

Cultural Intermediaries in Craft Arts Industry: An Exploratory Study on Strategies of Micro Craft Entrepreneurs in Taiwan

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Abstract: This study analyzed the strategies of cultural intermediaries in Taiwanese crafts through strategies of micro craft entrepreneurs' thought processes. Faced with increasing competition, artisans focus on enhancing product innovation and production capacity, most artisans have weak self-marketing abilities and limited resources. Craft artisans require professional marketing assistance to facilitate the creation and promotion of their artwork. Cultural intermediaries serve as a bridge between artisans and the market, enabling artisans to focus on their work. In-depth interviews were conducted with 9 cultural intermediaries of micro scale of Craft Arts industry to understand the strategies of craft brokerage. The results indicate that the strategies of the traits of cultural intermediaries, in partnership with artisans, price of services, and customer relationship management. Cultural intermediaries carefully select artisans who are willing to cooperate with them and evaluate the artisans' work, also identify craft sector demands to direct artisans toward creating such crafts. Committed to different levels of creative marketing projects, cultural intermediaries play important roles in the development of the craft arts industry.

Keywords: craft cultural mediator, creative industries, cultural industries, cultural intermediaries, Taiwan.

I. INTRODUCTION

Taiwan's Ministry of Culture (2016) defines the craft industry as "an industry that engages in craftwork creation, craftwork design, mold making, material making, as well as the production, exhibition, sales, circulation, and appraisal of craftworks." Most artisans, however, lack marketing knowledge and have little insight into consumer psychology and behavior (Chen, 2013). Faced with increasing competition, artisans focus on enhancing product innovation and production capacity; as such, they have little time to learn about market demands. This situation has given rise to a demand for cultural intermediaries. There is currently no official certification system for craft managers in Taiwan. However, several proprietors and employees in cultural and creative companies who specialize in intermediary services and marketing. Though they are not designated as managers, they can be considered cultural intermediaries who essentially function as managers or cultural intermediaries. Such intermediaries serve as a bridge between artisans and the market, enabling artisans to focus on their work.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Role of Cultural Intermediaries

To facilitate transactions in the process of commodity production and exchange, cultural intermediaries provide services such as mediation, consulting, financial management, planning, marketing, and dispute resolution. They arose in response to the demand for the social division of labour. Moreover, they play a key role in promoting social consumption, serving as a liaison between producers and consumers (Negus, 2002), and are the frontrunners of a new consumer lifestyle (Lai, 2013; Lee, 2014). Exploring the relationship between intermediaries and creators in literature and the arts, Bourdieu

(1984, pp. 357–359) suggested there is a “new petite bourgeoisie” composed of people involved in presentation and representation (clerical, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration, etc.), who also provide symbolic properties and services. By exploiting symbolic capital, cultural intermediaries shape the status of creators and shield them from direct contact with the market, maintaining the image of “disinterested” artisans (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 79; 1996, p. 168). Cultural cultural mediator involves providing information, trading opportunities, media exchanges, and agent, among other services, depending on consumer interest and need (Xu, 2015).

Cultural intermediaries are the gatekeepers of the craft industry. Adopting certain aesthetic standards, they evaluate craft creations and decide which are suitable for exhibition and sales, and which are unmarketable. Gatekeepers also evaluate market responses and the marketing potential of creations. They mainly serve as a marketing window for artisans, integrating production, marketing, and services; optimizing production and marketing processes; exploiting and conveying market demands; and helping artisans set their direction for creation (Ministry of Culture, 2016). Their role involves “evaluating and creating product (target of cultural mediator) value, obtaining authorization through further negotiations, matchmaking for indirect development of products, and subsequently establishing channels and facilitating customer relationships through planning, marketing, and promotions” (Industrial Technology Research Institute, 2014).

Cultural intermediaries can become talent scouts by seeking out artisans and making them successful. While an intermediary’s symbolic capital derives from his or her relationship with an artisan, the spotlight belongs to the artisan (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 147, 168). Thus, cultural intermediaries operate behind the scenes and maintain unidirectional power as gatekeepers rather than leading actors. This is how long-term cooperative relationships are maintained between intermediaries and artisans. Intermediaries are generally more knowledgeable about sales than artisans, and they understand the preferences of the market. However, they must also respect artisans’ views and help them to present their own perspectives.

In line with the trend toward specialized division of labour, the relationship between intermediaries and artisans has evolved from gatekeepers merely seeking talent to a model in which intermediaries propose original ideas to artisans, aiming to enhance marketability. As a result, contradictions can arise in a craftsman’s work. While cultural intermediaries conduct the personalized marketing and delivery of artisans’ work, they must also develop their own work priorities and understand how to utilize resources for service delivery.

Cultural intermediaries also add value to artisans’ work. Artisans and intermediaries are unified in a vertically integrated industry where and cultural and economic factors are equally indispensable. An intermediary’s work is both intelligent and capital intensive; if he or she learns that a customer’s requirements have not been met, he or she will investigate the matter and take action. By regarding service content as a tool rather than merely a goal or role, intermediaries can transform not only their relationships with artisans but also long-term work methods and processes. In this pattern, cultural mediator companies and cultural craft intermediaries transform from passive gatekeepers into active curators and cultural intermediaries, shouldering the responsibility for selecting artisans and crafts. They also participate in artisans’ creation processes in response to market demands, thus moving from “mediation” to “intervention.” In this process, intermediaries cooperate and connect with artisans and give them opportunities for information exchange.

B. Cultural Field of Taiwan’s Craft Industry

According to Ryan (1992), the division of labour in a creative organization can be separated into two stages—“creation” and “reproduction”—both of which produce original, commercialized works and mass-produced goods. The “creation” stage concerns the original creative practices of the creator. The “reproduction” stage, meanwhile, involves the functions of cultural intermediaries, including how to position and exhibit crafts, build brand value, and organize sales and marketing activities. Both stages manifest the value of the entire process of manufacturing creative crafts. However, the craft industry and the art industry both belong to “the field of restricted production” since they are similar with high degrees of autonomy and a focus on symbolic capital, such as the value of arts and crafts, artisans’ reputations, and so forth (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996).

Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture (2016) defines the craft industry as “an industry that engages in craftwork creation, craftwork design, mold making, material making, as well as the production, exhibition, sales, circulation, and appraisal of craftworks.” In the industrial chain, craft cultural mediator belongs to the dissemination category in middle and lower enterprises, while craft retail falls into the exhibition/acceptance category in lower enterprises. Along with the development of cultural and creative industries, there has been an increasing demand for marketing in traditional crafts.

Most artisans, however, lack marketing knowledge and have little insight into consumer psychology and behaviour (Chen, 2013). Faced with increasing competition, artisans focus on enhancing product innovation and production capacity; as such, they have little time to learn about market demands. This situation has given rise to a demand for cultural intermediaries. Thus far, Taiwan’s crafts industry has been uncompetitive with other countries. It is necessary, therefore, to strengthen culture and creativity to emphasize the characteristics of Taiwan’s micro-miniature craft industry. By analysing consumer markets and proposing tailored marketing strategies, professional managers can help reverse the current situation. They can help artisans obtain advantageous market information, deal with complex international sales, and focus on a specific scope of services. The craft industry value chain begins with the creation and production of crafts by artisans. Next, crafts are provided to art cultural mediator companies for dissemination and exhibition, or to handicraft wholesalers for exhibition in retail stores.

While Taiwan’s craft industry had previously declined because of changes in the industrial structure, the creative industry created new opportunities. Cultural and creative craft industries account for 22.77% of Taiwan’s annual industrial output, with a turnover of US\$3,878,000 (Ministry of Culture, 2015). In Taiwan, 88.16% of the craft industries are domestic markets, mainly composed of small- to medium-sized businesses characterized by miniaturization, diversity, and dispersiveness. Most craft artisans set up studios and display their work there or deliver it to craft shops. Alternatively, they boost their publicity by entering craft contests and subsequently wait for customers to visit their studios. In this way, their self-marketing abilities are weak. With the growth of specialized division of labour, there is an increasing demand for marketing talent. To expand into international markets, the craft industry requires a pluralistic integration of culture, creativeness, and marketing. In particular, “art cultural intermediators who have marketing abilities and the ability to judge industry trends” (Ministry of Culture, 2015) are needed to solve problems such as ambiguous division of labour, lack of appropriate channels, market price chaos, and counterfeiting (Hwang & Liu, 2013; Industrial Technology Research Institute, 2014).

III. METHOD

The objects of this study were mainly the proprietors and employees of cultural and creative companies specializing in intermediation services and sales of Taiwanese artisans’ works. There is a diverse customer base in Taiwan’s metropolitan areas—keen consumers who are willing to purchase traditional handicrafts or cultural services (e.g., lectures, courses, activities). In 2014, there were 17,048 manufacturers in cultural and creative industries in Taipei, occupying 30% of Taiwan’s total consumer base, while the business volume of these manufacturers accounted for 58% of the total. These industries were ranked first in Taiwan in terms of both number and business volume. There were 6,707 manufacturers in Taichung, accounting for 12% of the total, while the business volume accounted for 5.8% of the total in Taiwan, with a growth rate of 3.96%. In Kaohsiung, there were 5,010 manufacturers—9% of the total—while the proportion of business volume was 6% of the total, with a growth rate of 8.16% (Ministry of Culture, 2015). There are several manufacturers in cultural and creative craft industries in these three regions with high growth rates. Therefore, this study focused on companies in northern, central, and southern Taiwan specializing in creative and cultural craft cultural mediator as well as craft exhibition and sales.

The study was conducted in 2015 and 2016. Since the focus was on understanding content and countermeasures in the implementation process, a qualitative method was adopted. Interviews with 9 participants were used for data collection. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) people who belonged to a craft industry category in the cultural and creative industries specified by the Ministry of Culture, (2) executors who were engaged in the operation and sales of traditional crafts or who worked in the field of branding traditional artisans, and (3) those whose workplaces had been operating for more than six consecutive years. The researchers contacted the participants and asked them for face-to-face interviews. Table 1 in the Appendix shows the participants’ background information.

TABLE I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Code	Position title	Seniority in the industry	Professional Background
B01	Founder and head	28 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry
B02	Founder and CEO	17 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry
B03	Founder and chief executive officer (CEO)	8 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry

B04	Founder and CEO	8 years	Product design and marketing in Craft Arts industry
B05	Founder and design director	6 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry
B06	Founder and general manager	6 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry
M01	CEO	15 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry
M02	Project manager	9 years	Product design and marketing in Craft Arts industry
M03	Store manager	4 years	Sales and marketing in Craft Arts industry

(Tabulated by this study.)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined two main areas: the strategies of cultural intermediaries in Taiwan's craft industry and the relationship between artisans and intermediaries. For customers, the value an intermediary can offer is very important, and it is important to provide services relevant to their needs and ensure quality. Hence, it is important to maintain the values of both cultural and craft industries. The implementation strategies used by cultural intermediaries are described below.

A. The traits of cultural intermediaries

Cultural intermediaries participate in every important step of the craft production process, including creativity formation, production, dissemination, and presentation/acceptance. They also make suggestions for the value promotion and projection of artisans and help them integrate various resources. A craft industry cultural intermediaries' main job is to support the integrated marketing of artisans and their work, and to convey the aesthetic value of traditional crafts. He or she can be regarded as the constructor, cultivator, and organizer of the craft platform in the service sector of the craft industry. Such competencies will help them maximize profits under limited markets and budgets:

Generally speaking, as a cultural mediator, one must have a progressive vision. Among the things that he must understand, one of them is that the market is important. If he does not have the market in mind, it may be difficult for him to do the work well. If he doesn't, then next time I will explain the importance of it to him, but there will be several problems in the process because most of the cultural intermediaries I talk to are not convinced. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

The Internet encourages specialization and cooperation, and industry trends keep pace with the times. A cultural mediator's industry experience is more important than his or her educational background. Textbook knowledge alone is not sufficient in real-world industry. Therefore, it is essential for cultural intermediaries to accumulate specialized professional knowledge in the craft categories they work within. A cultural mediator is responsible for marketing and promoting crafts, artisans, and exhibitions. Cultural intermediaries can include curators at craft stores or exhibitions, advertisers and publicists, copywriters, and manage companies. A cultural mediator has a set of marketing plans that includes marketing bulletins, problem descriptions, market analyses, competition analyses, capital requirements, product/service plans, operating revenue plans, and operational plans. He or she also considers the structure and achievements of the craft industry and works in the community to help establish a platform that supports other people's work. The cultural mediator also acts as a supporter helping artisans to reach their goals:

A cultural mediator must have a strong passion as well as a knowledge of crafts, management, and marketing. First, he must have some basic knowledge, such as the concept of aesthetics. Second, he also needs to gain more market-related knowledge. Finally, the important concept of marketing includes the circulation that ability are the most important and indispensable. He must have all this knowledge that I mentioned and then gradually develop his linguistic, diplomatic, social, and communication abilities. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

A professional cultural mediator in the craft industry is not merely a gatekeeper who waits for artisans seeking assistance. He or she needs to proactively plan themes for exhibitions and contract with artisans. A cultural mediator must also have skills as a communicator, coordinator, and navigator in cultural dissemination and cultural commodity marketing. He or she needs to be a talent specialist in various fields and must continually acquire new knowledge to not only understand the present but also pioneer new directions in the industry. To sustain cultural intermediaries and drive

industrial growth, it is necessary to establish an ecosystem of professional craft managers and continuously invite new members. Cultural intermediaries should also recruit, train, and support their peers in the network to promote the overall value of the craft industry.

B. In partnership with artisans

The relationship between cultural intermediaries and artisans will be one of close collaboration. Therefore, selecting the right artisan is the key to success for an intermediary. Through exploitation, an intermediary helps artisans improve their visibility. Cultural intermediaries not only exhibit and sell artisans' works but also serve as a bridge between artisans and consumers; hence, communication between them needs to be smooth. The interview data reveal that intermediaries value traits such as "innovative," "communicative," and "adaptable" when working with artisans:

The first type of person we try to avoid is the troublemaker. The second type that we should avoid is anyone who is unable to share profits with us, because cultural intermediaries themselves would cost us a lot. The third type is one who does not strive for further progress. As an artisan, your craft technique itself is progressing, and this progress can only be achieved when you not only improve the technique but also include many fashion and design elements in your work. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

One of the important things when we choose a target for cooperation is that if the prospective target do not have any ideas, then, frankly speaking, I may not be willing to work with them. (M02's interview transcript, 07/11/2016)

There are generally depends on whether his ideas and concepts correspond with ours. For example, some people may ask how many orders we receive per day, and if they ask, I know that they are definitely not the people we are going to work with. To be honest, we do not know how many either. As we are a growing and developing platform, there is no way for us to guarantee the amount we can help them sell. However, we can still guarantee that we will do our best to help them sell their products. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

To find excellent artisans with a good reputation, intermediaries will often actively seek out talent. With the rise of craft sales outlets such as fashion markets, grid shops, and product design websites, intermediaries may seek artisans with potential in those areas and propose plans that will give young artisans more opportunities to display their talents. Cultural and creative fairs are important places where intermediaries seek talent. Since works by young artisans displayed at these fairs have considerable visibility, some already have a loyal customer base. Moreover, intermediaries are adept at self-expression, enjoy interacting with customers, and are ambitious entrepreneurs. They may request cooperation with artisans after several visits have resulted in positive interactions and both parties are in agreement regarding ideas and concepts:

We go to the fairs to look for them. Generally, we have our own approach for how we do this, we only contact an artisan whom we have visited and observed more than twice. For example, when we know which fair he is at, we will visit it to observe him first. If we feel positive about him after the initial observation, we will visit and observe him a second time, and if he still makes a good impression, we will send him a letter saying something like, and "We have visited and observed you twice and feel that you are great!" That is usually the start of our conversations. We will work for him only when we agree with his ideas and concepts, and when we know that he is not arrogant. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

Aside from proactively seeking out artisans, recommendations from friends can be helpful as well: "I will look at the works first. I will also try to know who the introducer is. Because if the introducer has good taste, the person introduced may not be too bad" (B03's interview transcript, 07/14/2016).

In cultural and creative industries, it is necessary for products to have a certain output; therefore, shipment needs to be taken into account. Moreover, these industries sometimes need to adjust design styles and content to cater to market demands, subsequently creating higher profits. In the production field, with the formation of a cooperative relationship, a cultural intermediary needs to introduce artisans to symbolic property markets through craft sales, exhibitions, and publishing so they are recognized and their social status increases.

The traditional craft preservers appointed by the central government enjoy a distinguished reputation for their skills, which have reached the stage of "sanctification." Compared to young artisans who lack an established reputation, cultural mediation work should be relatively simpler with "sanctified" artisans. However, some cultural intermediaries show no

intention of establishing cooperative relationships with traditional craft preservers. Based on their professional experience, they know that senior artisans usually maintain their own views with strict conditions for cooperation and have limited output. Some senior artisans uphold the idea of “art for art’s sake,” which the economist Richard Caves refers to as “poor artist syndrome” (Caves, 2000, p. 4). If an order cannot be completed on time due to an artisan’s attitudes, the awkward situation could affect the rights and interests of the client placing the order:

This is because the production capacity of an individual artist or artisan is limited.... Hence, his works may not become truly commercialized, and he himself may not be a brand. It is OK to use the metaphor that when everyone is able to say his name, his name becomes a brand. However, we need to know that his name is not really a brand, but his own works are, and it is just that he as an individual enjoys a huge reputation. (B03’s interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

The research participants suggested that prior to cooperating with artisans, cultural intermediaries should first understand whether the artisan’s personal interests and aspirations are oriented toward “inheritance” or “entrepreneurship.” If they are interested in “inheritance,” then they may focus on an original style of creation and continue to enhance their unique skills (B03’s interview transcript, 07/14/2016). In that case, artisans can focus on creating unique classic collections that leave a lasting legacy. There is no need for them to blindly follow public tastes and revise their work or mass produce it based on market demand:

We have quite a few skilled artisans as master workers who are able to produce works of the same quality, but the works do not have to be produced by the artisans themselves. The key point here is not whether it is manual or no manual. The key is whether it is possible for others to assist the artisan with production and subsequently expand production capacity. If it is, then the works produced by him may turn into a brand product. For an artisan who begins the work of design from the outset, his role is similar to the designer of this brand. (B03’s interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

Cultural intermediaries are adept at thinking about the overall situation from the market’s perspective, and they believe that artisans are a key part of the industrial chain in the craft industry. It is necessary to let artisans recognize the craft industry’s ecosystem in response to diverse production and marketing so that each artisan focuses on craft techniques they are adept at and promotes interpersonal connections between members of the ecosystem. The key asset of an artisan is creation based on not only the scarcity of creative content but also its richness. On the other hand, cultural intermediaries serve as bridge builders in this industrial chain and therefore need to ensure that each step of the entire production process is linked.

C. Price of services

Mutual trust needs to be built with artisans before signing cooperative contracts with them. A cultural intermediary often develops a successful artisan with a “selfless and irrational passion” for the artwork or lends a helping hand to support artisans when they encounter financial difficulties in the process of creation. However, with the increasingly popularized concept of intellectual property rights (IPRs), artisans are paying attention to their own rights and interests. Hence, they are more likely to be vigilant regarding complicated contractual provisions and subsequently more hesitant about cooperation. Therefore, cultural intermediaries should help artisans understand the content of and the reasons for service fees and try to be considerate and flexible when contracting with artisans:

If we use the lawyer’s way of signing a contract with him, he might be too scared to sign. What our company does is simplify the contract a little bit so that the artisan won’t be too frightened to know what to do. Of course, the lawyer’s way must be used if the terms and conditions in the contract are to be implemented, but I think given such a rigorously written contract there would be little dispute later on. Nevertheless, [things can be different] when it comes to operating it on a practical level. (B02’s interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

We may discuss things with him by saying, “Excuse me, do you expect us to split profits or buy out?” After hearing our stories and what we want to do, most artisans do not want us to buy them out. Even if a buyout is better for them, they are very considerate to us. Hence, we have a deep connection with the brands in the store, which goes beyond the modes of transactions. For example, when our store hosts year-end parties, we welcome them to attend as well because we feel that they are our partners with whom we work. (B04’s interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

It is necessary to clearly explain service fees to artisans to avoid future misunderstandings. Cultural intermediaries may be paid for marketing activities or for revenue sharing. Depending on whether charges are paid in advance or are performance based, there are several risks that cultural intermediaries must bear:

Artisans themselves feel that their work is very hard, and the most dreadful thing is the issue of benefits. The artisan does not think of how business operates or the inevitable costs of circulation channels, logistics, etc. All these are currently the biggest challenges in front of us. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

Craft cultural companies are oligopolies and hence have pricing power. If cultural intermediaries think a certain product is easier to sell (i.e., marketable) after assessing market demand, they will usually ask the artisan to produce a large supply of goods. This can sometimes indirectly influence artisans' direction of creation, resulting in artisans producing crafts that cater to the market. In terms of pricing, the factors that influence profit splits are related to consignments or outright sales. Purchase quantity may also influence discounts and transportation expenses, and a large purchase quantity may reduce discounts. Cultural intermediaries may coordinate with artisans in setting prices and reserve room for flexible adjustments: "When it comes to splitting the profit of a product, it can be 30-70/60-40/50-50, depending on the pricing strategies of the artisans. It may vary from different categories and series" (B06's interview transcript, 04/04/2016). In addition,

There are two approaches here. One is that artisans set their own price and then deduct from profits, and the other is that they directly buy out the circulation channel at the end of the industrial chain. The artisans have their own problems in the circulation channel at the end of the industrial chain (e.g., problems with management, marketing, and inventories). (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

Some people do not want to be pushed around by such moves. They buy out the entire copyright at once. They buy out the first batch and then receive dividends. That is why our company currently owns a considerable number of copyrights.... The biggest adjustment lies in profits. Some artisans think that they are top-notch celebrities, and their works are indeed very good. In this case, your profit margin may need to be adjusted. You cannot ask every artisan to pay a fixed copyright royalty of 5% or 10%. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

Artisans today are very assertive. Information about the pricing of various products is more transparent, making it easier for them to discuss and compare pricing. Hence, most cultural intermediaries tend to respect artisans' pricing of their own works so that their collaboration will be unaffected by considerable differences in price perception:

To be honest, we are not mature and experienced in this area, because the artisan will pursue economic prosperity, and he decides the price. So, at present, we do not get involved. This does not make sense. Why do we not get involved? Because if we bargain with artisans about the price, they may feel that we are only going to slash prices. If we told them that it is only reasonable for the product to be priced at NT\$2000, they would think that they could sell it at NT\$20,000 on the market and would wonder why we asked them to sell at NT\$2000. Therefore, we do not intervene in pricing. (M02's interview transcript, 07/11/2016)

Both the supply and pricing of some products are up to them, but when drafting pricing strategies, we give some opinions or suggestions. For example, this thermos bottle may cost NT\$3000, and you wonder if it's too expensive, so I would say, "Yeah, indeed! It may be a little bit expensive, because most thermos bottles on the market may be priced at NT\$1000–2000." Alternatively, I could ask him to tell me the advantages of the thermos bottle. If he could tell me that, that's OK. This is just one of the approaches. Another approach is that we mail forms to them each month and subsequently receive some feedback. There is room for flexibility, and we fully respect that. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

Generally, in the craft industry, cultural intermediaries and artisans initially spend about six months trying to understand each other's operating style and administrative procedures. Meanwhile, it is important for cultural intermediaries to consider whether they should charge artisans, especially when there are increasingly fewer loyal co-operators, not to mention artisans who have never experienced cultural mediation. Cultural intermediaries should try to provide better services as a means to get more people to cooperate. It is important for cultural intermediaries to discover new ways to deliver services at the artisans' studios, instead of waiting for artisans to come, as if waiting for a donation. Cultural intermediaries in the craft industry should establish close relationships with artisans and then build the business aspect on that basis. A cultural intermediary should know how to help artisans do what they want in improved ways, comprehend artisans' situations, and accordingly provide services relevant to their needs. They also need to create and deliver corresponding services specific to the interests and needs of artisans.

D. Customer relationship management

A cultural intermediary's primary function is to display, market, and sell products; cultural intermediaries are only responsible for exhibition/acceptance at the end of the industrial chain. Wen and Liu (2009) suggest that cultural intermediaries in cultural and creative industries must perform six functions: bridge interpersonal connections, dispatch talent, seek funds, pursue creativity, make economic investments, and integrate resources. In other words, they must possess knowledge and abilities related to exploiting and integrating human capital, creativity, and market resources (Chao, Lu, & Chang, 2014; 2016). Cultural intermediaries can include sales personnel at cultural and creative craft stores, personnel at exhibitions and sales outlets, and handicraft wholesalers. Cultural intermediaries assist artisans by providing services in product sales and transactions. Their work remains within the traditional realm of selling. Among transaction types, "consignment" has fewer risks and is often the first type artisans use to expand their circulation channels. When artisans provide products for consignment, cultural intermediaries are responsible for not only sales but also sales-related services, such as responding to customer inquiries or requests for on-site services. When customers want to know more about a work, cultural intermediaries provide detailed explanations, thus facilitating transactions:

We will introduce the handicraft itself, the method, where it is from... This is not an obtrusive process of marketing our products all the time, and introducing a product does not mean forcing customers to buy it. It is necessary to introduce something that interests customers. Hence, if the customer feels good about it, we will usually wait for his reaction. For example, when we say, "This product is made in Hsinchu!" he might say, "Oh, really? Then how was it made there? Oh, I see! Good! Thanks!" Only by receiving customer feedback like this will we continue to introduce our product further. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

Due to marketing weaknesses, cultural intermediaries mainly adopt field sales. Therefore, to increase the likelihood of sales, it is essential to make a good first impression, maintain a cordial attitude, strengthen interactions with customers, and improve selling skills:

For customers, they might need something to go with utensils or want to send a gift to somebody. For example, not long ago, one of our visitors came in and said she wanted to send her boyfriend a gift—a gift that would ensure the boyfriend would remember her, even if they broke up in the future. In this case, we recommended that she carve her name on a piece of wood and send it as a gift to her boyfriend. Moreover, if a restaurant wants 20 or 300 plates, we can help by providing it with customized services. By doing the above, we have built a bridge between customers and artisans. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

They establish long-term relationships between companies and customers through various services and forms of communication:

We build close connections with our customers as if we were friends. We often chat with them on Facebook and reply to their messages. We reveal our daily lives a little bit. For example, we share some recipes with everyone, such as how to prepare delicious dishes. (B04's interview transcript, 04/12/2016)

In the digital era, cultural intermediaries may seek customers online by collecting statistics on customer e-mails and page views. They might also analyze customers' individual needs and interests, and use customer data as a tool to create value. In craft industry, services and marketing have become as important as the artisans themselves. Since consumers hope to purchase valuable crafts, brand creation and product differentiation are inevitable future marketing trends. If cultural intermediaries lack certain knowledge and skills, they have to employ other human resources for marketing. A cultural intermediary who wants to enter the overseas market, for example, might work with people who are multilingual and possess business expertise, inviting them to help with trend observation, translation, and identifying links between regional craft markets. Most artisans either lack an online presence or rarely update their online content. A cultural intermediary, in such cases, helps artisans with website creation and maintenance. Through the website, the cultural intermediary promotes the business or organizes activities such as craft fairs or artisan gatherings. The website can also be used to draw regional customers or establish a sense of identity for artisans lacking an established reputation. Artisans might also be introduced to national or metropolitan cultural intermediaries or customers via their websites.

a. Face-to-face sales

One of the important tasks of a cultural intermediary is to build good relationships with customers. It is important to treat customers as individuals or communities to provide relevant services and build greater value, which is crucial to the

sustainable operation and success of intermediaries. The content provided to customers is not the final product; it only serves as a tool for delivering services. It is not only of intrinsic value for selling craft-related knowledge but also a way to understanding customers, including their interests, curiosity, and perceptions. In this case, the tool could drive cultural intermediaries in the craft industry to provide greater value for customers and subsequently obtain loyalty, passion, and operating revenue:

What we normally do is to greet the clients (visiting guests) first. Our store requires every staff member to say hello to visitors and maintain eye contact, because this makes our clients feel welcome. We also try to find out individual clients' personal characteristics and interests through observation. For example, when we know what product a client is looking at, we will introduce it to him or her. However, we always have a very relaxed service style, so we don't pressure our customers too much. We will say a few words about the product, and if the customer is interested, then we will continue the introduction. If he says he wants to see it for himself, we let him do so. So, I think this is a pretty low-key method. (B03's interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

As for product sales, we have SOP. The first thing we do is serve a visiting guest a cup of tea and make an initial introduction. Key sentences of the introduction include, "Our store specializes in the sales of Taiwanese crafts, and we have crafts that are made by artisans, communities, and tribes from across Taiwan." Initially, we introduce all our crafts, and later we may make further introductions based on customers' degrees of interest. (B06's interview transcript, 04/04/2016)

Most of our staff at the retail stores share the responsibility for business operations, and subsequently even for design and administrative affairs. So this is how we train and develop them... We all begin in retail sales at stores because it is a good training exercise for young people. Nowadays, many young people lack contact with society. If they do sales jobs at a retail store, it may be an opportunity for them to talk with different kinds of people. That's why it's an excellent way of training young people. (B03's interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

Cultural intermediaries need to learn key relationship-building skills and provide services that make people feel comfortable revealing personal information. The goal is to win the trust of customers so they are willing to reveal personal information. Meanwhile, cultural intermediaries need to analyse this customer information carefully and take actions that are customer-friendly, thus creating a platform for customers to purchase traditional crafts. It is also important to provide existing services and implement innovative services based on relevant information collected from current services.

b. Customer service and interpersonal network expansion

If a cultural intermediary wants to make a profit, he or she needs to satisfy customer needs first so that customers voluntarily engage in mutually beneficial transactions. Only then will they be willing to reveal their personal information. It is important to understand the signals sent by customers—including relevant personal information such as hobbies, identities, consumption patterns, and circles of friends—so intermediaries can provide them with content specific to their needs. By inviting neighbours from around the physical stores to attend various activities, a neighbourhood relationship network can be established as a means of expanding the customer base. Intermediaries can also offer transportation services or increase distribution channels for guests who have travelled some distance:

The customer base of our store can be divided into four types: The first type is local customers who are referred by our neighbours and other business owners in the community. They often shop at our store. The second is our own customer base. These customers are indeed our fans who visit our store, including our own friends. Hence, the influence of interpersonal relationships is huge. I would like to say that if you want to sell any newly developed product, you have to make sure that your friends are the first group of people willing to buy. If you can find the first 100 fans to support you, you may subsequently get more. However, if even your friends and family do not want to support you, it will be difficult for you to find fans. So, it is important to create a community of your own. As for our store, we have several contacts, not only on Facebook but also in the real world. They are all willing to visit our store. (B03's interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

Customers generally have a need to acquire new knowledge, gaining recognition for social integration and interaction as well as entertainment. Cultural intermediaries must first provide value before capturing it. The profits obtained from selling craft products are limited, but the services that provide customer solutions can yield higher profits:

The reason is that we are in fact in a very small niche market. In particular, it is important to maintain a relationship with a minority of customers, because it is this relationship that matters most. Provided an individual has 100 good clients and he is satisfied with you, you may get 1,000 clients. This has nothing to do with the so-called market share, and frankly speaking, it is meaningless to conduct analyses of the demographic variables of these customers. It is more important to find a client who likes you and then satisfy him. (B03's interview transcript, 07/14/2016)

We are generally called integrators because we want to integrate crafts, arts, and all the things related to the market. How, then, do we integrate when we do it? Just by telling—that is, by instilling our customers with new concepts and even bringing them to Europe and other countries, informing them about these concepts continuously. (B02's interview transcript, 06/20/2016)

In addition to contributing money, customers can contribute ideas, content, publicity, and assistance in areas related to their expertise. The sharing economy is a social trait cultivated and strengthened by the Internet. Making effective use of the characteristics shared by customers could increase opportunities for product sales. Opportunities, demand, and innovation are the sources of business opportunities for cultural intermediaries. Cultural intermediaries may inform artisans about customers' hobbies or opinions for reference so they can better understand market trends. Customers can bring various kinds of value. The personal relationship with the customer is sometimes the most valuable one compared to the content and context of crafts. A cultural intermediary not only locks on a target for the content but also creates corresponding services specific to the interests and needs of users.

V. CONCLUSION

In the current creative market, the value of crafts is created not only by artisans but also by cultural intermediaries, collectors, craft reviewers, dealers, and other people related to the cultural field of the craft industry. Their perspectives and interests determine the significance and value of crafts. The judgment of the craft market, as well as the artistic accomplishments and marketing expertise of cultural intermediaries, can effectively bridge the gap between the market and the creators, and subsequently resolve the current difficulties regarding marketing deficiencies (Ministry of Culture, 2015). It is necessary for cultural intermediaries in the craft industry to acquire new knowledge and continuously practice innovation. For the younger generation seeking change and innovation, cultural mediation is an emerging business that can not only protect and defend the traditional craft culture of Taiwan but also be progressive and profitable. Meanwhile, it can also solve the dilemma of two generations regarding inheritance and survival competition. The government and private sectors should cultivate professional craft managers more effectively to facilitate the marketing of Taiwanese traditional crafts, subsequently developing more possibilities between tradition and innovation. Currently, there are still several difficulties in promoting the system of professional craft managers. If the quality and vision of personnel who specialize in selling traditional crafts can be improved, it may increase the output of the craft industry and create a win-win outcome for both the industry and the government.

Craft cultural mediator should move toward professionalization, internationalization, and cross-border cooperation, which will help cultural intermediaries to survive sustainably. As professional managers serving as cultural intermediaries, they need to ask themselves the following questions: Where are the values created? Who contributed those values, and where are they now? How do we encapsulate them? Where does industry innovation come from? In response to changing times, artisans need to break away from production-based industrial patterns to build, create, and disseminate products that can create value and add cultural significance to their production processes. The rise of the Internet has influenced and changed the perceptions of intermediaries. Cultural intermediaries in the craft industry should consider how they can capture value and maintain survival. In addition to providing information related to the craft industry, it is also necessary to propose key questions for the industry to consider—namely, how to add value to the industrial chain, regard customers as individuals or communities, and provide services relevant to their needs. Areas where artisans themselves are inefficient or in some way lacking are exactly where cultural intermediaries can provide services. Cultural intermediaries can actively guide artisans' creative inclinations, access opportunities, and capture relevant value from creative content and information. The cultural intermediary system of the craft industry can help Taiwanese crafts lay a foundation for the inheritance of its techniques, promote the value of the industry, and subsequently develop a blue-ocean strategy for the industry. The promotion of a professional craft manager system could help artisans and managers in the craft industry to perform their respective duties effectively. With specialized division of labour and cooperation, they can work together to create output and increase visibility for the traditional craft industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank all people who contributed to this study. This work was supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology, R.O.C. grant no. 104-2410-H-224-033-. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful and generous comments.

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