

Chantaboon Mat Weaving : Development of Community Enterprise in Eastern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the management of community enterprise and 2) to investigate development for sustainability of Chantaboon mat weaving community enterprise, Ban Bang Srakao, Laemsigha District, Chantaburi Province. This research used qualitative method. Data was collected by the fieldwork survey and in-depth interviews conducted for 15 informants of senior local people with knowledge of weaving mats, leaders of community enterprise group and weavers or group members selected from purposive sampling in Ban Bang Srakao, Laemsigha District, Chantaburi Province. Content analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data for the objectives of the research. The result revealed that the group members, Chantaboon mat weaving community enterprise, were approximately 100 members from different families and they collaborated on mat weaving by dividing the work according to specific expertise. Group leaders encouraged and supported members to participate in group and implemented plans to develop community enterprise. The raw materials of mat, reeds, were planted in the local area which reduced costs and enhanced quality of products. The guidelines for the development of community enterprise were 1) creating an identity of specific-owned local products 2) developing product design and utilization, and 3) inheriting or training in production for conservation to the next generation.

Keywords: Mat weaving, Development, Community enterprise

INTRODUCTION

A community enterprise is the concept originated from the community in order to create a welfare system for oneself, in other words, to create immunity for own community to have sufficient income when faces to the economic crisis. Community enterprise refers to managing a business owned and run by the community. The members of the community own means of production i.e. resources, products, local wisdom, knowledge, cultural capital, and social capital. Therefore, community enterprise targets to the self-reliance of the community and focuses on participation and learning process.

According to the evidence of history, it shows that mat in Thailand has been used since Ayutthaya Kingdom to Rattanakosin era. The evidence could be seen in the literary work of King Chulalongkorn, also known as King Rama V, in 1907 when he visited Chantaburi province. The key evidence to prove the initiative of the craftwork reed mat was Vietnamese who migrated to Thailand and lived around Roman Catholic Church in Muang Chantaburi district. Laung Sakon Khotchakhet mentioned in "The French occupied Chantaburi Memory Archives from 1893 to 1934" that the priests in the Roman Catholic

Church had high proficiency in applying mat weaving skill. And the craft at the beginning of reed mat in Chantaburi was rare to find. Due to Ban Samed Ngam, Maung district and Ban Bang Srakao, Leamsigha district were located in the lowland area which is inundated by water. For this reason, mat weaving in the two areas of Chantaburi was popular.

Ban Bang Srakao, Lamsigha district, Chantaburi province is a community where is famous in mat weaving. During the last 70 years, mat weaving started from Vietnamese priests who live around the Catholic Church and at that time we call Chee mat, Chee means the priest in Thai language, and had been changed to Chantaboon mats followed by the old name of the province. Chantaboon mats are produced from reed, a tall, slender-leaved plant of the grass family, which grows in water or on marshy ground. The geographical local of Chantaboon province is appropriate to grow reeds.

As the role of community enterprises has been increasing for sustainable development of Thai economy especially for rural sector, to study about community enterprise on Chantaboon reed mat at Ban Bang Srakao which has an outstanding quality and local resources of material is in order to enhance the potential community enterprise to sustain and be able to pass down the generations.

OBJECTIVES

This research focuses on Suriya Chantaboon Mat weaving community enterprise in Chantaburi province. The objectives of this research were twofold;

1. to study the management of community enterprise
2. to investigate development for the sustainability of Chantaboon mat weaving community enterprise in Ban Bang Srakao, Laemsigha District, Chantaburi province.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research by using data collection, review concepts, and theories from research papers. Data was collected by using fieldwork surveys, in-depth interviews, group discussion, and analyzing content according to the research objectives.

Population and sample group

The population consists of knowledge groups, practice groups and general groups in the province, which is related to mat weaving and research areas. The total of the sample group were 15 informants. The samples were divided into 3 groups; 1) 2 senior local people with knowledge of weaving mats 2) 3 leaders of community enterprise group and 3) 10 weavers or group members selected from purposive sampling.

Tools

The research tools are as follows;

1. Survey form was used to survey preliminary data to check the status of existence of the weaving reed mats at Ban Bang Sa Kao, Laemsing district Chantaburi province, considering the location, transportation, topography of the area, etc.

2. Non-structural interview form was used to collect data in the fieldwork
3. Focus Group Discussion was a group conversation between the knowledge group and the practice group.

Data processing

There are two data sources which are the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data were collected by interview method (fieldwork) and the secondary data were collected from documents and research papers.

1. Check the reliability of data by using the triangular method; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation.
2. Interpret the data by collecting the data to proceed with systematization, classify and categorize the data, and summarize the data according to the research objectives.
3. Discuss the data with the focused group including general weavers, related scholars, key informants, and consumers.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed by using content analysis.

PROCEDURE OF MAT WEAVING AND GROUP MANAGEMENT

Suriya Chantaboon mentioned that mat weaving community enterprise was registered in 1972 by Mrs. Suriya Kaenchan who established the group and its owner. According to the enterprise owner's name, the products were named after the founder's name. Recently, it has approximately 100 members. The community is located in Ban Bang Srakao, Leamsigh district, Chantaburi province, the eastern part of Thailand.

Procedure of mat weaving

The crafting processes of mat weaving, Mrs. Suriya distributes its process to the group members by worker's individual expertise or each readiness such as reed planting, reed transforming and dyeing, reed weaving, rim sewing of the mat, etc. Mat weavers are both male and female, mostly are in the middle-age who is uneducated but they can work with their crafting skills. Moreover, the elderly person retired from their work are able to weave.

Reed planting

Reed is some kind of plant, it has long, row, tender, triangular shape, and it is grown in a muddy area. The primary quality is an unwanted weed which is grown in the rice field. Due to being an unwanted weed, the farmers need to kill it from the rice field. As a long shape of reed, the product from reed would be an advantage of crafting mat weaving. Reed is an important raw material for crafting mat weaving. According to ecological conditions, Ban Bang Srakao is a lowland that closes to a sea. Therefore, this area consists of brackish water and is practically suitable for reed planting. The reeds from this area are stickier more tender and greasier than another area.

The founder stated that the steps to produce mat weaving can be divided into 5 steps. First, there are about twenty members planting the reeds and being an elderly person (the age between 50-60 years old). The founder also informed that the land and field are mandatory for a member who plants reed. That means members of mat weaving community enterprise plant in their own clay lands and rent ones. Totally the amount of areas is around 4 acres. It

takes three to four months of growing, the reed can be planted 3-4 times a year. The fully grown reed can be harvested.

Reed drying

After fully grown and harvested, the reed is torn into four or five parts per each stalk and remove the fills out until left its peel. Reed is cut one by one by handmade. The machine is not part of each stage of producing. Soaking in water for a day in order to absorb water, tie them together and drying reed to prepare for the next process.

Reed dyeing

In the past, Chantaboon mat has been dyed and was natural color i.e. black color, red color. The black color is from mud and the red color is from tree bark. Recently, drying color into reed is colored with chemical color, by adding red and green because these colors are brighter and more long-lasting. Green, blue and red colors are mainly used as the color of Chantaboon mat. However, natural color or colorless are the most popular.

Mat weaving

The procedure of weaving Chantaboon mat is weaving by traditional floor-loom weaving with local technique. In this process, there are two weavers do weaving together. One inserts reed from the one side to the other side of the mat while another one weaves the reed. In general, the size of the mat is 2 meters long with the original pattern. The final stage of mat weaving is to trim the mat with fabric.

Group management

Suriya Chantaboon mat weaving community enterprise was registered in 1972 by Mrs. Suriya Kaenchan. Her family was originally mat weavers – it is called in house crafting. In addition, she had also been a mat weaver since she was young. So this group is named after her name. She is now 70 years old and be a leader of the community group.

Mat weaving community enterprise starts from family-business. It had only 5 members of doing mat weaving at that time. It started from a small business and a small investment in her family. Her family's business spent time and place of doing Mat weaving at her home. It is located on 6 Moo 5 Ban Bang Srakao, Chantaburi province. Her family contributes her home into the home office and the shop at the same time. Later, in 1972 had 30 members. In 2019, her small family business has been growing continuously by having almost 100 members. Mrs. Suriya normally spreads out the work to each members depending on members' skills and the proper work of members. For instance, one member can be the one who does the reed planting and sorting at the same time. Some are only do dyeing or only do weaving. In order to take responsibility for each member, only a few members can work all process of doing mat weaving. There are two types of mat weavers one is who has their own loom, works at their home and brings the completed mats to the community enterprise office, and another weaver works at the community enterprise office. Suriya-founder revealed that she and some of community enterprise members control and manage the business by

themselves. There are many positions in community enterprise i.e. marketing, accountant, and sales.

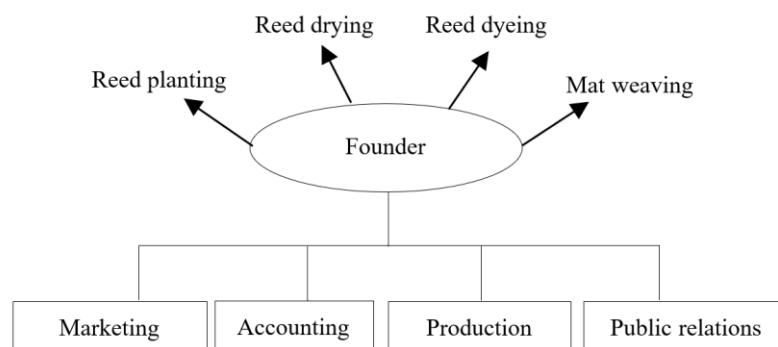


FIGURE 1
COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT

Following the community enterprise chart above shows that community members are part of the group while the founder is a coordinator. Although the community enterprise members are in various positions but community enterprise members are able to operate the community by themselves.

RESULTS

SuriyaChantaboon reed mat has its own outstanding quality from other markets. The quality of SuriyaChantaboon reed mat is unique in regards to the geographic plantation. Chantaburi province is located on a location of brackish water (the seawater mixing with the fresh water) and clay which made local raw reed at Bang Srakao soft but sticky and long-lasting.

Creating an identity of specific-own local products.

SuriyaChantaboon reed mat founder notifies the background story and lifestyle about the rural people in Chantaburi province. The uniqueness of Chantaburi reed mat is about the quality that is strong, long-lasting, and very specific in weaving pattern which differed from the reed mats in any other provinces of Thailand.

The process of mat weaving is exquisite from planting, sorting, dyeing, and weaving. Reed can be harvested after four months. The significant process is sun-dried. It takes four days for the sun-drying mat. Mats should be dyed before coloring weaving. The colors are unique and being the identity of the local area.

Moreover, SuriyaChantaboon mat representative expressed that the unique characteristic and detail of their Chantaboon mat weaving is using jute in weaving mat. Jute is used for a vertical line and reed is used for a horizontal line to ensure durability. Jute is an important part of the Chantaboon mat weaving. It is remarkable and different from elsewhere mat while the other provinces use tendon in a vertical line. Thus, this outstanding

qualifications of Chantaboon reed mat are lighter, more convenient, more long-lasting and more environmentally friendly. For creating the identity of their specific-own local products, they struggle to adjust their products to increase and add value to their product. SuriyaChantaboon mat is successfully adjusted in their products to the markets. Especially, their products can be folded, portable and fashionable.

Developing product design and utilization.

Apart from mat weaving for floor sitting, SuriyaChantaboon mat weaving community enterprise has designed the newproducts for their community enterprise. Developing product design is a choice for consumers to get a broader market, and to add the high value to products. For instance, slippers, purse, saucer mat, tissue box, fan and pencil case. The new products are designed for various purposes for customers and consumers to help the community to gain more income. Developing normal products from large piece floor mat which is inconvenient to carry to be a modern pattern foldable mat. It is a remarkable product and can drive a traditional form of reed mat to many trendy and modernized mat pattern.

Inheriting or training in production for conservation to the next generation.

According to Thai government has taken the development of One Tambon One Product (OTOP) as a project to promote community enterprise since 2001, Suriya reed mat group keep moving forward by Mrs. SuriyaKanchand, a leader, and the supporters in the community including local government to promote reed mat to be OTOP and to make plain reed mat transformed in colors and patterns until qualified for international quality. Suriya group also sets up a local learning center by providing professional lecturers for students, groups of people from other communities, government units, etc., for observation and practical study. Based on Suriya, her family business is a small and local commercial organization in which is influenced by family members.

CONCLUSION

Today, SuriyaChantaboon reed mat products are broadly accepted and popular in global market, and obviously excess the demand. Mrs.Suriya has foreseen that networking in the community is crucial for long-term success. She is aware of a new trend, bringing in updated-pattern to transform normal reed mat to other products while continue building networks of producing local reed by promoting to other villages and community as well as having strong marketing and sales technics to make sure the products return sustainable income and profit back to household and members. Now the group has more than 100 members, including people in thecommunity, neighboring villages and other provinces in the reed matnetwork which theyhave knowledge-sharing and product distributing among different provinces.

The inheriting or training in production for conservation to the next generation providing professional lecturer opens for students or interesting people for doing observation and practical study for their generations.

Development of community enterprise was creating the identity of specific-owned local products by applying jute in a vertical line instead of the tendon to ensure outstanding of

SuriyaChantaboon mat. Besides, developing product design to more different patterns and useful in various kinds of usage. Working collaboratively in community, the enterprise collaboration and related platform that is responsible for the members which let teams work collaborate and have fun whenever they are at work. Working collaboratively would help the society is more sustainable.

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