consistency and representative in style indicate the artist's experience in the specific area, signifying the perceived value and price of the creation.
5. Condition: the originality of the artwork most of the time plays a role to determine the artwork value. Restoration or conservation work carried out may affect the artwork value significantly.
6. Provenance: place of origin becomes a more valuable element which narrates the value of the artwork. The place where the artwork has been exhibited or has been of a notable individual's collection will instantly increase in value.
7. Technique/medium: the making method affects the value of the artwork. The

creation made by the original traditional methods and materials give more value compared to prints and multiples.

Most of the time, those seven elements guide the setting of the commercial value of the artwork or creation. However, an individual's perceived value may be influenced by the spiritual, cultural variation, and socio-ecocultural understanding as well (Rozaimie, 2018) that leads to the creation of artwork and handicraft. Furthermore, these elements relate to the Marxist theory of art valuation that is rooted in the labour theory of value, which considers the social and labour aspects of art creation and its values (Alizadeh, 2017). Thus, this theory provides a framework for understanding how art is valued in relation to the labour invested in its production and its social significance.

Food for thought

Based on the determinants of the artwork value, the readers of this paper are invited to nominate the value or possible price tag of the artwork as shown in Figure 1. The information about the artwork is as follows:

1. Artwork: a bead work
2. Materials: glass beads, crafted using sewing threads
3. Origin: Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
4. Measurement: the bead work is approximately 26 cm (H) x 11 cm (W) in size, preserved in a glass photo frame measuring 34.5 cm (H) x 19 cm (W)

This bead work is not part of a material culture (the creation to become part of a cultural costume, or a piece of equipment, or an ethnic's material), but was made by a Malay boy aged 14 years old (the written note on the back side of the frame states it was made in 1992). He made this craft for his school

artwork. Although this 31-year-old art piece represents an indigenous image of the Dayaks in Sarawak, Malaysia, a local indigenous expert narrated that the image did not reflect the exact representative of the spiritual belief of the indigenous groups. Another interesting fact behind this creation was that this artwork was made in a government school located in Kuching, Sarawak, where most of the students are Chinese and the art class was taught by a Chinese teacher. This shows the harmonious diverse societies in Sarawak who understand and embrace one another cultural diversity.



Figure 1: Bead work, 1st author personal collection.

Readers of this paper are invited to write to us to propose the artwork value based on the elements stated in the discussion. There is no reward promised though; however, your response is highly appreciated as it will give us valuable insights of public perception with regards to the indigenous-based artwork's aesthetics value. This valuation also provides motivational importance, especially in preserving the local material culture and artwork.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, indigenous craftsmanship is a valuable aspect of cultural heritage as it represents the identity of indigenous ethnic groups and is often passed down through generations. The determinants of valuing traditional craftsmanship include various factors, such as the perceived value, handcrafted work value, and socioeconomic context. The commercial value of artworks can be influenced by factors like the artist, scarcity, authenticity, subject/style, condition, and provenance. However, individual perceived value may also be influenced by spiritual, cultural variations, and socio-ecocultural understanding.

Preserving and promoting indigenous craftsmanship is essential for maintaining the rich cultural diversity and ensuring the survival of traditional skills and knowledge. Efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, such as UNESCO's 2003 Convention, can help raise awareness and provide support for the conservation of indigenous craftsmanship. By understanding the factors that influence the value of traditional craftsmanship, it is possible to develop strategies for preserving and promoting this valuable aspect of cultural heritage.

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