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HOW SHOULD INHERITED CRAFT KNOWLEDGE BE GOVERNED? ISLAMIC ETHICAL CUSTODIANSHIP FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

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Abstract:

How inherited craft knowledge is governed matters as much as how it is transferred. Malaysian handicraft knowledge carries tacit judgement, cultural meaning, practitioner authority, livelihood value and intergenerational responsibility across artisans, institutions, digital systems and markets. Transfer mechanisms explain how this knowledge moves; ethical responsibilities governing authority, recognition, representation, welfare and continuity remain conceptually fragmented. This conceptual paper develops Islamic ethical custodianship as a value-based moral architecture for responsible knowledge transfer. Through conceptual synthesis and model-building, the framework integrates amanah, adab, maşlahah and 'adl with the selected Maqāsid preservation principles of ḥifẓ al-'aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl. The architecture connects heritage knowledge context and transfer mechanisms to cultural, community, and economic and adaptive outcomes. Its central contribution shifts analysis from knowledge movement to custodial responsibility without displacing established mechanisms of continuity, offering an ethical basis for heritage policy, craft education, documentation practice and community-centred preservation across changing heritage settings.

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Keywords:

Heritage Governance; Islamic Ethical Custodianship;
Knowledge Transfer; Malaysian Handicraft Heritage; Maqāsid
al-Sharī'ah



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Introduction

Malaysian handicraft knowledge embodies tacit judgement, material expertise, motif literacy, cultural meaning, community memory, practitioner authority and livelihood value accumulated across generations. Artisans develop much of this knowledge through repeated practice, sensory judgement, observation, correction and direct engagement with materials. These characteristics place human relationships at the centre of craft continuity, especially in traditions such as batik, songket, wood carving, brassware, pottery, bamboo craft and indigenous material culture. Apprenticeship sustains embodied knowledge through observation, imitation and corrective learning, whereas documentation and digital preservation extend selected knowledge beyond immediate practitioner communities (Ojha & Yammiyavar, 2017; Seiler et al., 2021; Partarakis et al., 2025). The continuity of Malaysian handicraft knowledge therefore carries cultural, intellectual and economic significance beyond the survival of craft products themselves.

Material scarcity, rising production costs, declining artisan skills and limited youth participation increasingly weaken the environments through which inherited craft knowledge continues across generations (Mohd Tokiran et al., 2022; W. J. W. Ariffin et al., 2023). Institutional programmes, digital preservation, craft education, innovation and market development respond to these pressures by widening opportunities for learning, documentation and circulation. Their expansion also relocates inherited knowledge across agencies, archives, educational settings, commercial networks and digital platforms. As this movement expands, actors outside direct practitioner relationships increasingly select, record, interpret, represent and adapt craft knowledge. Documentation preserves technical sequences and cultural information. Embodied judgement, material sensitivity and situated interpretation remain anchored in practitioner expertise (Isa et al., 2019; Hou et al., 2022; García & Ashley, 2023). Preservation consequently involves responsibility for knowledge authority as well as continuity.

Knowledge transfer scholarship explains the principal mechanisms through which craft knowledge moves, persists and adapts. Apprenticeship supports embodied transmission, documentation and digital systems extend preservation and access, institutional programmes broaden participation, and innovation and market circulation sustain contemporary relevance (Manfredi Latilla et al., 2019; Kabaçam, 2024; Partarakis et al., 2025). These contributions establish the functional architecture of craft knowledge transfer. They provide less explicit

theoretical guidance for governing the ethical responsibilities created when inherited knowledge moves across practitioners, institutions, technologies and markets. Questions concerning source authority, practitioner recognition, cultural representation, attribution, community welfare, livelihood protection and future transmission therefore remain conceptually fragmented. The central gap is the absence of a coherent value order governing these responsibilities across established transfer mechanisms.

This gap carries particular significance in Malaysian handicraft settings, where knowledge increasingly enters training programmes, certification systems, design collaborations, digital repositories, tourism initiatives and commercial platforms. Malaysian studies document the contribution of knowledge bases, institutional engagement, innovation and collaborative practice to craft preservation and development (Isa et al., 2019; Suib et al., 2020; W. J. W. Ariffin et al., 2023). These forms of mediation also create decisions concerning who authorises representation, whose contribution receives recognition, how cultural origins remain traceable, how adaptation protects inherited meaning and how economic and social value reaches source communities. Responsible handicraft knowledge transfer therefore requires more than effective mechanisms of circulation. It requires an ethical basis for governing the relationships and responsibilities that accompany preservation, transmission, representation and use.

Islamic ethical custodianship provides that normative basis by positioning inherited craft knowledge as entrusted knowledge whose transmission creates responsibilities toward knowledge holders, communities and future custodians. Surah An-Nisa (4:58), through its injunction concerning trust and justice, provides a normative anchor for approaching inherited craft knowledge as amanah. Amanah establishes entrusted responsibility and accountability for source authority; adab governs disciplined and respectful transmission; maṣlaḥah directs custodial judgement toward community welfare; and ‘adl grounds fairness in recognition, attribution and return (Shuhari et al., 2019; In’Ami et al., 2025; Alias et al., 2025; Jamal, 2022). The preservational logic of Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah extends these relational responsibilities through ḥifẓ al-‘aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl, corresponding respectively to intellectual inheritance, livelihood dignity and intergenerational continuity (Auda, 2008; Kamali, 2008; Mohd Saifuddeen et al., 2013). Islamic ethical custodianship consequently supplies an ethical order for evaluating how inherited craft knowledge moves without displacing the transfer mechanisms that sustain its continuity.

The paper addresses the following question: How does Islamic ethical custodianship provide a moral architecture for responsible Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer? Through conceptual synthesis across handicraft knowledge transfer, heritage custodianship, Islamic ethical scholarship and Maqāṣid-oriented reasoning, the paper develops Islamic ethical custodianship as a value-based conceptual framework. The framework distinguishes the mechanisms through which inherited craft knowledge moves from the custodial responsibilities that govern how actors preserve, transmit, document, represent, adapt and circulate that knowledge. This distinction extends knowledge transfer scholarship from a predominantly functional account of movement and preservation toward an integrated account of ethical governance.

The paper makes three connected contributions. Conceptually, it advances Islamic ethical custodianship as a moral architecture that integrates entrusted responsibility, disciplined transmission, community welfare, fair recognition, intellectual preservation, livelihood dignity

and intergenerational continuity. Analytically, it links ethical vulnerabilities arising across knowledge transfer mechanisms to distinct relational values and selected Maqāsid preservation principles. Practically, it provides a value-based basis for heritage policy, craft education and documentation practice by clarifying responsibilities toward knowledge holders, source communities and future custodians. The framework strengthens responsible Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer by keeping preservation connected to the people, meanings, livelihoods and intergenerational relationships that sustain its cultural authority.

Literature Review

Malaysian Handicraft Knowledge Transfer

Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer extends beyond the transmission of technical skills between practitioners. It carries embodied judgement, cultural meaning, community memory, material knowledge and livelihood value across artisans, apprentices, institutions, markets and documentation systems. Tacit learning, apprenticeship, innovation, documentation, institutional programmes and public circulation sustain distinct dimensions of craft continuity. Their operation also raises questions of authority, attribution, cultural interpretation, representation and intergenerational responsibility. Handicrafts consequently function as skilled cultural products and repositories of inherited knowledge that sustain identity and economic participation across craft communities (W. J. W. Ariffin et al., 2023).

Material scarcity, rising production costs, declining artisan skills and limited youth participation intensify the vulnerability of inherited craft knowledge. Malaysian studies associate these conditions with disappearing traditional craft products and weakening transmission environments (Mohd Tokiran et al., 2022; W. J. W. Ariffin et al., 2023). Product decline also signals deterioration in the wider knowledge ecology surrounding material selection, production judgement, cultural interpretation and situated learning. Craft continuity depends on relationships through which artisans practise, interpret and transmit inherited knowledge across generations.

Tacit knowledge forms the epistemic core of this transmission process. Artisans develop craft judgement through repeated practice, sensory awareness, bodily control and sustained engagement with tools and materials. Ojha and Yammiyavar (2017) identify substantial difficulties in capturing craftsmen's tacit knowledge in traditional designs. Seiler et al. (2021) similarly position tacit knowing as embodied and practice based. Written descriptions, manuals and digital records retain selected aspects of craft processes. Timing, touch, material response and corrective judgement remain dependent on prolonged experience. These limits of codification establish practitioner authority as a constitutive condition of meaningful craft knowledge transfer.

Apprenticeship provides the relational setting through which artisans transmit embodied knowledge and exercise this authority. The master-apprentice relationship integrates observation, imitation, correction, discipline, conduct and recognition. Kabaçam (2024) describes this relationship as a living structure of handicraft transmission through which learners acquire technique, values and respect for the master's authority. In Malaysia, apprenticeship also intersects with craft education, institutional training and youth economic empowerment (W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al., 2023). Its significance reaches beyond technical

instruction. Sustained interaction between knowledge holders and learners protects craft expertise, cultural memory and succession. Declining participation among younger generations weakens all three dimensions.

Innovation introduces a separate challenge concerning the legitimate boundaries of adaptation. Craft traditions require renewal to retain social and economic relevance. New materials, motifs, techniques and market use alter inherited meanings, production conventions and symbolic boundaries when adaptation loses sufficient cultural grounding. W. J. W. Ariffin et al. (2023) position innovation as an important strategy for preserving Malaysian intangible cultural heritage when adaptation maintains authenticity. Mohtar et al. (2023) similarly associate craft development with cultural identity and contemporary relevance. The central issue concerns who hold authority to modify inherited forms and which conditions preserve cultural legitimacy. Responsible adaptation maintains traceable links to the practitioners, meanings and traditions from which the craft derives its cultural authority.

Documentation and digital preservation extend craft knowledge beyond immediate practitioner communities by converting selected processes, narratives, terminology and material practices into records and digital representations. Isa et al. (2019) demonstrate this potential through a Terengganu brassware knowledge base that organises technical and cultural information for preservation. Yang (2024) connects information systems with the documentation, retrieval and transformation of tacit knowledge in traditional handicrafts. Digital records expand accessibility. Mediated representations capture selected dimensions of embodied and situated practice. Hou et al. (2022) identify this limitation in the digitisation of intangible cultural heritage, and García and Ashley (2023) connect digital documentation with responsibility, context and representation. The movement from living practice into databases, images and platforms redistributes interpretive authority and places greater responsibility on actors who select, describe, organise and circulate inherited knowledge.

Institutional and community programmes move handicraft knowledge into formal structures of training, development and public engagement. Higher education Knowledge Transfer Programmes connect academic expertise with industry and community needs (Abd Rahman et al., 2016). Community partnerships strengthen structured engagement among universities, external organisations and local actors (Radin Firdaus et al., 2020). In handicraft settings, these arrangements support documentation, skills development, product innovation and youth participation. Institutional mediation also changes the conditions of knowledge circulation. Agencies, universities and development actors increasingly participate in decisions concerning selection, interpretation, promotion and commercial use. Responsible mediation preserves knowledge-holder recognition and meaningful community participation across organisational boundaries.

Market development, tourism, certification and digital platforms expand the public circulation of inherited craft knowledge. Hassan et al. (2017) associate handicraft preservation with tourism development, cultural identity and small-scale economic opportunity. W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al. (2023) connect craft heritage with youth economic empowerment and livelihood development. Wider circulation creates opportunities for income, learning and cultural visibility. The same expansion weakens traceability when products, motifs and production narratives detach from their cultural sources. Research on indigenous arts and crafts identifies risks of misappropriation and cultural dilution when market circulation obscures community

ownership and source authority (Azmi et al., 2015). Digital applications such as VR360 heritage systems and cultural tourism chatbots further expand public access to tangible and intangible heritage (Kasinathan et al., 2024; Santano & Zainuddin, 2025). Their heritage value rests on sustained practitioner voice, cultural meaning and identifiable links to originating communities.

These strands establish two complementary dimensions of Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer. The first concerns the mechanisms through which actors learn, adapt, document, institutionalise and circulate inherited craft knowledge. The second concerns the conditions that preserve authority, meaning and continuity as knowledge moves across people, organisations, technologies and markets. Apprenticeship protects embodied learning. Innovation sustains contemporary relevance. Documentation extends memory and access. Institutional programmes broaden participation. Market and digital systems widen public circulation. These mechanisms remain necessary for craft continuity. The unresolved conceptual question concerns the value order governing their operation when inherited knowledge changes holders, forms, institutions and audiences. This distinction establishes the analytical basis for Islamic ethical custodianship as a value-based lens for responsible Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer.

Table 1. Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms and Ethical Vulnerabilities in Malaysian Handicraft Heritage

Knowledge transfer mechanism	Analytical significance and ethical vulnerability	Key supporting literature
Tacit knowledge transmission	Sustains embodied judgement and material knowledge; codification risks detaching expertise from practitioner authority and situated practice.	Ojha & Yammiyavar (2017); Seiler et al. (2021)
Apprenticeship and master-apprentice learning	Transfers skill, correction and learning discipline; fragile succession threatens knowledge-holder authority and intergenerational continuity.	Kabaçam (2024); W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al. (2023)
Innovation and adaptation	Sustains contemporary relevance and raises questions of legitimate adaptation, source recognition and cultural integrity.	W. J. W. Ariffin et al. (2023); Mohtar et al. (2023)
Documentation and digital preservation	Extends preservation and access, relocating interpretive authority into records, databases and digital platforms.	Isa et al. (2019); Yang (2024); Hou et al. (2022); García & Ashley (2023)
Institutional and community programmes	Broaden training and participation, risking distance between inherited knowledge, originating practitioners and community authority.	Abd Rahman et al. (2016); Radin Firdaus et al. (2020); Hassan et al. (2017)
Policy, market and public circulation	Expands visibility and economic participation, increasing cultural detachment, weak traceability and inequitable return.	Azmi et al. (2015); W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al. (2023); Kasinathan et al. (2024); Santano & Zainuddin (2025)

(Source: Developed by Authors)

Ethical Gap in Handicraft Knowledge Transfer

The ethical gap in handicraft knowledge transfer arises from the absence of a coherent value order governing how actors hold, transmit, document, adapt, commercialise and institutionalise inherited craft knowledge. Established mechanisms explain how knowledge moves across practitioners, institutions, technologies and markets. They leave unresolved questions concerning authority, recognition, cultural protection and the distribution of social and economic value. Heritage knowledge work therefore involves normative decisions about responsibility, transparency, legitimacy and accountability. Ethical boundary-spanning scholarship identifies similar concerns across relationships among knowledge producers, institutions and wider publics (Cvitanovic et al., 2026). Malaysian handicraft contexts sharpen this problem as craft knowledge carries practitioner judgement, communal memory, cultural identity and livelihood value across multiple settings.

Authority and recognition become vulnerable as craft knowledge moves beyond direct relationships with recognised knowledge holders. Artisans establish legitimacy through accumulated experience, sensory judgement, material familiarity, corrective practice and community recognition. Agencies, repositories, certification systems and commercial platforms subsequently influence which knowledge enters records, categories and public representations. Yang (2024) connects information systems with tacit knowledge documentation and transformation, whereas Abdul Ghani Azmi (2017) identifies legal and ethical concerns when communal cultural knowledge enters formal structures of ownership and control. Apprenticeship adds a relational dimension through discipline, correction and respect for expertise (Kabaçam, 2024). Certification and innovation extend this concern into attribution and cultural source (Mohtar et al., 2023; W. J. W. Ariffin et al., 2023). Responsible transfer therefore depends on identifiable practitioner authority, traceable attribution and fair recognition across institutional and commercial mediation.

Documentation introduces a distinct representational responsibility. Archivists, database designers and documentation actors select terminology, voice, sequence, interpretation and material detail whenever they convert living practice into records and digital objects. Isa et al. (2019) demonstrate the preservation value of an organised knowledge base for Terengganu brassware, and Yang (2024) connects information systems with the transformation of tacit handicraft knowledge. Digital records preserve selected information; embodied judgement and situated meaning remain anchored in practitioner interpretation. Ethical documentation therefore requires identifiable relationships among maker, material, terminology, place, cultural meaning and community authority. Codification loses intellectual depth when records separate information from the judgement through which artisans produce, verify and transmit craft knowledge.

Continuity, provenance and livelihood create interconnected responsibilities as inherited knowledge travels across institutional, market and digital networks. Product visibility does not secure cultural continuity when apprenticeship, symbolic literacy, practitioner succession and cultural memory weaken. Mohd Tokiran et al. (2022) identify material, market and transmission pressures associated with disappearing handicraft products, and W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al. (2023) connect craft heritage with youth participation and livelihood opportunity. Wider circulation also complicates provenance when materials, techniques, motifs and production histories lose identifiable links to their sources. Trung et al. (2025) associate ethical

sourcing with traceability, accountability and trust, whereas Selvi A et al. (2025) connect disrupted transfer with hidden, distorted or selectively transmitted knowledge. Islamic economic and sustainability scholarship further links handicraft enterprise with livelihood dignity, fair exchange, digital economic participation and responsible resource use (Hamid et al., 2026; Munawaroh et al., 2025; Arfah & Zulfa, 2026). Responsible heritage transfer therefore requires continuity of knowledge, traceable origins and economic conditions that recognise artisan contribution.

The conceptual gap concerns ethical governance across transfer mechanisms, not the absence of mechanisms themselves. Apprenticeship supports embodied transmission, documentation extends preservation, innovation sustains relevance, institutional programmes broaden participation, and market and digital systems widen circulation. Scholarship explains these functions extensively. Responsibility across authority, transmission, representation, attribution, community welfare, livelihood and continuity remains conceptually fragmented. Islamic ethical custodianship addresses this normative problem by integrating amanah, adab, maṣlaḥah, ‘adl and selected Maqāṣid preservation principles into a coherent ethical architecture (Shuhari et al., 2019; In’Ami et al., 2025; Alias et al., 2025; Jamal, 2022). Table 2 maps the diagnosed vulnerabilities to the values that provide their custodial grounding.

Islamic Ethical Custodianship: Ethical Values and Maqāṣid Foundations

Islamic ethical custodianship supplies the normative foundation for governing inherited craft knowledge across artisans, apprentices, communities, agencies, educators, designers, markets and documentation systems. Heritage custodianship scholarship associates safeguarding with stewardship, community participation, recognition and continuity (Menozzi, 2014; De Jesus Jopela, 2011; Pawłowska-Mainville, 2022). Islamic ethics deepens this orientation by treating knowledge, skill, resources and social relations as entrusted responsibilities governed by accountability, justice and community welfare (Mohammed, 2013; Jabbar et al., 2018). Applied to Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer, custodianship regulates how actors hold, teach, document, represent, adapt and use inherited knowledge whose legitimacy rests on practitioner authority, cultural memory and intergenerational transmission. The concept therefore extends established preservation mechanisms through an explicit ethical order governing responsibility across the transfer process.

Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah provides the evaluative basis for judging whether custodial practices protect the interests attached to inherited craft knowledge. Maqāṣid reasoning connects moral judgement with the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage and wealth, and maṣlaḥah directs ethical action toward public welfare and harm prevention (Alias et al., 2025; Mohd Saifuddeen et al., 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Surah An-Nahl (16:90) reinforces this orientation through its emphasis on justice, good conduct and protection from oppression. This framework foregrounds ḥifẓ al-‘aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl due to their direct analytical correspondence with three vulnerabilities established in the preceding literature: erosion of inherited knowledge, livelihood insecurity and weakened intergenerational continuity. Ḥifẓ al-dīn and ḥifẓ al-nafs remain foundational Maqāṣid objectives. The framework places them outside its primary analytical set; the diagnosed handicraft-transfer problems correspond most directly to intellectual inheritance, economic

dignity and generational transmission. This bounded selection ties each chosen principle to a specific custodial responsibility and preserves conceptual precision.

Amanah and adab govern complementary dimensions of custodianship. Amanah positions inherited craft knowledge as an entrusted responsibility and places accountability on actors who preserve, interpret or circulate practitioner narratives, techniques, motifs, terminology and community origins (Shuhari et al., 2019; Islam & Samsudin, 2018; Herijanto, 2022). Adab governs the conduct of transmission. Islamic educational thought associate's adab with intellectual refinement, respect for knowledge, teacher authority and proper relations among learners, communities and traditions (Noaparast, 2012; In'Ami et al., 2025). In craft learning, this principle disciplines observation, correction, patience, humility and acknowledgement of recognised knowledge holders (Ismail & Matthews, 2024; Abdul-Jabbar, 2026). Amanah therefore establishes responsibility for custody; adab establishes responsibility in transmission. Their relationship protects both the authority attached to inherited knowledge and the conduct through which artisans transmit it.

Maşlahah and 'adl govern how custodianship distributes social and economic value. Maşlahah directs preservation, promotion and use toward identifiable community welfare, including livelihood opportunity, training access, youth participation, cultural continuity and meaningful involvement in decisions concerning inherited knowledge (Alias et al., 2025; Khazani et al., 2017; Mukhtar et al., 2022; Hà, 2025). This interpretation defines community welfare through concrete benefits and participation instead of treating it as an abstract aspiration. 'Adl establishes fairness in attribution, recognition, cultural source acknowledgement and the distribution of value derived from artisan knowledge (Jamal, 2022; Surahman et al., 2025). It protects local expertise, inherited design ownership and contributions obscured through institutional or commercial circulation. Maşlahah directs custodial action toward collective welfare; 'adl evaluates whether actors distribute recognition, opportunity and return fairly.

The selected Maqāsid preservation principles translate these ethical commitments into heritage-specific responsibilities. Ḥifẓ al-'aql protects tacit judgement, terminology, motif knowledge and embodied skill as intellectual and cultural inheritance (Alias et al., 2025; Mohd Saifuddeen et al., 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2019). Ḥifẓ al-māl links custodianship with artisan economic dignity, fair exchange, viable enterprise and protection from unequal market relations (Hamid et al., 2026). In this heritage context, ḥifẓ al-nasl anchors custodial responsibility in succession, cultural memory, family heritage, community identity and transmission to future custodians (Vázquez-Atochero, 2025; Fatima & Nadeem, 2025). Contemporary digital markets and sustainability concerns further connect these responsibilities with transparency, social welfare and responsible resource use in craft enterprise (Mohammed, 2013; Jabbar et al., 2018; Munawaroh et al., 2025; Arfah & Zulfa, 2026). Islamic ethical custodianship consequently integrates entrusted responsibility, disciplined transmission, community welfare, justice, intellectual preservation, livelihood protection and intergenerational continuity as a coherent value foundation for Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer.

Table 2. Ethical Vulnerabilities and Custodial Grounding in Malaysian Handicraft Knowledge Transfer

Ethical vulnerability	Core risk to inherited craft knowledge	Custodial grounding	Key literature
Authority displacement	Practitioner authority and community voice weaken across institutional and digital mediation.	Amanah: entrusted responsibility for source authority and accountable use.	Yang (2024); Abdul Ghani Azmi (2017)
Transmission responsibility	Technique separates from discipline, correction and respect for recognised knowledge holders.	Adab: disciplined and respectful transmission.	Kabaçam (2024); Selvi A et al. (2025)
Attribution and recognition gap	Promotion, certification and adaptation obscure artisan contribution and cultural source.	‘Adl: fair recognition, attribution and treatment.	Mohtar et al. (2023); W. J. W. Ariffin et al. (2023)
Representational reduction	Documentation reduces embodied judgement and situated meaning to recordable information.	Ḥifẓ al-‘aql: protection of craft knowledge as intellectual inheritance.	Isa et al. (2019); Yang (2024)
Intergenerational continuity erosion	Product visibility persists as apprenticeship, succession and cultural memory weaken.	Ḥifẓ al-nasl: protection of intergenerational continuity.	Mohd Tokiran et al. (2022); W. N. W. J. Ariffin et al. (2023)
Traceability and community-welfare risk	Wider circulation obscures provenance, responsibility and fair return to source communities.	Maṣlaḥah: community welfare, participation and fair benefit.	Trung et al. (2025); Schofield (2015); Costa (2023)
Livelihood vulnerability	Market and digital circulation separate artisan knowledge from fair economic return and livelihood security.	Ḥifẓ al-māl: livelihood dignity and economic protection.	Hamid et al. (2026); Munawaroh et al. (2025); Arfah & Zulfa (2026)

(Source: Developed by Authors)

Conceptual Approach and Framework Development

This paper follows a conceptual synthesis and model-building logic to develop Islamic ethical custodianship as a value-based framework for Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer. Conceptual research creates theoretical value through the purposeful integration of concepts and literature streams into a coherent explanatory structure, with explicit justification for the role of each conceptual source (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Jaakkola, 2020). Hashim et al. (2026) further demonstrate the analytical value of literature-based conceptual synthesis in integrating normative principles, practice-oriented processes and institutional outcomes into a coherent explanatory architecture. The synthesis draws on four interconnected domains: handicraft knowledge transfer and heritage preservation, cultural custodianship and

stewardship, Islamic ethical thought, and Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah. The analysis prioritises sources for their direct conceptual relevance and their contribution to clarifying transfer mechanisms, ethical vulnerabilities, custodial values and preservation-oriented responsibilities. This theory-led selection sharpens the conceptual focus and establishes a transparent path from literature synthesis to framework development.

The analytical process proceeded through four stages. First, the synthesis identified what requires custody and how inherited craft knowledge moves. The heritage knowledge context established tacit skill, embodied practice, cultural meaning, community memory and practitioner authority as central forms of inherited knowledge. Literature on knowledge transfer then identified the principal mechanisms through which actors transmit, adapt, document, institutionalise and circulate this knowledge. This stage established the functional architecture of Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer and distinguished the knowledge being safeguarded from the mechanisms that carry it across people, institutions, technologies and markets.

Second, the analysis traced the ethical vulnerabilities generated as these mechanisms relocate knowledge across settings and actors. The synthesis identified recurring concerns involving authority displacement, transmission responsibility, attribution, representational reduction, intergenerational continuity, provenance, community welfare and livelihood security. This analytical step moved the argument from the functional question of how knowledge travels to the normative question of how actors should govern its custody, transmission, representation and use. Table 1 establishes the mechanism-vulnerability relationship, and Table 2 extends this reasoning by mapping the diagnosed vulnerabilities to their corresponding custodial grounding. Third, Islamic ethical scholarship supplied the normative vocabulary for interpreting these vulnerabilities. Amanah grounds entrusted responsibility and source authority; adab governs disciplined transmission; maṣlaḥah directs custodial judgement toward community welfare; and ‘adl establishes fairness in recognition, attribution and return. Maqāṣid-oriented reasoning extends this ethical foundation through ḥifẓ al-‘aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl, selected for their direct correspondence with intellectual inheritance, artisan livelihood and intergenerational continuity. The analysis therefore assigns each principle a defined conceptual function instead of treating Islamic values as interchangeable ethical labels.

The fourth stage integrated these relationships into the proposed moral architecture. Heritage knowledge context defines what requires custody; knowledge transfer mechanisms specify how inherited knowledge moves; Islamic ethical custodianship provides the governing lens; relational values and Maqāṣid preservation principles establish the criteria for responsible conduct; and responsible heritage outcomes articulate the cultural, community and economic/adaptive consequences of ethical transfer. Figure 1 consolidates this sequence into a single interpretive framework. The resulting architecture emerges through an explicit progression of conceptual identification, ethical diagnosis, value mapping and theoretical integration, creating a traceable chain of reasoning between the literature and the framework proposed in this paper (Jaakkola, 2020).

Proposed Moral Architecture of Islamic Ethical Custodianship in Malaysian Handicraft Knowledge Transfer

The proposed moral architecture integrates heritage knowledge context, knowledge transfer mechanisms, Islamic ethical custodianship and responsible heritage outcomes into a value-governed framework for Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer. Heritage knowledge context defines the knowledge requiring ethical custody, including tacit skill, embodied practice, cultural meaning, community memory, practitioner authority and vulnerable inherited knowledge. Knowledge transfer mechanisms specify how this knowledge moves through tacit transmission, apprenticeship, innovation and adaptation, documentation and digital preservation, institutional and community programmes, and market and public circulation. Islamic ethical custodianship occupies the central governing position by establishing the ethical criteria through which actors preserve, transmit, represent, adapt and use inherited craft knowledge.

The architecture addresses the conceptual fragmentation identified across handicraft knowledge transfer scholarship. Established mechanisms explain how craft knowledge travels, persists and adapts across social, institutional, technological and market settings (Yang et al., 2018; Othman et al., 2024; García-Almeida, 2019). Islamic ethical custodianship extends this functional account by placing source authority, attribution, cultural meaning, community welfare, livelihood dignity and intergenerational continuity within a unified ethical order. Surah Al-Mujadila (58:11), which elevates the standing of those endowed with knowledge, reinforces the treatment of inherited craft knowledge as a valued intellectual and cultural inheritance that carries responsibilities of respect, disciplined transmission and accountable use.

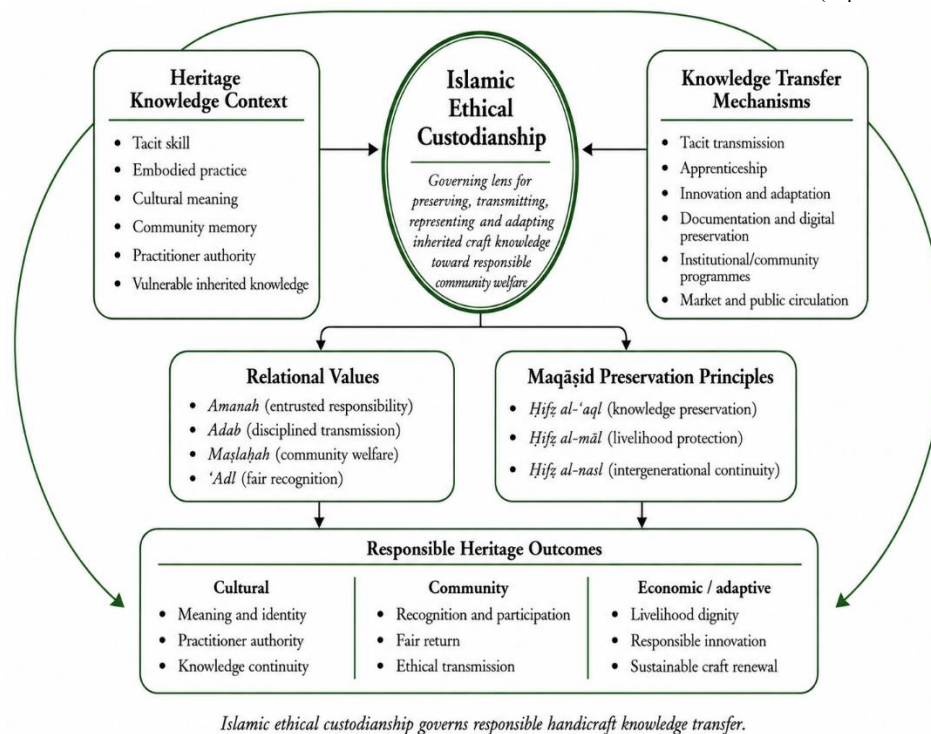


Figure 1. Moral Architecture of Islamic Ethical Custodianship in Malaysian Handicraft Knowledge Transfer

(Source: Developed by Authors)

Figure 1 positions Islamic ethical custodianship between the knowledge being inherited, the mechanisms that move it and the outcomes that responsible transfer seeks to sustain. *Amanah*, *adab*, *maṣlaḥah* and *ʿadl* constitute the relational value cluster governing entrusted responsibility, disciplined transmission, community welfare and fair recognition. *Ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*, *ḥifẓ al-māl* and *ḥifẓ al-nasl* constitute the Maqāṣid preservation cluster governing intellectual inheritance, livelihood protection and intergenerational continuity. The two clusters therefore perform connected ethical functions across the movement of craft knowledge from source holders to wider institutional, technological and market settings.

The framework organises responsible heritage outcomes across three domains. Cultural outcomes centre on cultural meaning, identity, practitioner authority and knowledge continuity. Community outcomes centre on recognition, participation, fair return and ethical transmission. Economic and adaptive outcomes centre on livelihood dignity, responsible innovation and sustainable craft renewal. These outcomes represent the ethical directions of custodianship instead of fixed causal effects. The framework therefore functions as an interpretive architecture for evaluating whether Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer maintains responsibility to knowledge holders, source communities and future custodians as inherited knowledge moves across changing contexts.

Implications

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The proposed framework advances handicraft knowledge transfer scholarship by distinguishing the mechanisms that move inherited knowledge from the ethical principles that govern its custody, transmission and use. Scholarship establishes apprenticeship, documentation, institutional programmes, innovation and digital circulation as central mechanisms of craft continuity (Ojha & Yammiyavar, 2017; Yang, 2024; Kabaçam, 2024). These mechanisms explain how knowledge travels, persists and adapts across social, institutional, technological and market settings. Questions of authority, attribution, representation, community welfare, livelihood protection and intergenerational responsibility extend beyond these functional processes. Islamic ethical custodianship addresses this conceptual space by positioning ethical governance as an integral dimension of knowledge transfer.

The framework also establishes a structured relationship between Islamic ethical values and heritage-specific custodial responsibilities. Amanah, adab, maşlahah and ‘adl govern responsibility, transmission, community welfare and fairness across relationships among knowledge holders, institutions and wider users. Islamic scholarship connects these principles with entrusted responsibility, proper conduct, welfare and justice in ethical action (Shuhari et al., 2019; In’Ami et al., 2025; Alias et al., 2025; Jamal, 2022). The selected Maqāṣid principles extend these relational commitments toward intellectual inheritance, livelihood dignity and intergenerational continuity through ḥifẓ al-‘aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl (Mohd Saifuddeen et al., 2013; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Hamid et al., 2026). This structure assigns each principle a distinct conceptual function and prevents Islamic values from collapsing into interchangeable moral labels. Islamic ethical custodianship therefore contributes a value architecture for interpreting the responsibilities created when inherited craft knowledge moves across actors, technologies, institutions and markets.

The architecture further extends responsible heritage outcomes beyond continued product visibility or craft survival. Heritage scholarship increasingly associates continuity with community participation, practitioner knowledge, cultural integrity and intergenerational transmission (Pawłowska-Mainville, 2022; Nam & Thanh, 2024; Hà, 2025). The proposed architecture brings cultural meaning, practitioner authority, community participation, fair return, livelihood dignity and future transmission into a unified ethical account of responsible knowledge transfer. These outcomes function as interpretive directions instead of deterministic effects. The framework therefore provides a basis for assessing whether transfer practices maintain ethical responsibility to knowledge holders, source communities and future custodians.

Practical and Institutional Implications for Heritage Policy, Craft Education and Documentation Practice

For heritage policy, Islamic ethical custodianship positions artisans and craft communities as knowledge authorities whose participation should extend across preservation programmes, certification systems, tourism initiatives and creative-industry strategies. Community custodianship scholarship links meaningful participation with stewardship, sustainability and

intergenerational transmission (Pawłowska-Mainville, 2022; Nam & Thanh, 2024; Hà, 2025). Amanah directs agencies toward accountable treatment of inherited knowledge, ‘adl grounds recognition of knowledge holders and cultural lineage, and maṣlahah connects preservation decisions with community welfare and meaningful participation (Shuhari et al., 2019; Islam & Samsudin, 2018; Alias et al., 2025). These principles translate into practical policy considerations involving community consent, knowledge-holder attribution, provenance, fair return, authenticity review, youth succession and livelihood protection. Ḥifẓ al-māl strengthens the economic dimension by linking heritage preservation with artisan livelihood dignity and fair participation in the craft economy (Hamid et al., 2026).

For craft education, the framework positions apprenticeship and training as processes of ethical formation alongside technical learning. Craft expertise develops through embodied practice, observation, repetition, sensory judgement, correction and mentorship, leaving significant dimensions of knowledge resistant to full codification (Høgseth, 2013; Seiler et al., 2021; Roy & Bairagi, 2025). Adab gives this learning relationship an explicit ethical foundation through respect for recognised knowledge holders, disciplined learning, humility, acknowledgement and responsibility toward cultural lineage (Noaparast, 2012; Ismail & Matthews, 2024; In’Ami et al., 2025). Craft training should therefore extend beyond production competence by incorporating practitioner attribution, community origins, motif meanings, transmission protocols and responsibilities attached to inherited practice. This orientation protects apprenticeship from reduction to technical imitation and reinforces the relationship between skill acquisition, cultural understanding and responsible succession.

For documentation and digital preservation, the framework directs attention to context, voice, provenance and accountability alongside technical capture. Documentation systems commonly privilege recordable information such as images, texts, videos, object descriptions and production steps, whereas embodied judgement, social context and cultural meaning remain more difficult to represent (Hou et al., 2022; García & Ashley, 2023; Crouzet et al., 2025). Amanah grounds responsible custody of recordings, photographs, terminology, motif descriptions and practitioner narratives. ‘Adl protects attribution and fair representation, maṣlahah directs digital preservation toward community welfare and learning, and ḥifẓ al-‘aql reinforces the preservation of craft knowledge with sufficient intellectual and cultural context. Ḥifẓ al-nasl links documentation with future transmission, and ḥifẓ al-māl connects digital use with artisan livelihood and fair economic return (Lim et al., 2015; Vázquez-Atochero, 2025; Hamid et al., 2026)

This ethical orientation also carries practical implications for metadata and documentation design. Documentation systems should incorporate fields for knowledge holder, community origin, local terminology, motif meaning, transmission context, consent status, attribution requirements, usage sensitivity, authenticity notes and intended community purpose. Heritage ethics scholarship emphasises stewardship, participation, cultural integrity, social justice and community-centred digital practice as central responsibilities in cultural heritage work (Ireland & Schofield, 2015; Rouhani, 2023; Shaikhon, 2025). Islamic ethical custodianship integrates these concerns through a coherent value structure that links responsible documentation with source authority, cultural meaning, fair recognition, community welfare, livelihood dignity and intergenerational continuity.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper develops Islamic ethical custodianship as a conceptual architecture for Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer through the integration of handicraft knowledge transfer scholarship, heritage custodianship, Islamic ethics and Maqāsid-oriented reasoning. Its conceptual design limits claims concerning how artisans, agencies, educators, documentation practitioners and craft communities interpret and enact these principles in specific settings. Craft type, community authority, institutional arrangements, market conditions and local transmission traditions shape the practical expression of custodial responsibility across settings. The framework also foregrounds ḥifẓ al-‘aql, ḥifẓ al-māl and ḥifẓ al-nasl due to their direct analytical relevance to knowledge preservation, livelihood dignity and intergenerational continuity. This bounded selection strengthens conceptual focus; other heritage settings warrant separate assessment of additional Maqāsid objectives.

Future research should evaluate the framework through qualitative case studies across Malaysian craft traditions such as batik, songket, wood carving, brassware, pottery, bamboo craft and indigenous material culture. Interviews, observations and document analysis involving artisans, apprentices, agency officers, educators and documentation practitioners should clarify how amanah, adab, maṣlahah, ‘adl and the selected preservation principles shape decisions concerning authority, transmission, adaptation, attribution and economic participation. Comparative research across craft types, regions and institutional settings should further identify which custodial responsibilities remain consistent and which respond to local social, cultural and organisational conditions.

Documentation-focused research should investigate how databases, digital archives, certification records, training modules and public heritage platforms represent knowledge holders, cultural sources, provenance, consent, attribution and fair return. Future studies should also translate the framework into assessment criteria, ethical guidance or decision-support tools for heritage agencies, craft-training institutions and digital documentation projects. Field-based application should test the framework’s interpretive usefulness, contextual boundaries and practical applicability across diverse handicraft settings. Such research would extend Islamic ethical custodianship from conceptual architecture into a grounded resource for responsible heritage governance without reducing its value-based foundation to a technical compliance instrument.

Conclusion

Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer depends on apprenticeship, documentation, digital preservation, institutional programmes, innovation and wider public circulation. These mechanisms sustain the movement and continuity of inherited craft knowledge. A separate ethical problem concerns the governance of authority, attribution, cultural meaning, community welfare, livelihood dignity and intergenerational responsibility as knowledge moves across people, institutions, technologies and markets. This paper addresses that problem through Islamic ethical custodianship as a value-based moral architecture for responsible Malaysian handicraft knowledge transfer. Islamic ethical custodianship distinguishes the movement of inherited knowledge from the responsibilities that govern that movement. Amanah establishes entrusted responsibility for inherited knowledge and source authority; adab governs disciplined and respectful transmission; maṣlahah directs custodial decisions

toward community welfare; and ‘adl secures fairness in recognition, attribution and return. The selected Maqāsid principles extend these relational values through three preservation responsibilities: ḥifz al-‘aql protects intellectual and cultural inheritance, ḥifz al-māl safeguards livelihood dignity and economic interests, and ḥifz al-nasl anchors intergenerational continuity. Their integration establishes a coherent ethical basis for evaluating how inherited craft knowledge is held, transmitted, documented, represented, adapted and circulated. The paper’s central conceptual contribution is the shift from knowledge transfer mechanisms to custodial responsibility. The framework retains apprenticeship, documentation, institutional mediation and digital circulation as necessary mechanisms of continuity, then places their operation within an ethical order that protects practitioner authority, cultural meaning, fair recognition, community welfare, livelihood dignity and future inheritance. Islamic ethical custodianship therefore positions Malaysian handicraft knowledge as an entrusted intellectual and cultural inheritance with livelihood value. Its continuity depends on responsible relationships among knowledge holders, communities, institutions and future custodians.

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