

Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University		
Unit of Assessment: D32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Crafting the Future: Building International Sustainability for Culturally Significant Designs, Products and Practices		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Alison Welsh	Head of Fashion Research	1991–present
Stephen Dixon	Professor of Contemporary Crafts	1998–present
Martyn Evans	Professor of Design	2015–present
Johnny Magee	Principal Lecturer	1993–present
Jasper Chadprajong-Smith	Lecturer	2015–2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The Crafting the Future (CtF) research group has impacted on the social and economic development of multiple traditional craft communities in India and Thailand, leading to an increase in social wellbeing and economic sustainability. By developing the artisan beneficiaries' cultural practices through strategies of collaboration and co-creation, marginalised individuals and communities have been empowered; cultural identities have been revived; new cultural production has been created; and new markets and audiences generated. Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the British Council, and Arts Council England (ACE), international exhibitions of the co-created outcomes have directly engaged 511 creative participants and reached global audiences of over 300,000. This has increased the profile of disappearing practices and marginalised communities, whilst simultaneously promoting cross-cultural collaboration within the beneficiary nations and internationally.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The Crafting the Future (CtF) research group, based in the Manchester School of Art Research Centre, has developed a shared ethos towards revitalising indigenous crafts, and has delivered practice-based research projects in collaboration with artisans and organisations since 2007. Several research outputs (reported in the case study 'Crafting the Contemporary' in REF 2014), including the <i>Here and There</i> (HAT) project (2007) [1], <i>Design Camp</i> (2008), <i>Cotton Exchange</i> (2012/3), <i>Field to Fashion</i> (2013) [2] and <i>Warli</i> (2013) [3] initiated experimental research strategies underpinned by the principles of collaboration and exchange. These strategies culminated in an innovative artist's residency model, which was prototypical in formulating the methodology underpinning our ongoing CtF research.</p> <p>The critical need for such a pro-active engagement with traditional craft practices and practitioners was established by the AHRC-funded <i>Design Routes</i> (2017) project, led by Professor Evans, which established a typology of strategies for revitalising culturally-significant designs, products and practices [4]. The research revealed that many designs and products are associated with specific places, employ traditional processes and are embedded in local ways of life. Many of these culturally-significant indigenous crafts have fallen out of step with contemporary society, thus becoming marginalised. <i>Design Routes</i> promoted an ongoing reassessment and revitalisation of these crafts, attesting to their enduring importance in shaping cultural identity, and promoting wellbeing and environmental stewardship. This research, with its focus on creative ecologies of place, established the critical framework that informed the practice-based research subsequently undertaken by members of the CtF group.</p>		

Subsequent CtF projects have created opportunities for designer-makers to spend time as artists-in-residence, collaborating closely with traditional artisans to generate a body of experience, knowledge and critical exchange, which has led to sustained collaborative relationships between makers, arts organisations and creative communities.

ACE-funded *Reimagine India* project *Heart:Beat* (2017), led by Dixon in collaboration with the Clay Foundation, brought together an interdisciplinary team of artists and organisations from the UK and India to undertake a multi-media residency, exploring the cultural tensions resulting from India's rapid urbanisation. Film, sound and visual artists, and creative writers, from the UK collaborated with researchers from CEPT (formerly the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology) University in Ahmedabad, and Indian artists and artisans, to explore sustainability strategies for traditional crafts, focusing specifically on Warli painting from the Palghar District in Maharashtra. Operating within the context of the Warli community's traditions of pictorial narrative, the local and visiting artists created new artworks, which brought the cultural 'heartbeat' of the Warli's fragile rural environment to new audiences in India and the UK [5].

Dixon, Welsh and Chadprajong-Smith worked in collaboration with the British Council on the Tai Lue Project, which developed methods of empowering female weavers in Nan Province, Thailand, enabling the women to realise the creative and business potential of their hand-loomed textiles. The project investigated methods of equipping the weavers with knowledge in design thinking, and new methods of integrating their cultural identity into their cloth. A programme of intensive and extensive participatory design workshops was initiated, which ran intermittently over a three-year period. Through daily meetings and practical workshops, with a specific focus, such as design awareness, pattern-cutting and natural dyeing, the weavers' design thinking gradually evolved. The research revealed the need to re-think the weavers' product promotion, to create new commercially viable garments, and to ensure that their business model maximised the economic potential of their environmentally-friendly hand-dyed fabrics. The research also identified a need to explore methods of encouraging a new generation of skilled designers, weavers and businesswomen to engage with the craft. [6,7].

3. References to the research

1. **Magee, J., Dixon, S.** *Here and There, The HAT Project* (2007) [Exhibition]. Queen's Gallery, The British Council, Delhi, India. 28 March to 24 April. <https://www.hat.mmu.ac.uk/chat>
2. **Welsh, A., Vishram, S.** *Field to Fashion* (2013) [Exhibition]. Queen's Gallery, The British Council, Delhi, India. 7 to 13 November. <http://alisonwelsh.com/field-to-fashion.html>
3. **Magee, J.** *Warli* (2013) [Documentary film] <https://vimeo.com/79482128>
4. Walker, S., **Evans, M.**, Cassidy, T., Jung, J., Twigger-Holroyd, A. (2018) *Design Routes*. Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, ISBN 978-1-4742-4179-3
5. **Dixon, S., Magee, J.** *Heart:Beat* (2017) [Exhibition and film]. Kanoria Centre for Arts, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India. 1 to 5 April. <https://vimeo.com/210185023>
6. **Welsh, A., Chadprajong-Smith, J.** *Fashioning Tradition: The Tai Lue Project*. (2018) [Paper and Exhibition]. Fashion Colloquium: State of Fashion. Searching for the New Luxury Musis. Arnhem. 31 May to 2 June. <https://design.britishcouncil.org/blog/2018/jul/20/crafting-futures-thailand-state-fashion/>
7. **Welsh, A., Chadprajong-Smith, J.** *The Tai Lue Project: Crafting the Future of sustainable craft through Sustainable Fashion* (2018) [Exhibition]. Chiang Mai Design Week, Chiang Mai, Thailand. 8 to 16 December. <https://www.britishcouncil.or.th/en/programmes/arts/crafting-futures/tai-lue>

Funding:

- G1.** *Here and There, The HAT Project* Arts Council England Grants for the Arts (G4A) GBP210,000
- G2.** *Design Routes*, Arts and Humanities Research Council AH/K008021/1 GBP768,000

G3. *Heart:Beat*, Arts Council England, Reimagine India Programme, 32098521(lottery), GBP49,000

G4. *The Tai Lue Project*, The British Council, A/05353, GBP30,000

4. Details of the impact

Crafting the Future has promoted the cultural, social and economic revival of indigenous craft practices and the empowerment of their practitioners, most significantly with the Warli painting community in Maharashtra, and with weaving communities in Gujarat and Nan Province, Thailand.

Warli painting is a form of tribal art practised by the tribal people from the North Sahyadri Range in Maharashtra, India. Building upon networks formed during the HAT project, Magee's cultural collaboration with Warli painters was consolidated through the filming of *Warli* (2013), which focussed on the Warli master painter, Jivya Soma Mashe, and laid the groundwork for the *Heart:Beat* project. The objective of the *Heart:Beat* residency (2017) was to assess the cultural significance, and address the sustainability, of a traditional but marginalised craft practice, currently threatened by India's rapid globalisation, industrialisation and rural depopulation. *Heart:Beat* culminated in an exhibition and installation that attracted an audience of over 1,000 people, including 350 schoolchildren who participated in the event, many from the local Warli community, with others coming from as far afield as Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Jaipur [A]. An initial craft-mapping exercise conducted by researchers from CEPT University in Ahmedabad had established the fragility of this marginal cultural practice, identifying a core cohort of only 22 Warli painters in Thane Province. In addressing this, the residency exhibition brought together the wider creative community for the first time, and a further 28 painters were identified through their participation in the open exhibition, raising the profile of their practice. The exhibition also brought to light a small but significant number of female Warli painters returning to the practice, which had become dominated by men in recent years. Warli painter Ramesh Hengadi, a participant in both *the Hat Project* and *Heart:Beat*, commented on how these projects had initiated collaborative curatorial partnerships, which have increased the visibility and financial viability of Warli painting, creating new networks and opportunities for young painters: "AYUSH (Adivasi Yuva Shakti) got connected to me and with other local Warli artists. AYUSH has been there as an organisation since 10-12 year, but they did not do paintings earlier. They were more into farming, due to the Heart Beat project now they got the idea about painting and take it as a production and spread it in the entire region as they already had a network [...] I have been given a role in this project, that of a senior artist. I train young artists and also contribute to orders based production. AYUSH have opened a small gallery in Khabala village, towards Dhanu. They also have an office in Waghadi (near my in-laws' place). I sometimes provide them my paintings. There are different coordinators within this organisation. It is a good project for wage based employment of young generation" [B].

For *Heart:Beat*, new paintings were commissioned from ten Warli artists, exploring the themes of modernisation, transition, and environmental and cultural sustainability, and these works were exhibited alongside those of the artists-in-residence. Hengadi commented on how the project had influenced and invigorated his creative practice: "I am more involved in bringing a life and soul to paintings. I am in search of old stories, that are in songs, I want to depict them as painting, Warli stories that have not been depicted in paintings before. I am giving birth to new paintings never done before" [B]. Further exhibitions of the work in Ahmedabad; Jaipur; Wellbeck; Stoke-on-Trent and Rochdale have introduced Warli painting to new audiences, numbering 34,794, stimulating cultural tourism across the sites of the touring exhibition, and attracting national and international visitors, whilst also supporting local economies and tourism in Maharashtra [C]. In 2018, the project was further disseminated in the form of an artist's book, *Heart:Beat*, which was produced in a limited edition of 200 [D].

In *Field to Fashion*, Welsh developed environmentally-sustainable strategies, which focussed on the preservation of organic 'old-world' kala cotton grown by marginalised farmers in rural Gujarat, India, where production was being abandoned as the yarn diminished in demand. There was an identified need to stimulate an Indian market for locally-grown cotton without the pressures of external influences. *Field to Fashion* instigated a collaborative international design

process with an Indian master weaver, which exposed new cultural products to new international audiences. Today, kala cotton products have become successfully re-established on the international wholesale and retail markets. The Director of NGO Khamir stated: “Alison Welsh has been a part of the success story of kala cotton ... since its early inception in 2013. Alison worked with Khamir, the organization that developed the kala cotton as a farm-to-fabric story at a time when it was just being introduced and tested in the market [...] Alison saw the potential right away and decided to work closely with Shamjibhai Vishram Siju [...] to develop garments and product possibilities.[...] This was an important early step that led to the story of kala cotton being broadcast outside of Kutch and India [...] Since 2013, kala cotton has truly become a dynamic co-creating ecosystem where many components have engaged and interacted with one another to bring about a transformation in just 7-8 years. Many weavers who had left their traditional occupation for factory jobs, have actually returned back to the fold. And most importantly, the young weavers see hope for their future and their craft. In this journey, Alison and other designers have played an important role to give it not only the initial push but also to keep touching base, whenever required, with a legacy that has now taken a life of its own.” [E].

Similarly, the *Tai Lue Weavers* project (2018) promoted a sustained engagement with weaving villages in Nan Province, Thailand, many of which were also on the brink of abandoning their cultural heritage, having adopted chemical dyes and synthetic yarns without great commercial success. The project re-introduced eco-friendly practices into the cotton-growing, spinning, dyeing, weaving and garment construction stages of the Tai Lue weaving tradition, and led to the co-design and co-production of new garment ranges using handwoven Tai Lue fabrics. Some of these ranges were co-created with the weavers themselves to develop contemporary garments that demonstrated the design possibilities of traditional Tai Lue weaving. Welsh and Chadprajong-Smith worked closely with the leaders of three community enterprises, representing 52 women in Tai Lue province. Workshops taught both hard and soft skills, including pattern-cutting, garment construction, design and colour workshops, and organic dyeing techniques [F]. The project also brought in young Thai designers and entrepreneurs to collaborate in the creation and marketing of new textile products. The workshops attracted a total of 58 participants, who commented on how the workshops had changed their practice. Thanom Teekawong, a farmer, weaver and Head of Ban Donchai Weaving Community Enterprise, confirmed that: “There is for sure opportunity. The entire group has benefited. They got an opportunity to upgrade their skills, design process, shop and display arrangement. We also got to go on study trips. We learnt pattern making. We have learnt so many things” [F].

The project re-ignited the weavers’ passion for their weaving heritage and demonstrated its economic potential for contemporary textiles businesses. Jiraphat Changlek, a weaver, tailor and store manager at Ban Donchai observed, “We see the opportunity to make ready-to-wear garments. We adapt traditional patterns and make them more contemporary... We see business opportunities and new markets. We have more orders of textiles. Many customers from other districts order natural colour dyed textiles” [G]. Jiraphat also states that the weavers are gaining a higher price for their products, “We earn more than we did before. ... Before a shirt that was normal shirt was THB800-850, now with added hand-weaving and hand-stitching details, the price is THB1,200-1,500 depending on the pattern” [G].

Furthermore, the project has elevated the weavers’ profile, nationally and internationally, through conferences, publications, exhibitions, festivals and online presence. Since her interview, conducted by the Tai Lue project media partner, The Cloud Magazine, five television programmes have focused on the success of Phaeo Phafai’s business (with a total of 20,843 views on YouTube). “The situation of our community has changed. Because our products are better, and we could sell for higher price. So, we have more resources to hire more people to work with us and they earn good income and more people join our network” [G].

An audience of more than 100,000 visitors attended Chiang Mai Design Week, where the Tai Lue garments were exhibited in December 2018 [H]. Andrew Glass, Director of British Council, Thailand, stated: “Through her design-thinking workshops as well as her advice given to artisans individually and as a group, Alison enabled the artisans to have a better understanding about the design process. Artisans are now able to see that design is part of the making process and can incorporate new ideas into the design of new products. This includes working on colour

combination, natural dyes, and shop front displays, which help improve the design as well as brand images and marketing, which were new concepts to them. Alison's approach to design and making allows artisans to appreciate and build on their weaving traditions and hand skills. Her design work for the project focuses on bringing out the intricate details of the weaving combined with hand skills and slow making. Artisans then have an opportunity to see making in a different light and value their skills and heritage more. This also gives them a better understanding about the value of crafts and encourages them to continue with the crafts within their communities" [I]. A video film documenting the Tai Lue Project, and its impact on the women weavers of Nan Province, was premiered at a (COVID19 compliant) online event on 6th October 2020. The event featured a panel discussion by project participants and key international stakeholders, and was attended by an international audience of designers, makers, researchers, cultural theorists and curators. The film was selected from over 1,000 entries from 60 countries for screening at the Fashion Film Festival Milano, 13-18 January 2021 [J].

Collectively, the innovative collaborative strategies initiated and tested in the field by Crafting the Future researchers have brought real-world benefits to the many indigenous crafts-makers and communities of practice with whom they have worked. This activity has generated new international attention for the unique and, often undervalued, skills of traditional artisans, and has created cultural sustainability in a time of accelerating urbanisation and global uncertainty.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. British Ceramic Biennial Heart:Beat report. Corroborating reach and significance of Heart:Beat project.
- B. Warli painter testimonial (Ramesh Hengadi). Corroborating impact on local communities.
- C. The Clay Foundation evaluation report to Arts Council England. Corroborating internal impact of *Warli* exhibition.
- D. The Warli Project Heart:Beat (2018) [artists book] The Clay Foundation, Stoke-on-Trent. Corroborating impact of Heart:Beat project.
- E. Kala Cotton Testimonial. Director of Khamir NGO (Meera Goradia). Corroborating impact on international communities and businesses.
- F. Tai Lue weavers' testimonials (British Council interviews); British Council Tai Lue Impact Report, (Sasiwimon Wongjarin). Corroborating impact on international communities.
- G. Tai Lue interviews and report. Corroborating impact of project on participants and communities.
- H. Chiang Mai Design week (2018) report and statistics. Corroborating reach of Design Week exhibition.
- I. British Council testimonial, Director of British Council Thailand (Andrew Glass, OBE). Corroborating international impact of Tai Lue project.
- J. Tai Lue documentary film <https://vimeo.com/397418215/91e08ce54d> and confirmation of Festival acceptance. Corroborating reach of Tai Lue.