

# Embracing the Diversity of Craft Functions in Daily Life

I Wayan Sudana\*, Isnawati Mohamad

Visual Art and Design, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

**Email address:**

[iwayan@ung.ac.id](mailto:iwayan@ung.ac.id) (I Wayan Sudana)

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract:** Craft is a field of art that is very open with various meanings, according to the purpose of its creation, the raw materials used, the work process, and the form of the work produced. Crafts have always been present and needed to support various needs in daily life. Therefore, crafts certainly have various functions, but these functions have not been completely decomposed. This study aims to reveal the various functions of crafts in daily life. This study employs a qualitative research method. Data were collected through literature studies, observation of the creation process and craft products, and interviews with craftsmen. Data analysis was carried out interactively by continuously comparing data from literature studies, observations, and interviews. The results showed that the craft has been used for various functions in daily life, namely: as a ritual, a medium of expression, an economic driver, an educational medium, means of social interaction, means of therapy, environmental preservation, means of recreation, means of self-actualization, individual identity, and symbol of cultural identity. These various functions can appear in one craft phenomenon (process and product) or in different craft phenomena. Further researchers are expected to be able to explore these functions more deeply in a particular craft phenomenon to produce an increasingly extensive appreciation. Thus, we will be encouraged to continue to preserve it in daily life.

**Keywords:** Craft, Functions, Diversity, Daily Life

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## 1. Introduction

Craft is the most populist and open art field with various interpretations for both the maker and the user. The flexibility of the creation process, the wealth of raw materials, and the variety of types of products allow the crafts to adapt to the times. Crafts are always present in various dimensions of life from time to time. In this case, craft means not only the production of goods but also the display of one's skills, knowledge, thoughts, experiences, perceptions, and sensations to others [1]. This complexity implies that the craft product and activity have a variety of functions for both the maker and the user.

As part of the arts, the existence of craft, both process and product, is beneficial not only for aesthetic purposes but also for various other purposes such as physical and psychological. However, crafts always rank at the bottom of the pecking order in the theory and practice of art and design education [2]. This fact is thought to be caused by the lack of theoretical discourse related to craft in the academic field. Meanwhile, in

the community, the discourse on crafts tends to be related only to one of its functions, namely the economic function. For example, the discourse on the creative economy places crafts in a leading sector. In fact, crafts have various other functions that have not been fully disclosed so that they rarely become discourse content.

This study aims to reveal the complete diversity of craft functions in various fields of life. Data or information related to craft functions is obtained through literature studies, interviews with craft makers, and observations on the processes of craft creation and the works produced, especially in Indonesia. Data analysis was carried out interactively by continuously comparing data from literature studies, observations, and interviews; subsequently, the data were coded and categorized to identify themes and categories related to craft functions in daily life.

The discussion presented in this study is expected to inspire further researchers to explore more deeply the diversity of functions of a particular craft that have developed in various regions. This exploration is expected to enrich people's

knowledge and insights about the function and importance of crafts in daily life, so that they are encouraged to appreciate and preserve it more. This in turn can motivate craft workers to increase their creativity and create more innovative craft works with new functions.

## 2. Literature Review

The existence of crafts is associated with four important constructs and processes which tend to be ignored by art and design theory, namely: (i) making activities; (ii) skilled knowledge (kinesthetic intelligence); (iii) crafts-personship, which plays an important role in aesthetic assessment, and (iv) apprenticeship or learning knowledge and skills through modeling and practice [2]. These four aspects are important to observe in revealing the complete functions of the craft in various cases. Mason [2] reveals several reasons for craftsmen to make crafts, namely: getting personal pleasure, earning money, decorating the house, making it a gift, socializing, continuing traditions and family values, and making use of free time. These reasons refer to the various functions of craft in the various activities of life.

In several public places in Indonesia, craft-art has become a city icon with special symbols and signs of historical or contemporary works [3]. This finding implies the craft function as a collective regional and cultural identity that is displayed in special forms, which differ from one region or culture to another. The process of making crafts includes interactions not only between the maker and the product but also between the maker and other people to expand the culture [1]. In the interactions between the maker and the product and between the maker and other people (users), the craft carries out various functions. Among these functions are economic-business strength, means of social interaction, means of interaction between peers, media for artistic expression, and the inheritance of cultural values [4].

Craft as an activity offers a sense of achievement, social and cultural dimensions, thoughts and feelings of success, personal growth, development of physical and cognitive skills, control of one's own body, and ethos of self-managing [5]. Although the function described tends to be individual, it certainly has implications for social functions because the existence of the individual cannot be separated from the surrounding social contexts. The craft process provides identity, therapy, creativity, enjoyment, self-actualization, independent learning, and teaching; craft products provide functional value and aesthetic appreciation [6]. These findings illustrate the complexity of individual functions and craft social functions. Through the processes and products they produce, craft makers are able to achieve various individual and social goals.

According to the concepts and purposes of its creation, crafts can represent aesthetic art pieces, functional decorations objects, and commodity products. As a result, craft workers can be categorized into artists, artist-craftsmen, and craftsmen. Those who are categorized as artists create by emphasizing individual expression or the effectiveness of objects

influenced by philosophical esthetic contemplation; meanwhile, artist-craftsmen work by highlighting beauty and functional value considerations; and craftsmen work in response to market demand [17]. Each of these categories invents a different type of craftworks, which affects the diversity of its functions.

The creation of craftworks often integrates individual expressions, designs, and high skills [18]. The individual expression can be a subjective response to social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that are visualized through the design process and realized with advanced skill. This ends up resulting in unique craftworks with a diversity of functions, encompassing personal, social, political, economic and cultural functions [19]. Craft products are the community pride as they are the trace of cultures, intellectuals, wisdoms, and aesthetics [20].

The existence of crafts plays a significant role in the development of local communities by creating unique products that serve as a source of livelihood, heritage, and enhancement of creativity [21]. Crafts have become an integral part of society's life in order to satisfy the various needs of daily living. Including the practical need for a sustainable life, the aesthetic demand to satiate the desire for splendor, as well as the social need to convey sincere messages. Therefore, it is stated that craft is a visual artwork, which is distinctive, is full of meaning, and needed in human life [18].

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Crafts as a Means of Ritual

Ritual means are perhaps the oldest function of the craft process and products which are usually of symbolic value. The remains of ancient craft artifacts in Indonesia, such as decorative drawings in the Leang-Leang cave of South Sulawesi or primitive carvings of the Asmat tribe in Papua, are used symbolically as a link between the real world and the supernatural. These artifacts are evidence that the craft functioned as a ritual tool at that time. The making of handicrafts for religious rituals has become a tradition in some areas and is still being carried out today with adjustments to raw materials and production technology.

The ritual activities of Hinduism in Bali are an interesting contemporary case example to demonstrate the function of craft as a means of ritual. In daily worship of God, the Balinese Hindu community presents various forms of beautiful ritual equipment, which are made through craftsmanship and the use of various types of materials such as leaves, fruits, flower, wood, paper, metal, etc. The use of crafts as a ritual is not only in the product, but also in the process. Materials must be obtained in the right way and the process is carried out with sincerity without expecting any material reward. Even though the resulting product looks beautiful and unique (see figure 1), that is not the end goal. Their main purpose in making crafts is for ritual offerings to the God they believe in. In this way, they hope to gain spiritual

experience and inner peace. In this context, the presence of crafts does not only make something that is occupied to be beautiful, but also brings aesthetic idioms that are in line with religious values and beliefs [18].



**Figure 1.** Craft works as a means of ritual in Balinese Hinduism.

The use of crafts as a means of ritual creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the craft's existence and the ritual procession. The existence of the craft, both the process and its products, is maintained because of its usefulness as a means of ritual. In addition, the ritual procession will become more meaningful because of the availability of crafts as a medium.

### 3.2. Crafts as a Medium of Expression

The crafts function as a medium of expression is mainly related to artistic expression, where crafts are used to articulate creative art ideas that need to be visualized immediately. It is due to the richness of various visual techniques (carving, weaving, embroidery, batik, knitting, forging, printing, etc.) that can be applied to articulate individual artistic ideas. Crafts are also rich in various types of unique raw materials that can be selected or combined to create creative ideas.

This fact is implied by the recognition of John Koraag (56 years old), a designer of traditional textile motifs called *karawo* in Gorontalo (Indonesia), that "... there are many ideas in my head... drawing these motifs is my way of realizing ideas. I am satisfied and relieved after successfully making it happen ". The same thing was also expressed by a female craftsman, Sherli (45 years old), "I have a lot of ideas in arranging bright colors on fabrics... by making colorful motifs in this craft, I pour out my ideas... I am very happy that the results are beautiful and liked by many people. The informants' admission indicates that making crafts is a means of expressing personal creative art ideas to be shown to others. Craft makers were relieved after the ideas were articulated into products and received appreciation from others.

Individual artistic expressions or creative ideas are often applied through the use of various techniques and types of materials to produce handicrafts with varying styles or characteristics. It gives rise to different responses and appreciations from the responders according to their interests. Therefore, even though the ideas of craft creation are individual, their articulation in works has a strong social dimension. Thus, craftworks are often regarded as communal works of art in which the individual creator is immersed in that communality.

### 3.3. Crafts as the Driving Force of the Economy

The driving force of the economy is the most dominant craft function among others. In this context, craft is considered a strategic industrial sector that absorbs a large number of workers and contributes significantly to increasing people's income. As a consequence, many respected traditional crafts are then duplicated and commodified for economic purposes. However, many traditional crafts that are almost extinct due to the abandonment of their supporters have been saved by a commodification process that places them as commodities to fulfill economic needs. This reality changes the way crafts are studied and responded to by its supporters.

The use of crafts for economic purposes occurs all over the world. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report states that the global market for creative goods has more than doubled from \$ 208 billion in 2002 to \$ 509 billion in 2015. In addition, crafts hold a sizable market share, namely 45% of the total exports of creative goods, making it one of the most important creative industry sectors for developing countries [7]. Therefore, various countries are competing to develop the craft sector through various strategies to become a driving force for the people's economy and increase the country's foreign exchange.

In Indonesia, crafts also make a vital contribution to empowering the community's economy and increasing foreign exchange. The Indonesian government has even designated craft as the leading sub-sector of the creative industry, with a contribution to Gross Domestic Product of 25.51% or Rp. 26.7 trillion, absorption of 1.5 million workers, and 722.75 thousand craft companies [8]. However, the contribution of crafts to the economic sector has not been evenly distributed in each province. Therefore, it is still possible to increase the contribution of crafts to the economic sector through the development of types of crafts equally in each province.

Craft function as an economic driving force benefits under the competing philosophies of 'art for art's sake' versus 'art for business sake' where commercial aims and artistic ideals intertwine [9]. With this philosophy, crafts are driven by stakeholders for two integrated purposes: meeting the needs of the market economy and aesthetics. This position is likely to continue to characterize the development of crafts as the times change. The task of crafts makers in anticipating the changing times is to continue to innovate to produce craft products that are in line with the demands of the times.

### 3.4. Crafts as Educational Media

Most people have the wrong perception about the purpose of fine arts and craft arts education in schools. They think that the purpose of learning fine arts or crafts is to make students as artists or crafters. As a result, these lessons are rarely taught because few parents want their children to become artists or crafters. The purpose of art or craft education in primary and secondary schools is not to produce artists or crafters, although some students may become famous artists or professional crafters later on. The aim of fine arts education is to enable transformation in students' minds that manifest in

new ways of thinking, behavior, thoughts, and individual products; while the essential goal of craft education is to activate children, adolescents, and adults to create works, express themselves, imagine, and interact with each other [1].

As an educational medium, crafts are used to achieve extrinsic goals. The complex craftsmanship process aims to build the diligent and disciplined character necessary for all professions. Learning traditional crafts using local raw materials aims to foster a love of culture and sharpen students' sensitivity to local potentials. In the end, when they grow up and have the opportunity to become policy makers (leaders), their policies will side with local potentials.

Craft education in secondary schools is vital to instilling a sense of love and pride in local culture, fostering sensitivity to the potential of local resources, and forming various positive characters of students. The employment of crafts as a medium of education can focus on local social, cultural, and ecological issues that are close to people's daily lives. Competence in the diverse fields of Crafts requires the development of different knowledge, skills and understanding [22]. Learning crafts is not only product-oriented, but also oriented to techniques, materials, and traditions in an integrated manner. Therefore, in building knowledge and skills, craft can take a particular form that includes aspects of techniques, material, and tradition [10]. Thus, crafts will be a tool to achieve real educational goals and a guide in achieving common future goals in various fields.

### 3.5. Crafts as Means of Social Interaction

As a means of social interaction, crafts have various objectives: strengthening brotherhood between family members, strengthening friendship, attracting the opposite sex, and creating a certain social system [4]. The function of craft in strengthening brotherhood between family members is felt by many craftsmen in Indonesia, such as Ratna Dati (47 years old), who said, "All the embroideries who work here are my family (see figure 2). They are my cousins, my sister-in-law and her younger siblings, my distant cousins... for me, this skill is not just a means of earning money, but a means of being able to get together with family... to be able to work and tell anything". This quote implies that craft activity is perceived as a means of maintaining social interaction between family members in order to increase intimacy and strengthen brotherhood.



Figure 2. Ratna Dati and her family are making karawo embroidery crafts.

Craft activities also often function as a means of socializing and attracting the opposite sex, as explained by Rita Raup (50

years old), "In the past, when we came home from school, we gathered to make embroidery while telling stories... many male friends came and praised our good work, so we tried our best to catch their attention". This quote implies that in certain cultures and times, his craft is an important means of socializing with peers and attracting the opposite sex by showing skills and quality works. This function seems to have been neglected by the current generation. As a result, the number of craft makers among the younger generation is increasingly scarce.

Craft function as a means of social interaction, is also found in the craft products business, especially at the local level. Local craftsmen, such as entrepreneurs, collectors, or traders, establish not only transactional relationships with craftsmen in their business practices, but also social relationships such as empathy and mutual trust [4]. Such a craft business then forms a social system between entrepreneurs and craftsmen or producers based on emotional values, such as mutual need and trust.

### 3.6. Crafts as Means of Therapy

The function of crafts as a means of therapy has been proven by many psychologies, health, and craft researchers. Craft is considered to be the first therapeutic work of occupational therapy, where the therapeutic use of craft is similar to reasoning about other therapeutic activities [11]. As a therapeutic tool, craft-making activities are an excellent alternative in relieving stress, overcoming boredom, and refreshing the mood. Craft making is often carried out by people who are under pressure from routine work in offices and management targets. They interpret craft activities as a fun hobby without being overwhelmed by practical goals.

As a therapy, crafts can minimize stress or lack of motivation, develop motor sensory skills, allow learning of new skills, become a medium for relaxation, improve mood, and restructure the ego [12]. It seems that the use of crafts as a means of therapy is more about the activity or process rather than the product. The ultimate goal of therapy is physical healing and reduction of stress, not the production of quality products. Therefore, therapy is often carried out through a process of practicing basic techniques for making crafts. In this context, an individual does not need to have expert talents and aptitude to condition their mind at ease and mental relaxation in the therapy process [14].

Although Indonesia has a wealth of types and patterns of crafts in each province, the use of crafts as a means of therapy is still rare. This fact certainly provides opportunities for therapists and researchers to try and explore it so that the existence of various types and patterns of Indonesian crafts has more benefits for the community, both in terms of the process and the products.

### 3.7. Crafts as a Medium for Environmental Preservation

The function of crafts as a medium for environmental preservation is mainly related to the use of raw materials and processing methods. The use of various types of raw materials



and the application of various techniques is one of the distinguishing features of craft works. With these salient characteristics, crafts often function as "instruments" in environmental preservation. For example, the innovation of craft makers in creating craft works by utilizing plastic waste. This activity is an effort to preserve the environment from the invasion of plastic waste, which is a concern of the global community.

For the purpose of maintaining and preserving the environment, many craft products are made from wood, iron, glass, and paper wastes using specific recycling techniques. Craft makers are able to process wastes that pollute and destroy the environment into artistic and unique craft products. They may not be aware of their role in environmental conservation because these wastes are only raw materials that inspire creativity and innovation for them. In this context, craft makers express their values and creativity through the raw materials used [5].

The function of crafts as an instrument for environmental preservation is also demonstrated through the use of organic materials that are easily biodegradable, such as seeds, leaves, twigs, roots, grass, and the like as a medium for work. The use of these organic materials in making crafts should be appreciated. However, the efforts and creativity of craft makers often do not get proportional publications. As a result, their contribution to preserving the environment and increasing the effectiveness of natural resources is less well known to the public. In many cases, crafts makers sometimes only take advantage of leftovers from an abundance of natural resources, such as wood from the wood processing industry, broken glass, or tin cans from the processing industry. Working without causing damage to the natural environment is a form of concern for craft makers in environmental preservation. Historically, crafts have indeed developed from human needs to get along with their environment [3].

### 3.8. Crafts as a Means of Recreation

As a means of recreation, crafts are usually used by those who are not professional craftsmen. They take advantage of their craft products and processes as hobbies and entertainment between works or on family vacations for fun. Craft making encouraged participants to engage in positive journeys into the unknown and to express creativity [15].

One of the authors of this study has witnessed groups of European family tourists visiting Bali directly involved in making handicrafts as creative tour packages. The tourist family seemed happy to be creative with clay and trying to make ceramic crafts. According to the guide who is a professional ceramic craftsman, the tourists don't really want to learn to make ceramics craft. They just want to experience the fun of making ceramic crafts and without worrying about the quality. This case shows that the craft process is interpreted as a recreational activity to get pleasure. Creative tour packages that use crafts as a means of recreation are now becoming a tourism trend.

The function of crafts as a means of recreation is also felt by expert craftsmen in the process of crafting crafts. They feel joy,

for example, when they get and touch unique materials, succeed in realizing their ideas and produce crafts that are attractive to them. That pleasant experience is a form of recreational activity through craft. This craft function is also felt by connoisseurs and the user community. They feel joy and happiness when they observe the beauty and uniqueness of their craft works. The indication can be observed in the people's penchant for and enthusiasm in visiting museums or craft exhibitions. In such places, they enjoy various types of craft work and feel the sensation of the forms displayed. In this case, they perceive joy as an aesthetic experience.

### 3.9. Crafts as a Means of Self-Actualization

Crafts as a means of self-actualization are related to their role as a path to achievement and self-existence in a society that creates pride. There are many cases that imply this fact, one of which is expressed by a traditional *Karawo* textile female craftsmen, Hasanah (65 years old) as follows.

I learned this craft since elementary school. Because of my expertise in this craft, in 1974 I was sent for a youth exchange to Bali... many people praised me... I am very proud... I am also often invited and picked up by car to demonstrate this skill in front of officials... I became known to many people... I often got gifts and congratulations, I was very happy and proud... this skill was the strength that distinguished me from my friends at that time.

This quote shows that craft is considered a means of showing the self-existence and achievements of a woman. In fact, there are indeed many craftsmen in various regions, not only women but also men who have achievements, become famous, and are able to show their self-existence through the expertise of making craft works. Some of them have achieved success in business and careers that stems from their intensity in pursuing their craft consistently. It means that the craft can be an instrument for someone to achieve a career and success in the future. With mastered craft skills, a person becomes famous and gets many opportunities to develop himself which makes his life more meaningful [13].

Thus, it can be emphasized that intensity and craftsmanship can make someone famous, receive lots of praise, and get many opportunities to show achievements and develop themselves to achieve bigger goals in the future. In this frame, craft is an arena to develop and express personal identity. Crafts can help increase self-awareness, enabling their makers to set bigger goals for their lives [5].

### 3.10. Crafts as Individual Identities

The function of crafts as an individual identity refers to the expertise of the maker, such as an identity as an engraver, weaver, batik maker, or embroidery. One of the authors of this study interviewed a housewife who specializes in weaving in Central Java. She stated, "I am actually an ordinary housewife... but since people know that I weave every day, they call me a weaver... now I am known as a weaver, and they often order woven fabrics from me... they said my weaving was nice and neat..." This statement illustrates that

the “weaver” who is carried as a personal identity is given by the community because of one's consistency and expertise in making weaving. It means that personal identity in crafts that refers to specific craftsmanship specifications is obtained from public recognition, not from formal institutions such as educational institutions.

Personal identity in crafts can also emerge from the quality and distinctiveness of the craft work that is produced. For example, we can easily see the identity of Tjokot (a carver from Bali) just by observing the peculiarities or uniqueness of his work, even though we have never met him. It means that the personal identity of a craftsman can be identified through the uniqueness of the works produced. It can be said that his craft works are able to represent the personal identity of the maker. Therefore, craftsmen must strive to create distinctive craft works to achieve personal identity as a form of achieving reputation in the profession. Identity and reputation are also very important for commercial craft. Reputation and identity can be built at the level of industry and the level of producers or individual businesses [9].

The function of the craft as an individual identity apply not only to its makers, but also to its users. This identity is usually intended for people who are consistent in enjoying or collecting certain craft works. For example, people who consistently collect weaves will be given the identity of a weaving collector or an embroidery collector for those who like to collect embroidery. Likewise, people who like to use batik will be called batik lovers as their identity. Therefore, a person's consistency in using and appreciating craft works will get an identity that is respected in social interactions. The presence of crafts contributes to the creation of an individual identity for a person in social interaction with a collective society [21].

### **3.11. Crafts as a Symbol of Cultural Identity**

As a symbol of cultural identity, crafts are usually an indication of a dominant art that grows and develops into the culture of a particular area or community. The use of crafts as cultural identity is not only for practical uses, but also for aesthetic, artistic, philosophical, and symbolic functions [3]. Philosophical and symbolic craft values are communal cultural identities and values that represent certain groups of people or ethnic groups. Crafts (activities or works) which become cultural identities are monumental crafts that have been rooted in the history and social life of the people who own them. Therefore, the function of craft as a monumental cultural identity is capable of being a link between the past and the present and between the present and the future.

The forms of work or craft artifacts that function as identity are colors, motifs (animals, figures, artificial objects, etc.), and certain symbols that represent collective cultural values. Collective nature is one of the characteristics of a craft that is a cultural identity, so that the creator is often not recognized. Crafts function as a real image of society which is a marker of cultural identity [16]. It also causes the craft to get a lot of community support from various circles. As a result, craftsmanship is dubbed as folk art, a predicate that is often

perceived as "degrading" the position of craftsmanship in visual modern art.

The function of craft as cultural identity is useful in recognizing and differentiating a particular community or ethnic group from another. The most important value of the craft's function as a cultural identity does not lie in its artifacts or activities, but in the essential values it contains. As a cultural identity, the craft becomes an instrument in the inheritance of those essential cultural values from one generation to the next. Therefore, crafts, which are cultural identities, mostly become traditional arts so that their values can be passed down from generation to generation. The inheritance of cultural values is vital so that future generations do not lose their orientation and lose their cultural “home”. If that happens, they will become "cultural vagabonds", namely a predicate that describes the loss of original cultural identity which has become a foothold in global cultural association.

## **4. Conclusion**

Based on the result and discussion, it can be concluded that crafts both the process and the form have a variety of functions for the maker and the user. The various functions include: 1) a means of ritual related to the symbolic use of crafts as a medium for connecting humans to God or the real world and the supernatural; 2) a medium of expression related to the use of the craft as a medium for expressing feelings (art or creative ideas) which need to be immediately articulated into a visual form; 3) the driving force of the economy related to the benefits of crafts as a source of income and welfare; 4) educational media related to the use of crafts in education to build positive character, instill a love for local culture and develop sensitivity to local potential; 5) means of social interaction related to the role of the craft as social harmonization between individuals, between families and between groups in society; 6) means of therapy related to the craft function as a medium for physical and mental healing; 7) medium for environmental preservation related to the role of crafts in maintaining environmental sustainability from damage and pollution; 8) means of recreation related to the benefits of craft for gaining joy and happiness; 9) means of self-actualization related to the benefits of crafts as a means of showing achievement and self-existence to society; 10) individual identity related to the function of the craft in creating personal identity for the maker and the user; 11) symbol of cultural identity concerning the function of craft as a marker of identity for a particular community or ethnic group.

These various functions can appear in one craft phenomenon (process and product) or in different craft phenomena, depending on the complexity of the process and the techniques applied, the types of raw materials used, and the types of products. It shows that crafts have an important meaning in life, so that they need to be continuously developed and preserved. It is admitted that each of the craft functions in this article has not been discussed in depth because of the limited time to reach data sources. Therefore,

further researchers are expected to be able to explore these functions more deeply in a particular craft phenomenon to produce an increasingly extensive appreciation and richer knowledge about crafts.

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