

# The Dongguan Reeds of China: Dimension, Identity, Culture, History and Development

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## Abstract

Reed weaving skills are handicrafts and cultural treasures. Moreover, they are also a significant part of China's intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, preserving the reed weaving skills, the national intangible cultural heritage, is currently the most important and urgent issue because it can make Dongguan reed wicker products return to their golden age and reappear in daily lives of people in the local community. Dongguan Guan Cao Guan Cao This article provides in-depth studies, including the history of Dongguan Guan Cao weaving technology, the current situation, the material properties of Guan Cao, and the change in consumer demand from the evolution of Guan Cao weaving products. The authors have used qualitative research to search for identity and gain a deeper understanding of the history of weaving, the hardship in the current situation and characteristics of raw materials from reeds. We have conducted a field survey in Daojiao and Shatian districts to find a turning point for introducing Dongguan Gao weaving techniques in intangible cultural heritage tourism. The results showed that China's Dongguan Reed, dimension, identity, culture, history, and development are an effective way to expand the scope and refresh Guan Gao's weaving skills to step into the tourism market as a souvenir for tourists. This can lead to the inheritance and development of Guan Gao weaving memory and promote the development of local experience. Weaving Guan grass product design has to meet this era's development trends, innovation, and development, which is the power of Guan Guan weaving restoration. It is not only part of the product and innovation to create a model, but should also be invented in the weaving process. The arrangement of Guan grass weaving products using various materials is consistent with The Times, to create new articles and requirements for everyday use in order to expand the boundaries of the usage of Guan Chao basketry products.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, Dongguan reed weaving art, Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism

## Introduction

The economic development and the social progress of China has been changed so quickly. The globalization as well as the foreign cultures also have affected to Chinese culture. People are aware of the diversity of Eastern and Western cultures and the uniqueness of local culture. The precious value and significance of identity has aroused strong consciousness of the people of the country to protect local culture and intangible cultural heritage. In October 2003, the 32<sup>nd</sup> UNESCO General Conference has used the “Convention on Conservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” (commonly referred to as the Convention), and in August 2004, China became the very first countries to join the “Convention” and later other countries have gradually joined the “Convention” in the international background. The protection of the intangible cultural heritage and the attention to the inheritance of the international community, the Chinese government has also promoted this at all levels and it had drawn attention from experts and academics and interests of all professions in newspapers, journals and networks.

The art of weaving the reed is a branch of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Arts. The reeds (see Pic.1) takes its name from the city of “Dongguan”. It is an aquatic plant that grows mainly in brackish and freshwater areas. According to the “Record of Dongguan City” of the Chongzhen Emperor, Ming Dynasty, it stated that the reeds first appeared in the Ming Dynasty and was very popular in the Qing Dynasty before all major cities had been reformed. Main streets and towns of Dongguan are undeveloped and backward. Since the reeds are abundant, local people therefore have worked mainly on weaving reeds. Hand weaving has been developed quite a lot. Reed hand-woven products have become the main source of income and the main local handicraft. The reed woven products include reed mats (see Pic.2), reed baskets, cushions and so on. These products are not only famous in the south of Guangdong Province but also being exported abroad. However, in the 1980s, the changes in the local economy, environmental pollution and the impact of plastic products as well as other reasons, have caused the reed weaving handicraft to stay in the deterioration status for 30 years. In 2007, the city of Houjie has declared the reed weaving skill and was placed on the first 36 intangible cultural heritage list in Dongguan City. At the same time, the Dongguan City's Bureau of Culture and Modern Technology has declared the reed weaving to be listed as part of the second set of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Conservation Projects. The government of Dongguan city has begun to focus on the importance to protect the intangible cultural heritage by starting and planning to revive the art of the reed weaving skills and the protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has then become an important issue people are talking about in today's society.

Most Chinese scholars believe that the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism is a way of inheriting the Intangible Cultural Heritage. It will not only drive the local economy but also it is the inheritance and protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. For example, Chen Tianpei, a Chinese scholar (2006) believes that the Intangible Cultural Heritage is an important tourism resource of the region. By combining the development and the protection

of the Intangible Cultural Heritage with the tourism industry, it can enhance the characteristics of local tourism and ethnic to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of local tourism. Tourists have been becoming the main personnel to help promote the tourism. The Intangible Cultural Heritage is worth thinking of and to be studied in depth about how to combine the Intangible Cultural Heritage with tourism and what role does it play?

In summary, the reed weaving techniques used to be the main economic industry of Dongguan City which is now necessary to have an Intangible Cultural Heritage. We need to revive the art of the reed weaving as soon as possible to reappear in people's lives again. Nowadays, Chinese people have a high standard of living and pay more attention to the spiritual pursuits. Tourism has become a way for people to relax. There are many tourists attractions in Dongguan. There are the combination of Dongguan reed weaving skills with tourism. Moreover, Dongguan has promoted the development of the local economy and can protect and inherit reed weaving skills. Therefore, we need to understand the history of the art of weaving reeds, currently facing problems, future development and analyze the strengths of the reed weaving art combined with the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism from those researches.

## Research Objectives

This paper studies the history, development and material characteristics of Dongguan reeds weaving technology and finds the change of consumer demand from the evolution of Dongguan reeds weaving products.

## Literature Review

The objective of this research is to study the document to complete the Abstracts in the topic order as follows:

### 1. Cultural Identity

Most scholars believe that the benefits of tourism protection and development of the Intangible Cultural Heritage plays an important role in the economic development and tourism promotion. Michael Peach (2003) has used tassel as a sample in the research. He believes that the local heritage tourism has shown the history of the local miners. It is a historical tragedy during the Spanish occupation era. It become a carrier of the local historical story. Yudan (2009) analyzed from the perspective of national cultural tourism development and she studied about the positive impact of tourism on the protection and inheritance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. She believes that the tourism development can turn from the defensive to proactive and from the stationary research protection to the integrated active protection. Therefore, the protection and inheritance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was promoted. Liu Zejun (2015) believes that we can develop the tourism from the intangible to the tangible item and it should become very popular among people. We can optimize the

culture's genetic genes to achieve both the protection and inheritance of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

## 2. History

As a representative of the reed weaving, a reed mats were very famous in the past. Ming Chongzhen's "The Will of Dongguan City" has stated that Dongguan had produced "Reed Mats". During the mid and late Qing Dynasty, the reed weaving industry in Dongguan has already become a big market. Qing Xuanton's "Annals of Dongguan Province" has stated that "Dongguan cushions are sold overseas. More workers are employed and each village employs hundreds and dozens of men and women to work, huge profits and real mass production".

Documents on the reed weaving industry in Daojiao city indicated that the local reed weaving craftsmanship was prevalent from Jiaqing to Dongguan in the Qing Dynasty. Initially, most of the reed weaving industry in Daojiao City was operated as a semi-finished reed weaving for Houjie, due to its geographical advantages and there were many raw materials and unique weaving techniques. According to records, Daojiao City has a handicraft workshop called "Huang Xiangji" in 1873 and "Guo Shun" in 1885, who specialized in producing and delivering of nose ropes. In 1925, reed rope shops such as "Sixiang", "Yongtai" and "Sun Sheng" were found in Daojiao City, which opened the independent export era of Daojiao reed weaving. In the 1930s, Daojiao reed weaving industry introduced machines and molds to improve the production efficiency. In 1949, Daojiao reed weaving factory has arisen. Its size was one-third of local labors. In 1956, small factories were converted into large handicraft factories. Since the 1960s to the mid 1980s, the reed weaving industry in Daojiao City had reached its peak. According to a statement of an old man in Daojiao City, the first thing to do when returning from school was to weave reeds, whether old or young, children and people of various positions were participating in the weaving of Wan Chao. After the 1980s, the change in local economy and the environmental pollution has become more severe. In most areas of Dongguan, salinity prevention and rice planting expansion was carried out. Most farmers were planting rice as well as other crops in this fertile fields. Many factories were built and resulting in a sharp decline of reed production in Dongguan. The large-scale use of modern economic products such as plastics has also increased. The market demand for reed fabric is rapidly shrinking. In the early 1990s, reed weaving and handicraft factories in Daojiao area were gradually closed and the local main industry has gradually declined.

Liu Yuanju, a Chinese scholar (2007) gave a brief description of Dongguan reeds but was unable to conduct in-depth research. It is described in the '100 Farmers Path Magazine' that reed is a special product of Dongguan. To restore the reed industry, the Dongguan city government has divided workers and supported reed planting under the guidance of experts. The Sha Tian District is responsible for the planting. Houjia City is responsible for drying and Daojiao District is responsible for weaving (2014).

Peng Xiaopeng (2016) took the traditional art of reed weaving of the Hakka people as the main research object as well as analyzed the history and current situation of reed weaving.

From the research, the art of weaving reed by the Hakka people has been deeply excavated and discussed. The focus is on creation under the concept of traditional Hakka reed weaving and modern design. Then he made some suggestions, promoted brand awareness and brand logo, used CMF to carry out product series design and development initiatives, creation of product design and transforming it into a variety of formats.

Peng Xiaopeng and Yao Yousheng (2017) have briefly described the history of the Hakka reed weaving and the development of the Hakka reed weaver in their research. At present, the raw materials of reed are urgently needed. Government support is limited and the successors are getting older, making succession of reed weaving even more difficult. Scholars suggested that new products should be developed from three main areas which are; development of local tourism products; one type is a souvenir for cultural exchanges between governments and various places as a gift for Chinese and foreign friends and another category is high-end tourism products; incorporating modern design elements and develop high-end home furnishings, jewelry and clothing as well as increasing the cultural connotation of reed weaving products.

In Yao Yousheng's research (2018), the 'Shatian District Rehabilitation and Employment Service Center for Disabled Persons – Disabled Assistance Project' was used to connect this traditional handicraft with assistance of disabled people to create income. This has made the reed to have a special meaning in helping disabled persons to develop their potential and make their dream to have income come true.

Yin Fengkui and Zeng Lianchun (2018) Actively responded to the call of the Ministry of Education of China in their research and introduced the weaving technique of Dongguan grass into primary school classes, so that "intangible cultural heritage" could take root, sprout, inherit and spread in the campus.

Guangdong Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center (2019) briefly elaborated the origin and history of Guan Cao in the study, and displayed representative works of Guan Cao woven products, such as various handbags, vases, lamps, etc.

Su Zhuan (2020) believes that Dongguan intangible cultural heritage projects, such as Guan Guan weaving technique and thousand Angle lamp, are rich in decorative elements. The artistic beauty of these decorative elements has national characteristics and aesthetic value, and carries Dongguan people's longing for good luck, health and a better life, with strong aesthetic appeal. These elements can be used in modern design and resonate with people.

Lu Zhongguang (2019) narrated the history of Dongguan grass from prosperity to decline in his research. He believed that people should not forget the manufacturing industry of Dongguan grass that once brought economic income to people.

Li Qiumei (2020) takes Dongguan straw braid technique as the research object, studies its inheritance and cultivation mode of innovative talents in universities, and provides reference ideas for sustainable development of Dongguan straw braid traditional technique.

Chen Xueyin;Lu Yong ( 2021 ) In the study combing chorography and oral histories to clarify Guancao's history and the techniques of its planting and weaving,will be con-ducive

to understanding the reasons why that Guancao's weaving techniques were selected for an intangible cultural heritage. Moreover, it can help protect and pass down Guancao's planting and weaving techniques by this study.

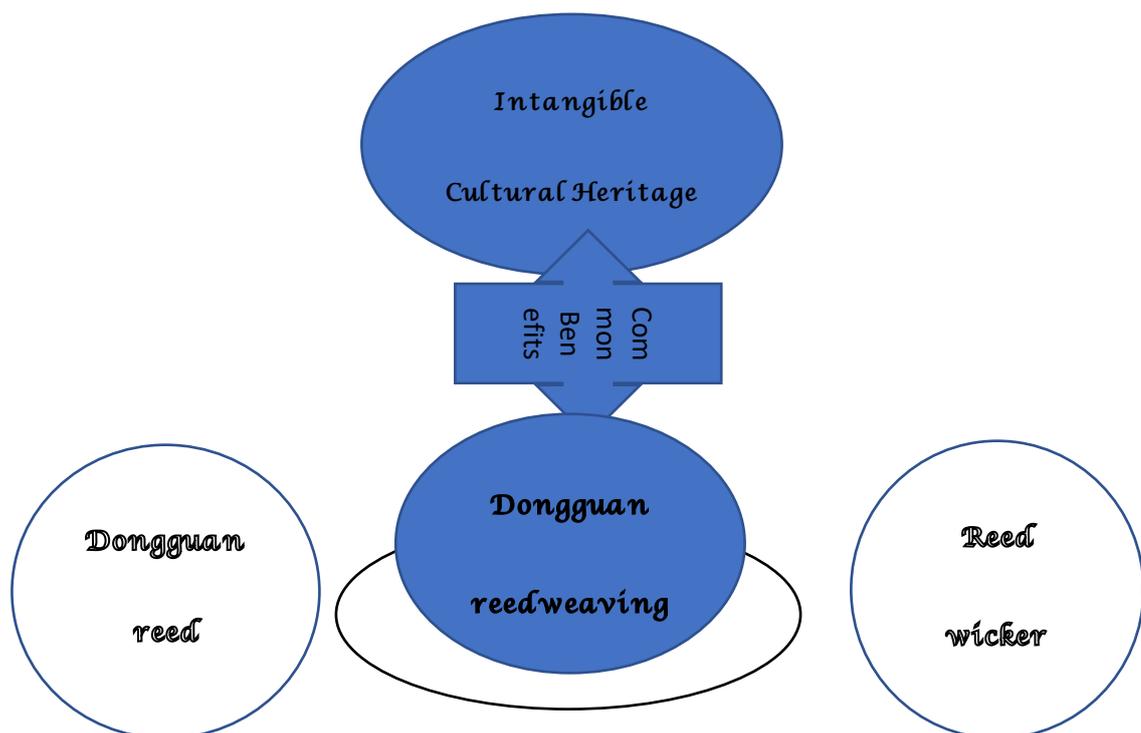
Li Yubin; Xiong Huan ( 2022 ) In the study mainly discusses the cultural inheritance and innovation of it in modern product design, and provides new ideas for bringing traditional handicrafts back to the public vision, restoring the public emphasis on traditional crafts, and activating intangible cultural heritage.

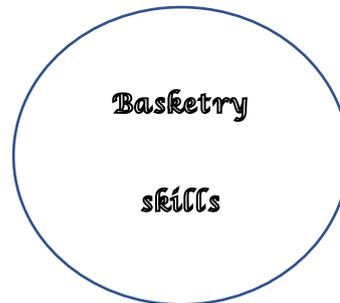
### 3. Development

1. The developing of Dongguan reed weaving skills for the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism is of great importance to the preservation of this type of handicraft. And not only to promote the development of tourism in the Intangible Cultural Heritage sites but also to promote local economic development.

2. The research on the skills of Dongguan reed weaving is divided into 3 areas as follows. The first is the study of innovative materials in Dongguan reed weaving to learn the properties of materials used in basketry and improve material defects. The second is learning the weaving skills of basketry from similar materials or invent a new style of weaving to match the aesthetics of modern people. The third is to focus on innovation of wicker products in the study of products from Dongguan reeds by focusing on the diversity of species, practicality and universality, etc. This is to present the irreplaceable advantages and uniqueness of Dongguan reed wicker products.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework





Source: Jiali Li

## Method

The author used a qualitative research to understand more deeply the history of the art of weaving reeds, the difficulties in the current situation and the characteristics of raw materials of reed by using a field survey methods in Daojiao and Shatian districts. Then analyzed consumer demand from the evolution of reed weaving products and the development of the art of weaving reeds in the future”.

A study of the current situation of the art of weaving reeds in Dongguan City is to study in depth about the history of the art of weaving reeds in Dongguan, current situation, material characteristics of reeds and the changes in consumers demand as the main objective. This is to find the starting point for introducing Dongguan reed weaving art in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism by using qualitative research methods. The researcher used the descriptive analysis research method, which has the following sequence of steps:

1. Study and collect information from documents, books, textbooks and research related to the current situation of the art of reed weaving in Dongguan City.

2. Study and collect field data from the study area which is the field in Daojiao City (Dongguan reed weaving handicraft area) and Shatian City (Dongguan reed plantation area) to learn the history of the reed weaving, the uniqueness of raw materials and the growing environment of the reed with the following methods:

- 1) Interview Method by in-depth interview

- 2) Observation Method. The researcher conducted field observations in Daojiao City (Dongguan reed weaving handicraft area) and Shatian City (Dongguan reed plantation area) to learn the history of the reed weaving, the uniqueness of raw materials and the growing environment of the reed and then collect the data obtained from the observations and present it in the form of a lecture.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 The cultural dimensions of wicker products as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

Picture	Cultural dimensions of wicker products						Distinctive features leading to usability
	Material	Record	Skill	Market Status	Sale Situation	condition of development	
	Dongguan reed material	Over 2,000 years	Insertion , Flat Knitting , Twisting , Adjustment	Dongguan basketry products have been exported from the period of Jiaqing Emperor to Daoguang Emperor.	High	Produced mainly according to customer requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● long history</li> <li>● The economic channels that Dongguan residents rely on for survival.</li> <li>● Very important Intangible Cultural Heritage</li> <li>● Dongguan reed material has good toughness and softness.</li> </ul>
	Wheat Straw	Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynas	Weaving techniques such as weaving , knotting , braiding , fastening , plugging ,	Mainly used in households In the period before the 1980s	Low	Produced mainly according to market demand. Meet the aesthetic and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An important part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage</li> <li>● The wheat straw is</li> </ul>

		ty ( 1723 - 1735 )	twisting , wrapping , weaving , stringing , flat knitting, etc.			functional needs of consumers in terms of shapes, colors, patterns and weaving techniques	soft and easy to form.
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According to the survey results in Table 1, the different types of wicker products have different cultural relationships. From the table, it can be obviously seen that Dongguan basketry has a significant longer history than Daming basketry. In terms of market determination, Dongguan basketry products have been exported to foreign countries since the ancient time while Daming wicker was sold for a family use only. Nowadays, however, Daming basketry has much more been developed than Dongguan basketry. Moreover, the type of Dongguan basketry are less than the Daming types. However, the two cities still have similar characteristics. That is, the main material used in weaving is the same herbaceous plant. The Daming wicker uses extremely flexible wheat straw as the main material while the Dongguan wicker uses wild reeds, which are less flexible than wheat straw. Moreover, both types of basketry also have similar weaving techniques. However, since reeds have less forming properties than wheat straw, so the reed has less techniques in weaving.

**Table 2 History of Dongguan Wickerwork**

Product Name	Picture	Record	Influence
Reed Mat		- Ming Chongzhen mentioned "reed mats" in the "Dongguan County Chronicle". - Dongguan reed basketry was very popular and prosperous from Jiaqing Emperor to Daoguang Emperor.	Woven products from reeds were growing.
Nose Rope		Daojiao District, in the years 1873 - 1925 appeared "Huangxiangji", " Guochun ", " Shixiang ", " Yongtai " and " Shun Sheng " etc.	There are many reed wicker workshops and open an era of independent export.

		- A shop selling reed rope that specializes in production. Sending and receiving a nose rope	
Oval rope mat		-In the 1930s , special machines and molds were introduced into the reed weaving industry to improve production efficiency and create a wide variety of products. -In 1933 , Sun Sheng Wicker Shop introduced basketry techniques and tools to weave oval reed mats (also known as a round mat), which makes this type of wicker tools widely used in various wicker shops.	The round mat has become the most outstanding exported products in Daojiao District.
Square Mat		-In 1946 , due to the demand of Southeast Asia and Western markets, this made the 12×12 inch square reed mat (called square mat) more popular in the international market. -Square mat wicker shop "Yongchang" became the first special workshop in Daojiao District.	-A variety of round mats quickly became another product of the reed basketry of Daojiao District. -Established the first special workshop "Yongchang"
Handmade baskets, wicks and woven mats.		-Since 1949 - 1964 , the reed wicker industry has been expanded and a wicker factory has been established with more than 800 employees. -In the early 1980s, due to the change in the local economy Environmental pollution is becoming more and more severe day by day. In addition, modern products such as plastics that are much cheaper	- Reed wicker factory grows and the reed wicker industry was the most prosperous. - The reed wicker industry has been severely affected. -The basketry skill from the Dongguan reed has declined.

		<p>are used in large quantities. This caused the market demand for reed wicker to decrease rapidly.</p> <p>-In the 1990s , the basketry and handicraft factory in Daojiao district were gradually closed. And this local main industry has gradually been declined.</p>	
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From Table 2 , it can be seen that the reed wicker handicrafts have a very long history. It has been produced and used extensively since the Qing Dynasty. Before the Chinese economic reforms, many areas in Dongguan were still undeveloped. But when local wild reeds began to be used as utensils, the local people had careers and had more income and then the reed wicker had become the main economy of the city. The reed wicker industry has brought great prosperity to Dongguan. It started out as a semi-finished product such as a nose rope, then it has gradually evolved into seating mats, woven baskets, woven mats and other products that were commonly used in everyday life. However, in the 1980s, there was a local economic change and more severe environmental pollution. In addition, the impact of the popularity of plastic products and other factors have caused the reed wicker industry to decline for more than 30 years.

**Table 3. Current developments of reed wicker products**

Picture	Type	Weaving Technique	Consumer Group
	Woven bags and reeds woven butterflies from the 1960s .	Insertion, Flat Knitting, Twisting, Adjustment	Western Country
	Decorations	Flat knitting , insertion, twisting	Produced according to the needs of the consumer group

	<p>Costume</p>	<p>Flat knitting, twisting</p>	<p>Produced according to the needs of the consumer group</p>
	<p>Furniture</p>	<p>Insertion, Twisting</p>	<p>Produced according to the needs of the consumer group</p>

China has given great importance to the development of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Dongguan reed weaving skill is also considered as one of the Intangible Cultural Heritages. Therefore, there is a great need and necessary to develop the new innovation in order to bring this type of handicraft to life again. Over the past several years, the government and related agencies have supported the development of the types and designs of the reed wicker to be more diverse. As shown in Picture 1 in Table 3, Dongguan woven bags and woven butterflies during the 1960 decade, we can see that the wicker is well preserved and it has a very classic style with exquisite craftsmanship of weaving and was the main export product at that time. The second picture is one of the works of Ye Xiaoling, the heir who inherited the Dongguan reed weaving technique. From the picture, we can see that flat knitting, insertion, twisting and other techniques are mainly used. The products are exquisite and the style of weaving is as same as that of the old days. The shapes of the wicker products have been modified and improved to have more diversity. Picture 3 is the work of students in a women's workshop (Place to learn and produce basketry from reeds of local women with no income, unemployment or working from home). Although the work is not very elaborate, it has created outstanding innovations in the shape and design of wicker products by combining Dongguan reed material and fabric to create a new product. Picture 4 is a wicker furniture product designed by students of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. They have bravely made innovations in product form and made wicker products become closer to people's lives. At the same time, in the field of basketry, new creativity has been

added, including changing the color of the original product from the natural color to be more colorful making the product become more familiar to daily life and more trendy.

In summary: the reed wicker products from the past which consisted of only woven mats, nose ropes, woven baskets, woven butterflies, etc., are now being developed to have more variety and modern styles and designs, such as decorative paintings, clothing, furniture and other products and continually innovating in the fields of basketry such as shape, use and more. This transformation of reed wicker products clearly reflects the demands of society in each era.

## Conclusion

Reed weaving skills are not only handicrafts and cultural treasures, but also a significant part of China's intangible cultural heritage.

Therefore, introducing reed wicker products into the tourism market to rely on the tourism platform to promote and develop this product is a very effective way to restore and publicize the weaving skills. Moreover, it also encourages the economic development of intangible cultural heritage sites to be more prosperous and increases the opportunities for more and more people to participate in the protection and conservation of Dongguan reed weaving skills. For the suggestions on the development of these wicker products, the authors are of the opinion that product design must be in line with the preferences of modernists. We have to pay attention to innovation and development to drive the successful restoration of Dongguan weaving products, which not only innovate in product category and design but also create innovation in the basketry process.

We should try to combine other materials with reed wicker products, to create appliances that can be used in daily life and meet consumers' needs in this modern world and then can increase the consumer base of the wicker products. China's Dongguan Reed, dimension, identity, culture, history, and development are an effective way to expand the scope and refresh Guan Gao's weaving skills to step into the tourism market as a souvenir for tourists. This can lead to the inheritance and development of Guan Gao weaving memory and promote the development of local experience. Weaving Guan grass product design has to meet this era's development trends, innovation, and development, which is the power of Guan Guan weaving restoration. It is not only part of the product and innovation to create a model, but should also be invented in the weaving process.

The arrangement of Guan grass weaving products using various materials is consistent with The Times, to create new articles and requirements for everyday use in order to expand the boundaries of the usage of Guan Chao basketry products.

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