Analyzing Textile Craft Entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan with Bourdieu

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a key factor driving transformation, economic development, employment opportunities, and overall social well-being (Smagina & Ludviga, 2021, p. 401). Some countries like Kazakhstan that heavily relies on natural resources extraction are now trying to modernize and diversify their economy and develop entrepreneurship, especially small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs; Smagulova et al., 2018, p. 2). In the times when unique, aesthetic and emotionally appealing goods are valued over simple functionality, there is a growing global trend toward entrepreneurial activity that can meet these emerging consumer expectations (Smagina & Ludviga, 2021, p. 401). This evolving, knowledge-based, and resource-efficient economy highlights a growing need for specialized, skill-driven labor, emphasizing the potential of the craft sector, a creative industry. The one branch of the creative industry that I am going to study in this research paper is textile craftsmanship in Kazakhstan. While there is substantial literature on the meaning of craft and motivations of craftspeople – primarily from female perspectives – there remains a literature gap on crafts people's entrepreneurial strategies, their relationship with the contexts in which they work, and the experiences of male craftspeople. In this paper I will adapt Bourdieu's holistic approach to study textile craft entrepreneurs from Kazakhstan looking at their entrepreneurial strategies, biographies and experiences through six semi-structured interviews with a narrative element and two non-participant observations.

Literature Review

Conceptual framework: Craft and Entrepreneurship

There is no clear definition about what craft is in academia, with some craftsmen and the general public referring to it as a skillful manual work, while others point out the necessity of artistic skills and traditional knowledge involved (Smagina & Ludviga, 2021, p. 402). Due to the semantics of the word, craft can refer to any type of skill mastered by an individual. To narrow down the focus of this paper, I chose the textile craft that is most familiar to me. Though there is no clear definition, 'textile craft' usually refers to craft involving fabric, especially the ones that are woven (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). 'Fiber crafts' offers more specificity and includes embroidery, quilting, knitting, crocheting, felting (Nelson, n.d.). However, for the ease of understanding by my respondents and readers I use 'textile craft' as the term is more widespread and look at what was just referred to as fabric crafts. This excludes materials such as leather and fur, although leather-working–often practiced by men in Kazakhstan–could have broadened the gender scope. Though there is no literature on the gendered nature of leather-making in Kazakhstan, leather being done and sold by men is a common occurrence. Observations during fieldwork showed all the leather-making craftspeople in the fairs were men, which is also reflected in the internet (i.e., searches for '*мері илеу'* which means 'leather-making' in Kazakh).

Nor is there a consensus on the definition of entrepreneurship that captures the complexity of this phenomenon fully (Smagina & Ludviga, 2021, p. 403). Commonly cited definitions point out such individual characteristics as opportunity recognition, the ability to pursue opportunities and innovative mindset. However, this portrays entrepreneurs as rational, autonomous, assertive, confident "heroes" and the phenomenon, reducing entrepreneurship to a purely individual endeavor rather than acknowledging its collective dimensions (Elias et al., 2024, p. 714; Ratten, 2023, pp. 79-80). Much of the literature on entrepreneurial activity is centered around how organizations manage resources over time for the best profitability and maintaining competitiveness, while the highest value of any entity is considered to be economic with the rest of values being put just as "social value" (Elias et al., 2024, p. 714; Smagina & Ludviga, 2020). This value creation is a "total wealth" - intangible and tangible - that entrepreneurs provide to customers in a mutual

and reciprocal exchange of value between markets and businesses (Smagina & Ludviga, 2020, p. 367). Such focus of entrepreneurial studies often overlooks the everyday process, practice of entrepreneurs, context, and diverse results of entrepreneurial behavior (Elias et al., 2024, p. 714; Ratten, 2023, pp. 79-80).

Everyday entrepreneurs, especially of small and low-growth ventures, including the craft sector, are different from this hero portrayal (Elias et al., 2024, p. 714). Though the strategic management of this sector is not studied well, Pret and Cogan (2018, pp. 10-13) reveals craft entrepreneurs adapt such strategies as collaboration, solidarity, community ethics, awareness of market trends and consumer values, internationalisation, constant innovation, authenticity and having non-commercial values. While just like any other entrepreneurship it is associated with creation of value, entrepreneurship in the craft sector creates many other values, including regenerative, environmental, educational, cultural, social, aesthetic, heritage, artistic, symbolic, and developmental values (Smagina & Ludviga, 2020). The craft entrepreneurs create value, recognize opportunities, adapt to the market in different creative ways, according to the key characteristics of an entrepreneur. For the purposes of this research, I refer to any local craftsperson who actively engage in strategic selling as an entrepreneur and aim to examine the strategies they adopt.

To sum up, there is no universally accepted definition of either "craft" or “entrepreneurship”. This paper focuses on "textile craft," a broad term for fabric-based manual practices, chosen for its clarity and familiarity. Leather-making, while significant and often male-dominated in Kazakhstan, is excluded. Entrepreneurship studies often are centered around individualism, innovation, and economic value disregarding other types of ventures as of the craft sector. This research recognizes craft practitioners who strategically sells their craft as entrepreneurs.

Kazakhstan’s Creative Economy: Context and Significance

Creative industries are based on the intellectual and creative potential of the population. According to the governmental report, creative industries include such industries as performative arts (music, acting), crafts (textile, jewelry), media (movie, TV, animations), virtual (video games, software creation), cultural heritage (museums), publishing (books), fashion, architecture, advertisements (Pratt et al., 2018, as cited in Kadyr, 2024, p. 57). This creative section of the economy is a driving force pulling creative, intellectual people to

the urban centers that play a key role in revitalization, cultural development, and tourism (Zhuparova et al., 2022, p. 147; Kadyr, 2024, pp. 65-68).

Craft entrepreneurship, sometimes referred to as artisan entrepreneurship, forms a distinct segment of the creative economy. These ventures are typically small in scale: 94% of creative industries in Kazakhstan are small ventures (Kadyr, 2024, p. 86). In comparison, in France 97% of the craft firms employ less than 10 workers, while 67% is just an individual venture (Jourdain, 2015). Between 2000 and 2016, the contribution of SMEs to Kazakhstan's GDP grew from 5.4% to 10.3% (ANS, 2017; as cited in Smagulova et al., 2018, p. 2). Creative ventures currently comprise 3.8% of all businesses in Kazakhstan, with Almaty (45%) and Astana (17%) as major hubs (Pratt et al., 2018, as cited in Kadyr, 2024, p. 65).

Urbanization and national cultural policy also shape the development of creative sectors. Kim and Comunian (2022) provide how top-down macro policies in Almaty and Astana influence and disrupt the urban cultural development after Kazakhstan’s independence. The paper mentions how the creative economy’s micro-level agents - art practitioners and organizations - reclaimed the local culture and reinvented the national identities after the fall of the Soviet Union and gaining independence. Many macro and meso-level policies were aimed at the nation-building agenda to popularize national identity via material culture. Yet, this research does not delve deeper into the agency of craftspeople and art practitioners. This topic is not addressed in other academic literature either.

Stoilova (2020)’s study provides a good comparative perspective on the agency of such small creative ventures. She looks at how craft beer bars became a vital part of the almost-abandoned neighborhood in Bulgaria in shaping it to be a place of creativity, innovation, and culture and develop to be a tourist, leisure attraction, and the cultural center of the country. In the Kazakhstani context, the cultural center of the country is Almaty and somewhat Astana where all types of craft, including textile craft and craft beers, are popular in the market. In this paper, the creative class discussed to be the driving force behind the urban revitalization includes both the owners of the craft beer bars and their customers. This perspective encourages a broader view of craft economies, not just as production-driven but as community-oriented cultural forces.

International perspectives also shed led on how public support systems can influence craft entrepreneurship. Yair and Schwarz (2011) explores how

England's public sector is useful for these craft makers such as mentoring, courses, and developmental grants. Though Kazakhstan is from a vastly different social reality, some elements of the public sector support in England seem to take place here such as mentoring and masterclasses of craftswomen to other craftswomen and governmental programs teaching traditional craft. Additionally, this paper looks at how those craft makers who had craft degrees made most of the opportunities and how some businesses were better at adapting to the market, and keeping up the creativity than others. This is useful in studying entrepreneurial strategies and backgrounds.

Although top-down policies in Kazakhstan shaped urban cultural development, the perspectives of individual craftspeople remain underexplored.

Intrinsic and Social Meanings of Craft

Previous studies have extensively studied the meanings of craft for craftspeople examining its social, cultural, and economic significance. The main question in many studies was why would people decide to engage in something so time-consuming when there are various cheaper, quality alternatives in the market. Gandolfo and Grace (2010) have found that busy contemporary women do not engage in craft as a time-killer but as a creative outlet for self-expression with a therapeutic effect that provides a connection point with other people. Just like all other sources, Gandolfo and Grace (2010) find that craft is a big part of these craftswomen's identity, and is the continuation of self. By giving off their handmade works and engaging in traditional crafts, they connect with other people and their familial and intergenerational roots.

Similarly, Pöllänen (2013) studied the role of craft in relation to the well-being of craft makers, discovering that doing craft actually helps to stabilize in the face of work-related imbalances. Craft is found to be a way of self-protection from being overwhelmed, a coping mechanism of doing something so familiar during times of turbulence and significant losses. Craft even helps elderly people and those with limited life options fostering their sense of self-worth and their role in the community where they structure their days around craft and gift their work to their family members. Doing craft calms down the mind, reduces stress, fosters personal growth, develops cognitive skills, self-control, social, cultural awareness, and empowers an individual through self-realization in craft. Thus, craft has many practical benefits and it is precisely because these individuals are busy and face challenges that they turn to craft.

These studies make me expect that craft will be foremost appreciated for its intrinsic values.

Continuing the topic of employed busy individuals, such women in Martindale and McKinney's (2020) study find time to sew their own clothing on top of their occupations. These home-sewer women got to accurately express themselves and get more authority over what they wear by controlling the fit, quality, and style, while also creating unique pieces they, otherwise, could not afford. An important part of the sewing experience was getting validated by getting compliments from others, and by showing that they are "more than just a mom" (p. 573). Hence, craft is a tool of empowerment for these women.

The act of following traditional crafts rather than any other craft is not uncommon, as we can see in studies of Gandolfo and Grace (2010), Smagina and Ludviga (2020), and in the current Kazakhstani market, which will be discussed later. It seems to be tied to societal expectations of women being responsible for spiritual and cultural aspects within the family. Martindale and McKinney (2020) find that sewing was tied to notions of womanhood and family, regardless of the diverse social, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds of participants. In the study of Dhaundiyal & Dangwal (2023), Himalayan traditional weavers from remote rural areas are all women who cannot work elsewhere and who have to juggle their caregiver and domestic responsibilities, continuing the tradition of weaving passed down from generation to generation. Kazakhstani crafts have the same heavily gendered nature of craft with textile crafts being done by and passed down to women, mainly.

Traditional crafts also are practiced differently than other crafts. According to Tzanidaki and Reynolds' (2011) study of elderly women from rural Greek islands, creativity and going out of norms were not encouraged, women greatly valued authenticity and researched historically accurate representations of the local craft in museums, and villages to copy, they developed more intimate connection with their family and heritage, and stronger religious connection. So, these papers, fully constituted by women, offer me a perspective on how gender is intertwined with tradition and craft and how traditional crafts are done to later compare it with other more modern crafts.

The social context of France's craft industry seems to differ gender-wise. 75% of those who run the largest companies in the French craft industry are men (Jourdain, 2015, p. 346). their prospects remain surprisingly little studied in scientific research. Hence, men in craft industries surprisingly have a

prominent place in some countries. With little quantitative data on craft industries in Kazakhstan, it is not possible to adapt the gendered lens right now.

To sum up, craft holds deep intrinsic and social value, particularly for women, as a form of empowerment, emotional well-being, self-worth, and cultural continuity. The culture and social context around craft is also multi-faceted.

Craft and Entrepreneurship

Aside from personal reasons, craft has a cultural, economic, and social role within any society. Doing traditional crafts has been tied to cultural revival and decolonization in many cases. For example, in Botoeva and Spector's (2013) research, Kyrgyzstani craftswomen working in the craft-based apparel industry created the "Made in Kyrgyzstan" brand and contributed to the local economy since the turbulent times after the fall of the USSR. This is not the achievement of just one company, but of many textile workers who have brought their local design, and clothing style to not only the whole country but to foreign markets where they faced significant competitive pressure from neighboring China (p. 488). Botoeva and Spector (2013) highlight that craft is a tool for claiming culture, rethinking heritage, and a platform where identities get expressed. One of the interviews with such a skilled textile worker tells how this woman trained during the Soviet times focused on traditional arts and ornaments that ensured her later success (p. 491). The success of such ventures with cultural values would be impossible, unless consumers - the Kyrgyzstani population - demanded cultural items.

Kazakhstan is now going through similar times with consumer demand for cultural, traditional, and ethnic items. According to Smagina and Ludviga (2020), consumers now have a need for "aesthetically pleasing and emotionally engaging" pieces, not just functional items. In the current capitalist market, when the demand emerges, the supply also appears. Smagina and Ludiga (2021) analyze how local Latvian consumers appreciate hand-made items for their aesthetic, cultural, and sustainable features. These studies are useful in understanding what role craft plays within broader societal trends and craft entrepreneurs' role in it.

Some engage in craft as a way to earn a living, making it more of an economic necessity than a personal choice. In the study of Dhaundiyal & Dangwal (2023), Himalayan traditional weavers choose this type of work as this is not only a continuation of the traditions and their cultural identity, but also

due to the flexible hours of the work that allows women to perform their main caregiver and household duties. Spending around 8-10 hours per day weaving in the community, they earn a living that gives them economic and social confidence, empowers them within the family, and is interwoven with their traditional gender roles. The weaving craft, though practiced in families generation by generation, was just a means of economic sustaining with no passion for some. Vastly different from other sources in the reading list, this paper allows us to see how craft can be empowering, yet not a passion to some due to the social reality they live in. Although the context of Kazakhstan is significantly different from this context of the third world who supplies cheap threads globally, this study is useful in studying people who have limited options available to them.

Others engage in craft for the joy of it, blending personal fulfillment with financial gain. In Smagina and Ludiga's (2021) study, Latvian craft entrepreneurs have started selling their craft quite organically without prior knowledge of entrepreneurship or the intention of creating a business. When setting foot into selling their craft, participants often express motivations such as "let me try monetizing what I like," "contribute to the promotion of national values, traditions, and culture," "offer to consumers something they look for" when they set foot into selling their craft. This study shows that craft entrepreneurship is most often about their craft and personal fulfillment first, and then about the other aspects such as financial gains.

This argument is supported by Smagina and Ludiga's (2020) analysis of craft ventures in Latvia. The economic value pursued by craft entrepreneurs is aimed at sustaining the venture, which in turn allows them to pursue creativity and other cultural, educational, environmental, regenerative, and innovative values that are of more importance to them. Similarly, Botoeva and Spector (2013) learn that the professional well-being and 'entrepreneurial success' of Kyrgyzstani craftswomen working in the craft-based apparel industry depend not on financial profits, but on their pride in doing well in the current competitive economy, providing for their family, interpreting cultural heritage and expressing it in their works, on finding and excelling their own style, and on their products being popular among local people. This paper allows a relatively valid comparison within similar post-Soviet contexts. What these sources lack is exploring what craftspeople do if the financial gains are not

sustaining their other values and justifying the effort they put in. I will cover such a case further in my research.

Craft ventures often are accidental and they are embedded in larger cultural and social changes.

Theoretical Framework

The majority of literature uses grounded theory as there is no particular theory or theoretical framework underlying craft entrepreneurs' experience. The sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu about relations of human agency with social life seems to be suitable to analyze craft entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. Four key concepts from Bourdieu's framework are used: *field* (the structured social landscape in which individuals operate), *habitus* (the internalized patterns of thought and behavior shaped by life experiences), *capital* (the various resources differently available and used by individuals), and strategies (the actions individuals take based on their position in the field and resources available to them) (Tatli et al., 2014, p. 62). This allows us to consider artisans not as isolated individuals, but as agents operating within social structures, managing resources affected by their backgrounds and the surrounding environment.

Bourdieu categorizes capital into four forms: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Economic capital is linked to being constructed by production processes and is the basis of economic strength (Huang, 2019, p. 45). They include such material resources - money, property, land, jobs, as well as inherited objects such as buildings, paintings (Huang, 2019, p. 45). Social capital is expressed through access to networks of contacts and relationships, knowing the right people (Huang, 2019, p. 45). Cultural capital differs from the previous two. According to Webb et al. (2002, p. x, as cited in Huang, 2019, p. 45), it is associated with socially recognized tastes, behavior, knowledge, skills, and awards.

This capital exists and becomes meaningful within the *field*, the social space in which agents with certain forms of capital operate, and where capital gets evaluated, valued, and transformed into other types of capital (Jourdain, 2015; Huang, 2019, p. 45). For example, a person's food or music preferences are their long-term patterns of perception, and action, formed under the influence of social experience, which in other terms is *habitus*. One from a lower class can prefer the quantity of food for the habit or fear of hunger. Others from higher class can prefer nutritious quality food or prestigious food brands

(e.g., cheese, wine). Thus, “taste makes a distinction and establishes a distance between the higher and the lower class groups” (Bourdieu, 1989, as cited in Huang, 2019, p. 46). However, having such tastes or even owning a prestigious wine critique certificate in the UK will not matter within the context of another culture of, for example, Chinese rural areas or working in NASA. Hence, capital and habitus are interrelated with each other and work within their own specific fields.

As for the symbolic capital, his analysis of symbolic dimensions is one of the most significant contributions of Bourdieu (Jourdain, 2015, pp. 342-343). To be sold an item should have symbols that fulfill the buyer’s taste. For example, often textile crafts sold in festivals are spoken to be done by authentic traditional knowledge and skills, to be ‘handmade’, thus of higher value. This is what Pierre Bourdieu (1992; Bourdieu, 1996, p. 172, as cited in Jourdain, 2015, p. 353) calls a ‘*symbolic construction*’ - a common practice in any ‘economy of symbolic goods’ - artist-craftsmen differentiate their products by emphasizing different symbols such as uniqueness, handiwork, and national elements, producing its perceived value. Thus, craft entrepreneurs are not only producers, but also as sellers and marketers of their work, combining the economic and symbolic dimensions of their activity. This ‘economy of symbolic goods’ is “a collective disavowal of commercial interests and profits” primarily focused on building symbolic capital (i.e., recognition, prestige) (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 261, as cited in Jourdain, 2015, p. 343). Craft items are often bought precisely for their symbolic value.

Individuals have agency. It is not only field and habitus that affect the individual, but also individuals that in turn affect the field by their actions; yet, their actions are bound by the resources available and regulations of the field (Tatli et al., 2014, p. 64). Habitus, field, and capital are not static, they get transformed under influence of each other. Bourdieu puts it into a formula (habitus × capital) + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101, as cited in Tatli et al., 2014, p. 62). Hence, such a diverse complex interrelated relationship forms practices of craft entrepreneurs.

These concepts allow us to analyze sociology of economic and symbolic activities on different levels of analysis as you can see from Table 1 by Tatli et al. (2014, p. 63) who looked at entrepreneurship and small business (ESB). As my Capstone thesis draws on qualitative data from interviews with local entrepreneurs and analysis of their strategies and platforms, I will mainly

conduct a micro-level analysis without looking at the bigger discourses, policies, objective structures, and labour market dynamics in Kazakhstan. However, these agents are not separated from the social context. Bourdieu's concepts are part of a holistic theory on social context and human agency, and thus better insights will be achieved if I look at concepts all together rather than isolating one concept (Tatli et al., 2014, p. 64). For this reason, in this research I look at the field, habitus, capital and strategies of textile craft entrepreneurs based on the narratives of these individuals.

Table 1.

A Bourdieuian multi-level framework for ESB research

Levels	Bourdieuian orienting concepts	Operationalisation
Macro-level (society, culture, political economy)	Macro-field	Social regulation context, industrial relations, legislation, business environment, labour market dynamics, prevailing discourses of legitimacy, structures of resources and constraints
Meso-level (sector and organisation)	Meso-field *Habitus*	Objective structures pertaining to the organisation and sector, sectoral rules and procedures, sectoral patterns of legitimacy and competition entrepreneurial networks which may include associational, professional and organisational linkages, informal codes of conduct, sectoral and organisational history and culture, informal rules of legitimacy
Micro-level (entrepreneurs and small business owners, i.e. ESB agents)	Capital (in social, economic, cultural and symbolic forms) Strategies, dispositions	Educational, financial, cultural, network etc. resources owned by ESB agents Strategies that ESB agents utilise to gain capital and to legitimise their presence in the field Entrepreneurial attributes, biographies and motivations

Note. Table derived from (Tatli et al., 2014, p. 63).

Research Design

This research adapts a qualitative, inductive research design, where I aim to study how craft entrepreneurs make sense of their experiences, navigate cultural, social, and economic spheres of their practices within a bigger context of their backgrounds and environment. Due to the common lack of theoretical framework on this theme in academia, my research was, likewise, inductive. I initially took interest in the meaning-making of these agents, and how their backgrounds affect the narratives they hold. Only in the later stages of analysis Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, field, and habitus was adopted to help interpret and structure the findings. This allowed for a theory-informed inductive approach, grounded in participants' own narratives.

To capture the diversity of the craft entrepreneurs, this research combined purposive and convenience sampling. Participants were found through personal connections, visits to Astana's fairs, familiarity with local craftspeople's Instagram accounts, online searches on olx, YouTube. Although there was a range of local craftspeople from different locations at Nomad Games 2025, this fair gathered only creators of Kazakh traditional works. This allowed initial access to the active craft makers. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select participants with diverse backgrounds in terms of age, biological sex, region (Astana, Almaty and rural area), and venture type. I had limited access to craftspeople who did neither participate in fairs nor have any online presence, and to those selling on the streets. Due to the cold season during the data collection, planned visits to local bazars were not conducted. Because of convenience sampling, I met two of my interviewees at the Nomad Games 2024 - a large event featuring Central Asian competitions, ethnic fairs, and craft workshops. This might have created a sampling bias toward a more traditional artistic focus.

The final sample consisted of participants aged between 28 and 65 years old, with the majority identifying as ethnically Kazakh and being from Astana and Almaty. Participants included full-time entrepreneurs, an ex-entrepreneur, a part-time craft practitioner who mainly sells others' works, those who exhibited internationally, in local fairs, small local stores, worked from home vs from a physical studio, shop. This variety was intentional, aiming to capture a wider spectrum of narratives and practices that might otherwise be overlooked in more homogeneous samples.

The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews with six textile craftspeople and two non-participant observations. As the interviews were with a narrative element, they took 1-2 hours where I let them talk, tell me their life stories, and show me photos of their works, social media. All interviews were face-to-face. One of the interviews held online were conducted via messages making the overall time they talked around 20 min. Unfortunately, the narrative element of the interview was lost with them answering very briefly. In some cases, non-participant observation was used to understand how entrepreneurs interact with customers, display their products, and interact with their colleagues.

Overall, the inductive approach of the study made it possible to stay attentive to the complexities and contradictions in participants' stories. Based on the topic that emerged during my first interview, I have added a question on the government's role in the craft entrepreneurial journey of my participants. As for the data analysis methods, the interviews have been transcribed, then coded, then reviewed for recurring themes using the NVivo platform. The emerging topics during the interviews and those strongly emphasized included meaning of craft, purpose of their ventures, local community and government, presence or lack of appreciation and support, tension between artistic freedom and market adaptations, role of money and promotion, role of family and knowledge.

Ethical considerations were an important part of how I approached this research. While I use pseudonyms for all participants to protect their identities, the narrative research means that certain personal details - like their family backgrounds, artistic descriptions, marketing strategies, will be disclosed for deeper context. This raises a risk of indirect identification due to the craft community in Kazakhstan being relatively small and interconnected. To address this, informed consent forms were attained with everyone being reminded that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The data that they shared with me is stored securely and only accessible to me and my advisor. Throughout the process, I tried to stay mindful and respectful of their experiences, especially when stories were personal or emotionally complex.

Findings

The section presents the findings of this study, derived from six semi-structured interviews with textile crafts entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. This study reveals a spectrum of textile craft practitioners in Kazakhstan, which can be broadly grouped into two poles: those who could be considered part of a "traditional" craft pole, and those aligned with a more "contemporary" or design-oriented approach. This division draws on Jourdain's (2015) analysis of the symbolic economy of craft with Bourdieu's lens. While their strategies, markets, and social positions differ, they are united by shared values, practices, and systemic challenges. This is why these findings are grouped around three core themes: (1) shared values and practices, (2) common challenges faced in their craft journeys, and (3) the distinction between traditional and contemporary craft practitioners.

1. Shared Values and Practices

1.1 Meaning of Craft

The major common theme of all craft entrepreneurs was the meaning craft holds for them. Regardless of age, gender, and the type of craft, all of them had been engaged in craft-making most of their lives, mostly ranging from 15 to 40 years of craft experience. All of my interviewees talked about how they are doing what they are "*meant to do*", doing "*what they dreamt about as little kids.*" There were several variations of how craft was talked about in the interviews. Zhamilya, a 30-year-old craft entrepreneur, talks about how she found herself in felt after she attended one exhibition from an international artist:

"*And I realized that there are so many opportunities in felt. That was the first exhibition I attended. I participated in the master class. And I decided for myself - I got this epiphany you know. At that moment in there I fell in love [with felt] and I said to myself that I will be doing this for the rest of my life.*"

Indeed, she studied felting in college and university, and continued practicing it during her free time in the early years while working a separate design-related job to pay her bills. Today, 15 years after that exhibition, she is a successful entrepreneur with her own studio with a couple of employees, takes on local, international orders, has her own brand and a blog.

Another craft entrepreneur is Timur who studied and worked as a graphic designer in the past expresses his sharp need to do craft:

"*...all my work stays in 2d, on paper and it disappears with time. Well, that is, in the form of files or in the form of some kind of advertisement. After half a year, it is not relevant anymore. This tormented me. I wanted to embody my design in the physical world.*"

He started trying out different hardware techniques 5 years ago working with wood, metal, epoxy resin, glass, reusing plastic, and a 3d printer. While starting out as a hobby, he now wants to share with others his vision of the future where sustainable, strong materials are used.

1.2 Craft as a connection with ethnic roots

This leads to the sub-theme emerging from the interview data - what people achieve and express through craft. Many participants expressed a strong desire to preserve and reinterpret traditional Kazakh crafts. Several worked specifically with wool and felt, adapting these materials from their historical uses (e.g., carpets, warm clothes) into contemporary items such as furniture, art pieces hanging on the walls, and thin garments.

Aside from cultural production, some craft entrepreneurs also aim to bring joy to the customers. Angelina, who knits, crochets, felts, assembles, decorates, paints, sculpts with clay, is a young entrepreneur who has opened a shop where she sells her, her mom's and other artists' and craft-makers arts. In comparison to other craft entrepreneurs, she has started her shop for other craft-makers. Her first experience was selling her mother's knitted toys online in social media when she was 12, because as she says "*they were so beautiful. I am madly in love with her art.*" Later on, she got cheated by the owner of one toy shop that sold their craft for a higher price than promised. Angelina wanted to create a platform for artists to sell their craft with no worry, for art to stop being about fear. Now, she keeps going for "*the delight in people's eyes when they see something made by hand, not just overbought somewhere*." Her passion about craft was tied with her close relationship with other craftspeople and her own craft-making practices.

So, although the exact reasons for craft making and sharing it with others had some differences, craft entrepreneurs all share this passion.

Zhamilya, a 30-year-old craft entrepreneur, also aims to popularize Kazakh culture. She intentionally positions part of her items such as takiya (Central Asian traditional head garment), phone cases with ornaments, selling on pop-up stores for popularization*: "It is not just for sale, it is precisely to bring youth closer to this... This is more like a souvenir, a part of everyday life, a piece of everyday attributes. It is like, you know, earrings that are of everyday use. The more you see it, the warmer it is for your heart.*"

1.3 Community, Family, and Informal Knowledge Networks

The role of community and family emerged as an essential yet uneven aspect of participants' entrepreneurial practices. Others were more solitary but still were embedded in networks. These networks facilitated the informal exchange of knowledge, encouragement, and opportunities.

Half of the participants had this craft venture as a family business allocating roles and responsibilities among members. Women, in comparison to men, have learned the crafts they are doing now from their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, or even daughters. Gulnar, a 60-year-old Kazakh lady who got a degree in arts and sew clothes and created fabrics for a living ever since, has learned felting from her daughter who, in turn, learned it in her higher education. She talks about how now when her daughter lives independently, they still exchange pieces they make for the other to sell on a fair or just as a gift for no further implication. She gives off lessons to teach students on short or long-term basis her techniques that she has been mastering for 40 years and that she has learned going to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan.

Most of them learned the craft in their families or grew up in an environment filled with craft, familiar with the cultural significance of the craft. There is a definite connection here, although many do not attach much importance to the role of family or familiarity with this craft since childhood. Zhamilya, for example, refers to felt as a material "*familiar to everyone from childhood*" just like traditional Kazakh blanket körpe. I suggest that family is not noted to be of importance due to the participants' perception that felting, sewing, embroidering being taught in families is a norm. For Gulnar, mentoring was a big part of her mission as a traditional craft practitioner: "*To continue working in our own profession, to continue further [developing the craft] and to teach others, to teach before leaving [the profession] - that's all.*" She put mentoring as a mission that every 'traditional craftsman' should achieve to

develop Kazakh traditional knowledge passing down. She, as a person who learned felting from her daughter, could develop her craft further by attending regional seminars offered by the government.

This is in contrast to men textile entrepreneurs who started learning the craft intentionally later on in their adult lives when they saw potential in the material. While Timur works with many hard materials such as metal, plastic, his way to textile craft, learning to work with wool and felt was independent based on trial and error, separate from the usual informal networks or formal education. Sabyr, who worked with felt alongside his siblings, studied felt from their mother intentionally to explore the material.

2. Challenges and Tensions

2.1 Financial insecurity

All participants faced similar challenges. The most common one was financial insecurity. Handicraft entrepreneurship was the main source of income for five out of six participants. When explaining the financial nature of craft, Gulnar, whose whole family are craft entrepreneurs, joked that "*well, if we had money, we would finish painting this gray house!*" the exterior repair work of which have been postponed for years. She also noted that craft income was often seasonal or event-based: "*It is only in the hands of Allah. There are days when it gets sold the day I create it. There was one work that I kept for five years [before it got sold].*" The unstable nature of the financial income was so unpredictable for Gulnar that she believed it was out of her control.

To diversify their income sources, they have participated in exhibitions, conducted workshops, offered mentoring, received periodic commissions on related markets (for example, clothing, interior design). Those who reported more stable income often had access to multiple income channels reaching different consumer bases. Aliya is an ex-craft-entrepreneur who stopped her brand line. She now allocates the sewing process to other people and creates designs only. She also offers mentorship, art sessions, commissions, with her customer basis capturing from young, middle-age customers, and businesses. This adaptation to the market and finding other channels of income offered her financial stability. "*I was suffering losses only, so I don't sew beforehand*

anymore. I don't sew collections. I take orders first." She also noted how she has no need to sew clothes: *"My life is filled with art, I sing, draw, and do art therapy.*" While other craft practitioners had a strong meaning and mission attached to craft, for Aliya it was just one of the things that fulfilled her. Perhaps this is why she no longer sews.

Although unstable, those who had disabilities noted that craft entrepreneurship provides a flexible work schedule, allowing them to take care of their health and participate in the economy.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Tensions: Artistic Freedom vs. Market

Participants described a tension between their creative expression and the need to adapt to the market. While they all engaged in entrepreneurial activity exhibiting in festivals, fairs, exhibitions, fashion shows, design centers, or just selling online, their attitudes toward the market differed.

Others adapted their work based on market trends. Sabyr kept track of other local craft makers' crafts and tactics to see customer demands and adapt to the current market, while others took inspiration from other designers and craftspeople without much intentional strategies. On the other hand, Timur had strong values and principles of preserving his originality no matter the financial instability: "*I create only my designs... People either buy it or not. I will not accommodate other people's taste just to repeat what they saw somewhere*." Like others he believed it is simply a nature of the craft entrepreneurship - income is seasonal and somewhat unpredictable. He rarely takes commissions only when he gets full freedom without indication of customers' wants. His main creation procedure is "first getting an idea, creating it, doing a high-quality photoshoot, then publishing it on social media and on international design platforms - if he gets accepted - "*then getting feedback*". It seems that despite his strong claims on staying true to himself and "*fleeting nature of trends*", he still cares for feedback from the designer community as his main followers on Instagram are designers and architects-alike. He often exhibits his works at international exhibitions, design museums to get recognition from the community.

Many participants used social media platforms - particularly Instagram - as their digital portfolios. The emotional labor involved in self-promotion was a recurring theme. For those who do not have successful Instagram accounts, with

low response rates and visibility, the work of taking photos and videos, writing captions, posting on time was often described as exhausting and time-consuming. Although all of the participants still used Instagram to showcase their range of works and services, the certificates and competitions they won, and to promote their services such as mentoring. Those who actively post high-quality image content, videos, stories, and other interactive work report that a portion of their customers reach out to them through social media. Even those who do not have many subscribers yet upload content onto their accounts report the same occurrence but they rely majorly on their offline activities for marketing than online. During the interviews, some craftspeople showed their Instagram to demonstrate their career path and works, explaining the ideas behind them.

Several participants expressed a wish that "money didn't matter" so they could devote themselves more fully to the creative process. It was time and energy-consuming to spend time selling, presenting your work nicely, posting and promoting yourself, going to fairs, exhibiting, and searching for customers and opportunities. Sabyr from a rural area who now lives in a small city uses TikTok to target youth, but lacks good aesthetics and narrating skills. Zhamilya from Almaty keeps her blog aesthetic and coherent posting every day part of her work in progress, collaboration projects through one language only - Kazakh. Regardless of the tactics and results, many recognized that this is a necessary step to get public recognition and to attract customers. Just like a portfolio, they have to keep it updated.

2.3 Lack of institutional support

All participants pointed out lack of governmental support, few grants, and not enough recognition of their cultural role, although some actively participated in governmental programs. There is a popular governmental program for craftsmen, called Atameken. Interestingly, one older participant used to actively participate and win this grant, while Sabyr, from a smaller city, is planning to participate in it in future. Sabyr was granted a house in a city due to his disability, cultural contribution, and being from a rural area. Even he noted that the government does not value craftsmen and suggested cultural awards as a good way to improve their prestige: "*There are awards recognizing singers, actors for their cultural contribution, but not for craftsmen who promote traditional art.*"

On the other hand, Angelina, strongly stood against working with the government. Except the first year of her small business being exempt from taxes, her journey was independent from grants and programs. Although many people suggested her to participate in Atameken to get grants, as she worked with many artists in her platform, she observed the tough nature of working with the government:

"She is knocking jobs out of the akimat in order to do all this officially… There you have to smash through walls, knock on akimats and tell them why you are not satisfied with such conditions, why you need a workplace for your seamstress, and all that. It won't be for me… Many businessmen are silent about this because they are so used to it. Many are silent because they don't want to reveal their cards somehow. But I've seen people go through all this, and many of them cave under the government… It's a very difficult path."

There was a feeling that artisans had to be built differently to get these opportunities. Additionally, access to the exhibitions and fairs, such as of Nomad Games 2024 are not public:*"There are actually a lot of events organized by the Akimat, but no one knows about them. I don't know where they find the people to invite, but when you show up, all the spots are already taken – sometimes even by locals, especially older women who've been doing crafts since Soviet times."* Talking about older women from Soviet times, Gulnar, noted how she met the head of the Cultural unit of the Almaty regions and was invited to participate in fairs. It seems like access to governmental events is informal, one has to have a reputation for the governmental units to be invited and to participate in the selection. This has led to skepticism about institutional channels and a preference for self-promotion.

2.4 Competitive Craft Community

While the idea of craft community evokes an image of mutual support, collaboration, shared values and identity, drawing inspiration from each other, several participants highlight a more complex nature of the craft environment. An emerging theme was a competitive environment with lack of clear communication, where everyone is seen as a competitor: "*Even if you manage to strike up a conversation with one of those graduates, not a single one of them will ever tell you where and when a fair is happening — because why would they want you there? You'd just be more competition*" - Angelina complains. This sentiment is echoed by another participant who is on the other side of the

argument, getting all these opportunities to go to governmental fairs, Gulnar: "*Each time they see [my achievement], their hearts ache, they envy. If we let go of that envy, we would develop so much more. But that jealousy, that bitterness is there. Even friends are jealous, saying that "those ones did not invite us with their whole family… Allah will deal with them"*" Here, jealousy and exclusion are framed not just as individual behaviors but as structural barriers to collective development of craft. This kind of internal tensions, though not often discussed openly, creates a complicated landscape.

2.5 Cultural Devaluation

While the craft is often celebrated for being a cultural heritage, it is sometimes devalued and compared with cheaper mass-produced alternatives. I have witnessed during a recruitment process in an Astana fair how a Kazakh person shouted after hearing the price of a textile craft that they can buy it for half the price in a bazaar. This has left the craft maker in a shaken state unconfident of her craft's value. Several craft entrepreneurs complain how there is "culture around buying craft items." One participant even takes Mukagali Makatayev, a prominent Kazakh poet, as an example to point out how devaluing is a common occurrence in local culture: "*He did not manage to see his works, his art, his poetry in the light, being appreciated! And the people only later saw what kind of person he was!*" Such a comparison depicts the distress and tension of craft practitioners who struggle for validation.

Other participants were only happy and grateful for their customers. Angelina, for example, was sure that people who value authentic, wholesome items would find them, noting how sometimes similarly creative young people and other artists are the ones who buy from their store.

3. Poles of Practice: Traditional vs Contemporary

One of the less clear patterns was the contrast between people working to promote traditional knowledge and ethnic culture and those treating craft as a more modern, design-driven practice. They differed in the nature of the entrepreneurial ventures and strategies.

The more traditional crafters saw their work as a way to keep cultural knowledge alive. Sabyr, a craft entrepreneur from a rural area who creates

paintings and magnets from wool, has expressed how they intentionally put Kazakh ornaments, clan labels on their pieces: "*Basically, our message is to respect and value Kazakh culture. We put this 'message' into our pieces.*" Gulnar, a 60-year-old Kazakh lady, often took pride in developing the traditional arts: "*this is traditional culture passed down from our ancestors! …Showing it to the people, developing it without forgetting – this is our dream. It's not about selling, it's about developing our art."* Using the plural "our dream," "our art" she emphasized her strong Kazakh identity and how textile crafts are important for the cultural development and heritage preservation above all else. They also strategically appeal to the Kazakh ethnic identity in their products' displays. They inserted Kazakh motifs and ornaments, depictions of Kazakh life and animals. Sabyr, for example, sells magnets with traditional Kazakh clans (ru) emblems and city emblems in the form of a small souvenir to appeal to local identity.

Contemporary crafters were often based in Astana or Almaty and tended to emphasize creativity, originality of the idea, and quality. For example, Aliya created modern clothing that sometimes was inspired by the nomadic style. But she emphasized the quality, comfort, sleek neutral unisex design over pointing out the nomadic elements. Timur, a craftsman who have redesigned felt's purpose into the form of furnitures talks about how culture influences his works: "*I draw inspiration from museums, national museums, the Saka heritage, the golden man and that period of time, the Scythians, the Saks. In general, nomadic culture inspires me. This culture influences me, yes. But I don't think modern culture has any influence. Modern technology certainly does.*" Interestingly, his displays of the work in the online platforms never mention 'Kazakh' nor on the nomadic elements that he draws inspiration from, while his works feature a modern, futuristic, rich look. He majorly draws on the quality, originality, design, taste of his works.

Aside from marketing and self-presentation, the overall entrepreneurial strategies of these two groups had major differences. Traditional pole of craft makers mainly sold at local fairs, museum exhibitions, at grand events such as of Nomad Games 2024 governed by the state. Gulnar, an experienced craft entrepreneur, has long been participating in the craft competitions in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and other local competitions organized by the local governments. They often present workshops in such fairs and exhibitions to demonstrate the skill involved in producing the items, attracting and educating

the customers. As for contemporary craft practitioners, they reached audiences through art galleries, fashion shows, pop-up stores, and participation in international design events. While traditional crafts practitioners rely on Instagram, those who lean to contemporary craft alongside an Instagram may have a website. The customers of traditional artisans were diverse - from tourists to locals who come to fairs, from young to older people. The customer segment of the contemporary artisans were other businesses, other designers, a wealthier middle-aged population "with money," as Zhamilya notes, due to the price of their works. It seems contemporary works are of higher prices than traditional crafts, and that their customers often come through referrals.

An exception would be Zhamilya, a traditional craftswoman, who has a modern look into her works that she places in both local fairs and art galleries, pop-up stores and sells online. She also displays her works on Instagram in a very aesthetically pleasing minimalist look, which is typical of contemporary practitioners. It could be that as Zhamilya slowly raised her status, income, and the venture size - she hired employees and moved her work place from her home to a rented studio within the last couple of years of her work - she started exhibiting in prestigious galleries and exhibitions, taking orders from other businesses, with no need to participate in local craft competitions.

These crafters often had different identities. Traditional craft practitioners noted a strong identity of a '*sheber'* (master of craft) and creators, contemporary craft makers referred to themselves as designers (i.e., fashion designer, product designer). Their different identities might have been due to the differences in their formal education: the former studied sewing, applied art, craft, while the latter had a degree in design. Their social origins also shaped these differences - a rural and lower class is associated with the traditional pole, while an urban higher class is contemporary. I have categorized the participants' classes based on where they were born (urban vs rural), if they owned a house in these urban places for the majority of their lives - basically on their origin and access to living in a place of bigger opportunities. One of the participants with a rural origin, although has lived in Almaty for quite a long time, lives in the lower parts of the city that are known to be inhabited by lower class. She also noted her financial struggles in the sections above. All the differences are summarized in Table 2.

Another individual who is difficult to categorize is Angelina - a young Slavic craft entrepreneur with a shop-platform selling craft items of local artists. She does not draw her marketings on traditions, but rather on this 'wholesome handmade' craft that is unique. Their digital marketing on Instagram also focuses on the shop being a unique place to buy a gift, toys. During non-participant observation, personalised advice, explaining the stories behind some of the items, their authors' stories were noted. The customer segment of this shop seems to be mostly young people, teenagers, and kids. As this was a family venture just like other traditional practitioners, it seems in terms of entrepreneurial strategies Angelina is in-between these two poles.

To sum up, traditional and contemporary poles of craft makers differ in their strategies: the former provides personalisation of their craft by emphasising traditional knowledge and skills, craft as a connection to ethnic roots; the latter provides personalisation of their craft explaining the idea behind it, the quality and originality of the products.

Table 2. Comparison between Traditional and Contemporary craft practitioners based on the Jourdain (2015)

Different aspects	Traditional	Contemporary
Strategies	Emphasis on ancestral skills, traditions, ethnic identity. Display craft labor in workshops	Emphasis on creation, original design, quality, story-telling.
Market	Local fairs, exhibitions, workshops	Art galleries, fashion shows, urban popup stores, international exhibitions
Online platform	Instagram	Instagram, website, referral
Customers	Tourists, creative people youth, middle-age	Wealthy, B2B, middle-age
Socio-economics origins	Rural, lower class	Urban, higher class
Family-involvement	Often a family venture	More individualized

Discussion

Having different strategies and different backgrounds of craft practitioners leaning towards traditional and contemporary poles can be explained by Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital.

As the overall distinction between traditional and contemporary craft practitioners was inspired by the framework of Jourdain (2015), the similarities between our works is obvious. The personalization through involving customers into the working process during workshops at exhibitions, tying them closer to the process, material, and educating them into the deeper meaning, history of the craft is typical of traditional crafts entrepreneurs.

While those leaning towards contemporary pole emphasized creativity and originality, by talking about the story and bigger idea behind the crafts (Jourdain, 2015, p. 354). What was different, though, was how emphasis on quality was typical of both traditional and contemporary practitioners, rather than just traditional ones in the study of the French craft industry by Jourdain (2015). The other patterns of my participants that you can from Table 2 all echo with Jourdain from the socio-economic origins, platforms to family-involvement.

Such strategies are an essential part of craft entrepreneurs who are "both producers and sellers of their work" (Jourdain, 2015, p. 343). By what Pierre Bourdieu calls a 'symbolic construction' - artisans increase the value of their product and differentiate themselves from other producers. As Elias et al. (2024, pp. 716-717) notes, their competitive distinction by creating distinctive values - aesthetic, social, spiritual, symbolic, cultural - that enable customers to immerse and emotionally connect. These symbolic meanings of craft being "more than meets the eye" transfer into increased economic capital where customers are inspired to base their eventual decisions of whether to buy the craft or not on the essential symbolic qualities of craft rather than on prices (Jourdain, 2015, p. 354). Craft entrepreneurs are often small-scale businesses who frequently depend on specific festivals, seasonal events, and national festivals that are of interest for local and tourist craft-lovers (Smagina, 2021, p. 407). All craftswomen attach symbols into their work as, otherwise, they cannot survive in this economy where competitors are mass-produced, industrial goods of lower price, and standardized alternatives (Jourdain, 2015, p. 353). Gulnar, even complained how tough it was to compete against Chinese mass-produced and

Kyrgyz cultural clothes 10 years ago. Craft entrepreneurs adapt to the field this way.

Such competitive distinction through symbolic construction is different from mere marketing techniques. In the craft sector, artisans balance between authentic production and such strategies that increase economic capital (Elias et al., 2024, p. 731). They try to stay true to themselves and struggle adapting to the market. Struggle to meet the customer needs leads some to reject the economic reality as we have seen in Timur's case. But even he listens to the feedback from fellow designers - who constitute his main customer segment, though without developing profit-oriented strategies or taking commissions. "Staying true to oneself" and creation of craft fundamentally involve connection, interaction, and relationality, emphasizing how elements are intertwined rather than existing in isolation (Elias, 2024, p. 717). Craft entrepreneurship is an "interplay between past, present, future," where entrepreneurs materialize ideas in the present influenced by their past (background, childhood) imagining future value they will bring to others (Elias et al., 2024, p. 728).

Talking about the past, the professionals who refer to the traditional pole of crafts are the inheritors of the family activity. Their values and self-presentation as keepers of traditional skills and knowledge is not simply a calculative strategy but their internalized thoughts and behavior shaped by their earlier close connections with craft as a connection with family and ethnic roots, in other words habitus (Jourdain, 2015, p. 355). What caused and motivated craft entrepreneurs to start their venture guide their entrepreneurial behavior later on (Pret & Cogan, 2018). If we look at Timur, he renovated traditional material, felt, into such interesting looking furniture. Yet, as he entered the craft field in a separate way, he did not go through such habitus of traditional craft makers. So, he did not have access to this cultural capital, knowledge behind the history of the felting and its intricate techniques. His formal 'design' degree as a habitus shaped his modern-looking aesthetics. The craft competitions as part of cultural capital to get recognition was not significant for Timur, whose cultural field constituted of the design community and wealthy international upper-middle class from Milan, Moscow, and other international exhibitions he went to. Thus, habitus, cultural capital, and fields are all different among traditional and contemporary practitioners.

Interestingly, the customer segment of these poles were similar to the craft entrepreneurs themselves. Like mentioned earlier, national events are attended by those interested in craft (Smagina, 2021, p. 407). Pret and Cogan (2018) state that those ventures experiencing natural growth are the ones whose values align with those of their customers. Aliya, for example, an ex-entrepreneur, still gets many requests to design and sew clothes after she stopped her brand line. The word of mouth and strong referrals ensure Aliya gets customers with similar values as hers who prioritize comfort, neutral colored unisex clothes with some nomadic element to it. This is due to similar habitus among craft makers and their consumers, which Bourdieu (1984, as cited in Jourdain, 2015, p. 350) calls a ‘structural homology’.

The customers are an important part of social capital that entrepreneurs can achieve through providing distinctive values. Another social capital in the informal field of the craft industry is governmental contacts. Getting recognition from them will increase your chances of your future inclusion in the selection process for government-hosted events. In entrepreneurship, knowing the right people is as important as knowing the market (Ratten, 2023, p. 79). Social and human capital optimises resource mobilisation and opportunity recognition (Pret & Cogan, 2018, p. 614).

In short, craft entrepreneurship exists in a field governed by cultural, economic, and institutional norms – from exhibitions and local fairs to online platforms, from government grants to informal support networks. In the craft industry, economic capital is expressed in income from sales, access to a studio outside of home, living in an urban area; social capital – in a network of craft makers, customers, exhibition curators; cultural capital – in knowledge, skills, taste; and symbolic capital – in recognition, symbols such as ‘Kazakh tradition’ as a marker of value. The various craftspeople are not competitors, they operate in different markets that are of different habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, as cited in Jourdain, 2015, p. 350).

Conclusion

Craft entrepreneurship is the interplay of identity and meaning, cultural heritage and economic transactions, self-expression and societal expectations, blending personal well-being with the pursuit of financial ends. The distinctions between traditional and contemporary practitioners - inspired by Jourdain's (2015) framework - reflect more than aesthetic preferences, shaped by the interplay of habitus, capital, and field. Craft entrepreneurs are great cultural contributors in the Kazakhstani context where they create meaning, reclaim culture, teach and support other craft-makers, and attract tourists to urban centers. Craft is not just a hobby nor is it just a work for the six craft entrepreneurs I have interviewed from Kazakhstan. Though the income is always unstable, the craftspeople feel unappreciated with no governmental support, this is a fulfilling and deeply-motivated lifestyle for them to pursue what they love, what is connected to their, ethnic identity, family, and what gives them artistic freedom. These people do not only juggle between tradition and innovation, but creativity and strategic planning.

I would recommend future research to focus on how community building affects small businesses, how craft networks collaborate, share knowledge on entrepreneurship, and the impact of digital markets on traditional craftmaking. Due to the scope of my research, I did not have an opportunity to analyse governmental programs, grants, and policies for craft entrepreneurs and creative industries nor was there much of that. As for the bigger changes, I would suggest offering more entrepreneurial classes and inviting craft entrepreneurs personally, establishing craft/art associations that are not only for traditional craftspeople, and in general, investing in local materials industries as an example of Kyrgyzstan.

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Appendix

Interview guide:

Demographic questions:

1. Could you please introduce yourself by saying your age, gender, ethnicity, and where you are from?
2. Where do you live now?

Questions on their craft experience background:

1. What crafts do you do?
2. How long have you been engaged in this craft?
3. Why do you do this craft?
4. Can you describe your crafting process?

Questions on the financial side of their entrepreneurial experience:

5. How long have you been selling?
6. Is it your primary source of income?
7. How would you describe your profit and turnover?
    a. If you feel more comfortable, you can tell me the range of your turnover.

Questions on their entrepreneurial experience:

8. Why did you start selling?
9. Where do you sell your work?
10. Who are your customers?
    a. How would you characterize them to your best knowledge?
    b. Would you say your customers are middle class?

11. How would you describe the work you sell?
12. What do you aim to give to your customers?
13. What challenges do you face?
14. What opportunities do you get from your craft venture?
15. Do you do other crafts? If so, how would you compare your experiences with these different crafts?

Questions on the cultural influences:

16. How does your family or your community affect your crafting journey?
17. How do you think the local culture influences your experience?
18. How do you think being a [man/woman] in Kazakhstan has shaped your experience in craft-making?

Question on the future and asking suggestions:

19. How do you see your future in this sphere?
20. Is there any change you would like to see in future?