

Benjarong Sanitary Ware: Design and development for commerce in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand

Wanchai Sama, Kla Somtrakool & Anchalee Jantapho

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Khamriang Sub-District, Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham Province, 44150, Thailand
wsama160@hotmail.com

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Abstract – *This investigation has three primary aims: 1) to study the traditional knowledge of Benjarong in Samut Sakhon Province; 2) to study designs and the production process of Benjarong sanitary ware in Samut Sakhon Province; 3) to develop Benjarong sanitary ware for commerce in Samut Sakhon Province. The research area for this investigation was purposively selected as Samut Sakhon Province. Data was gathered by document study, survey, participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussion and workshop. Results show that Benjarong sanitary products have been inherited from generation to generation in Samut Sakhon Province and continue to provide local jobs. Benjarong sanitary ware production uses a high budget because of the high price of colour inks, gold and electricity, so there are problems securing adequate funding. There are also problems with the management process and a lack of expert craftsmen to write and design modern patterns in harmony with contemporary art and Thai social identity. Moreover, many Thai people do not realize the value of cultural heritage and Benjarong inheritance is at risk. Benjarong sanitary ware can reflect local knowledge and traditional handicrafts. The researchers propose patterns for three types of Benjarong sanitary ware: washbasins, wall tiles and soap ledges. Development of these products will increase functionality and aesthetics, whilst maintaining Thai heritage.*

Keywords – *Benjarong, ceramics, OTOP, Thai handicrafts, traditional knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION

Thai culture reflects the way of life of Thai people and encompasses Buddhism, royal guidance, language, Thai literature and arts. Culture facilitates development of human mental and physical states, values, traditions, etiquette and arts [1]. Moreover, Thai traditions, Thai culture and Thai etiquette are important factors in the development of the quality of Thai people's lives. Conservation of local handicraft production is a way to preserve traditional culture from one generation to another. Handicrafts are important to human life, from birth until death. They mirror the way of life of humans in each era and reveal the history, economic conditions, society and culture of each ethnic group. The value of handicrafts can be divided into categories, such as usefulness, beliefs and values, history and archaeology, culture and identity, beauty, art creation and economy.

The production of handicrafts requires delicate skill and development of individual artisans depends on application, learning and practice. Craftsmen accumulate knowledge until they become experts [2].

Each example of Thai craftwork is found in only some parts of the country. Due to the intricate skill required, craftsmen must be patient and take time to make each product. As a result, traditional handicraft production is not as fast as factory production. According to research by the Office of the National Education Commission, Thai traditional knowledge of handicraft production techniques is disappearing from society because Thai people do not realize the importance of knowledge inherited from ancestors [3].

Benjarong is the most important pottery handicraft of Thailand [4]. In the past, Benjarong was used in royal households. Benjarong is made of ceramics, porcelain and enamel. It originated in China [5]. Nowadays, Benjarong is made in many parts of Thailand, such as northern Chiang Mai, southern Nakhon Srithammarat, central Ayutthaya and eastern Chonburi. Currently Benjarong in Samut Sakhon Province lacks variety of styles and product benefits. The filigrees used are very delicate, making it difficult for the new generation of artisans to replicate patterns of original cultural traditions. The filigree colours are

also similar, which limits ability to address consumer needs. The lack of art, culture and contemporary traditions in modern society make it difficult for product development [6].

In light of these problems, the researchers investigated three communities to develop a model for the benefits, use and cultural patterns of contemporary products to increase diversity, consumer interest and product value. The investigation was also aimed to develop the use of materials, technology, equipment, production process, filigrees, packaging and marketing by adding the colours and patterns of Thai children’s stories to reflect past Thai lifestyle and to make Benjarong in Samut Sakhon Province become an important commercial product of Thailand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This investigation aimed to study the traditional knowledge of Benjarong in Samut Sakhon Province; study the designs and the production process of Benjarong sanitary ware in Samut Sakhon Province; and to develop Benjarong sanitary ware for commerce in Samut Sakhon Province.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research area for this investigation was purposively selected as Samut Sakhon Province, specifically the three communities of Bandon Kaitee Community, Klomgadue Community and Ban Suanluang Community.

The sample of this study was selected by a purposive sampling technique and was composed of 285 individuals, including manufacturers and citizens. Data was gathered by document study, survey, participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussion and workshop (Figure 1). The data was categorized according to the research aims and validated using a triangulation method [7]. The results were analyzed by typological analysis and analytic induction. The results are here presented as a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research found that traditional knowledge used for the production of Benjarong sanitary ware in the three communities of Samut Sakhon Province originated in the Ayutthaya Kingdom. The designs were used in palaces but were developed for common use in the household [8]. Manufacturing methods and production styles have been passed on from generation to generation and the current range of goods includes kitchenware, such as dishes, bowls, coffee mugs and souvenirs [9]. There are few shape designs and motifs and very little variation in product designs. The motifs currently used have not been developed from the original Rattanakosin designs and include Norasingha and Teppanom patterns (Figure 2). There is no development pattern in harmony with contemporary art or the modern social identity of Thailand.

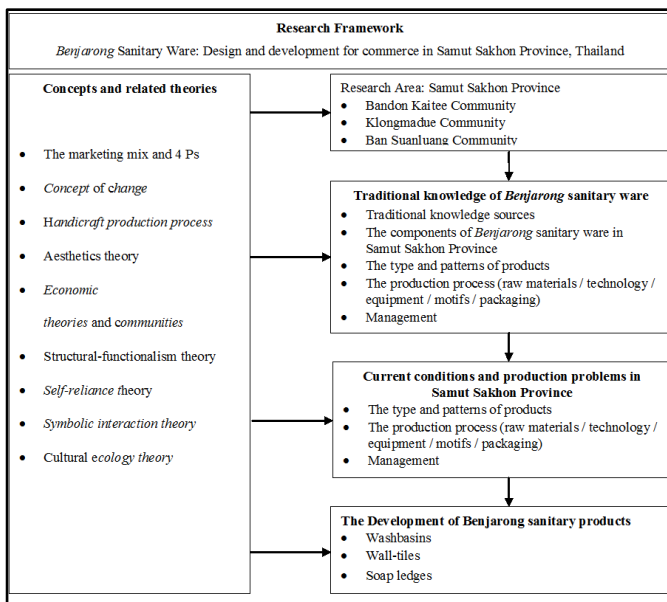


Figure 1. Research framework.



Figure 2. Norasingha and Teppanom patterns

The production conditions of Benjarong cause problems. There are many hurdles in the production process, such as the lack of style, variety and product benefits. Filigrees used are very delicate, making it difficult for the new generation of artisans to master

the patterns of original cultural tradition. The lack of art, culture and contemporary traditions makes product development difficult. Craftsmen waste time, labour and material costs in creating the designs. In the written forms, filigrees and colours are similar. This has limited the scope of consumer choice. As a result, artisans are not able to raise prices to be consistent with economic conditions. Therefore, the researchers and manufacturers of the three communities sought ways to develop models, benefits, uses and contemporary cultural patterns for the products to be more diverse and increase interest among consumers [10]. The overriding aim was to raise the price of the products.

Interviews and focus group discussion led to the development of three Benjarong products that could overcome the creative problems discussed above, yet remain based on traditional knowledge. The first of the products was a washbasin (Table 1; Figure 3).

Table 1. Components of adapted Benjarong washbasin production in comparison to traditional washbasin production

Component	Traditional washbasin	Adapted Benjarong washbasin
1 Raw materials	Multi-coloured washbasin	Patterned washbasin
2 Type	Attached to the wall	Free-standing
3 Technology / Handicraft	Machine produced	Handmade
4 Production steps	Unchanged from original form	Moulded into new shapes
5 Patterns	No patterns, only base colours	Designed with images of child entertainment Wrapped in plastic and foam before being packaged in a wooden box
6 Packaging	Wooden box	
7 Sales and distribution	Marketing; Bathroom product sales representative	Benjarong factory



Figure 3. Adapted Benjarong washbasin

The new Benjarong washbasin could be produced for 1,500 baht and sold at 3,500 baht, generating 2,000 baht profit. The second items to be developed were wall tiles (Table 2; Figure 4).

Table 2. Components of adapted Benjarong wall tile production in comparison to traditional wall tile production

Component	Traditional wall tiles	Adapted Benjarong wall tiles
1 Raw materials	Factory-produced tiles	Patterned, handmade tiles
2 Type	Many sized	8"x10"
3 Technology / Handicraft	Machine produced	Hand designed
4 Production steps	Mass produced	Produced according to consumer demand; intricate
5 Patterns	Sticker patterns	Benjarong pattern
6 Packaging	Boxed	Wrapped and boxed
7 Sales and distribution	Ceramic factories	Benjarong factory

The new Benjarong wall tiles could be produced for 200 baht and sold at 500 baht, generating 300 baht profit. The final items to be developed were soap ledges (Table 3; Figure 5).



Figure 4. Adapted Benjarong wall tile



Figure 5. Adapted Benjarong soap dish

Table 3. Components of adapted Benjarong soap dish production in comparison to traditional soap dish production.

Component	Traditional soap dishes	Adapted Benjarong soap dishes
1 Raw materials	Varied soap dishes	Soap dishes for rectangular soap bars
2 Type	Varied: clay/sticker	Coloured and 12c/18c gold
3 Technology / Handicraft	Machine produced	Handmade
4 Production steps	Mass-produced	Produced according to consumer demand
5 Patterns	Sticker patterns	Hand-drawn patterns
6 Packaging	Wrapped in paper, plastic and foam	Wrapped in paper, plastic and foam
7 Sales and distribution	Hardware stores	<i>Benjarong</i> factory

The new Benjarong soap ledges could be produced for 300 baht and sold at 800 baht, generating 500 baht profit.

The results of focus group discussion included the formation of a Benjarong sanitary ware production group in line with the principles of the ‘One Tambon, One Product (OTOP)’ government scheme.

The aim of the group is to focus the objectives and standardize production of Benjarong sanitary ware in the study area. The mission of the group is also to support each sub-district to create Benjarong sanitary ware with a locally-specific identity. This is to be achieved by community participation in the design, production and product evaluation processes. Importantly, traditional knowledge of Thai patterns must be retained by Benjarong production companies, who must also develop and adapt new patterns. There are five important stages in the development of Benjarong sanitary ware (Figure 6):

1. Study problems and needs, including raw materials, type, technology used, production steps, patterns, packaging and sales.
2. Survey of conditions and readiness of producers to meet consumer demand by ensuring they are ready to create original products with specific producer identity in terms of materials, patterns, technology, handcrafting techniques and packaging.
3. Product development, production process and management that meet consumer demands by developing new product forms, maintaining product value for money and using real-life experience to address consumer needs, rather than theories.
4. Follow-up and product evaluation by communicating and exchanging experiences with

other members of the OTOP group from different factories and workshops.

- Adaptation and product development by assessing customer satisfaction and adapting products according to customer recommendations.

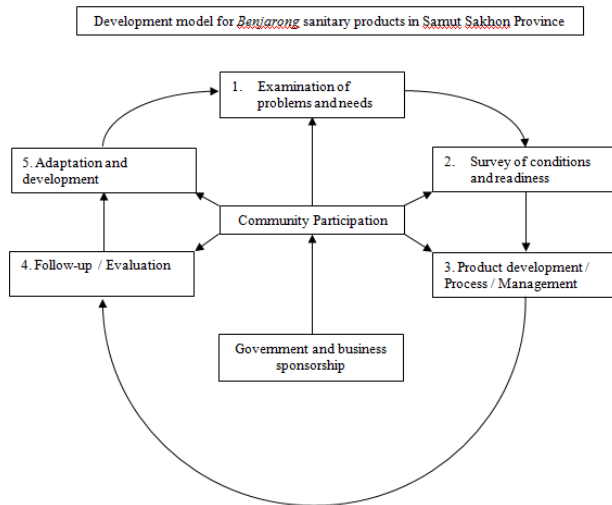


Figure 6. Development model for Benjarong sanitary products in Samut Sakhon Province

The traditional knowledge of Benjarong ceramics that has been inherited from generation to generation in Samut Sakhon is now used to generate income and provide employment for local people. This is an example of Julian Steward's cultural ecology at work [11]. Steward theorized that culture adapts to the surrounding environment. As consumerism and materialism have become increasingly important elements of society, traditional knowledge of Benjarong ceramic production has been adapted so that goods can be sold for profit rather than created for use in the household. This evolution shows how culture adapts to immediate environmental demands.

If Benjarong producers do not continually train and develop their skills according to changes in customer demand, the ceramic products will not be developed. Woranan Bunnak [12] found that although household handicrafts are a valuable source of income, their demand is determined by the labour force. The individual artisans are responsible for maintaining the modern appeal of their goods, which is achieved through continuous practice and training. New designs must be developed to reflect consumer preferences. This is a reflection of Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalism, which argued that society and culture

are direct consequences of individual and collective human needs [13].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Benjarong sanitary products have been inherited from generation to generation in Samut Sakhon Province since ancient times and this particular form of traditional knowledge has provided villager income and sustainable jobs. Currently, Benjarong sanitary ware production continues to provide local jobs in the form of OTOP workshops, stalls, cooperative village shops and local markets. Benjarong sanitary products are made for commerce, so the products should be delicate and beautiful to meet the needs of customers. Therefore, a model of Benjarong sanitary ware production should be developed to increase benefits, uses and incorporation of contemporary cultural patterns to increase product diversity, interest and price. Benjarong sanitary ware production uses a high budget because of the high price of colour inks, gold and electricity, so there are problems securing adequate funding. There are also problems with the management process and a lack of expert craftsmen to write and design modern patterns in harmony with contemporary art and Thai social identity. Moreover, many Thai people do not realize the value of cultural heritage and Benjarong inheritance is at risk. Benjarong sanitary ware can reflect local knowledge and traditional handicrafts. The results of this research propose patterns for three types of Benjarong sanitary ware: washbasins, wall tiles and soap ledges. Development of these products will increase functionality and aesthetics, while maintaining Thai heritage.

SUGGESTIONS

As a result of this investigation, the researchers recommend that artisans, producers and managers should be trained in standardized production processes for Benjarong sanitary ware. Both the government and private sectors should allocate budgets to support continuous production. Production knowledge should be reinforced by domestic and international excursions, while sustainability must be made a key objective of local businesses. Current information for producers and consumers must be updated and the government should inform, contact and cooperate with producers and consumers to provide more information for the general public, such as by organizing a product exhibition. Thai people must be encouraged to use handicraft products

following the policies of sufficiency economy. In line with this, the government should outline a national policy to secure handicraft jobs, so that they remain a part of Thai society. In terms of further research, other Benjarong sanitary products should be studied, as well as Benjarong sanitary ware in other areas of Thailand.

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