

## 5.4 Discussion: Comparing Markers of Authenticity from Mosuo, Bhutanese Kira and Harris Tweed Hand-woven Textiles

Table 59 below highlights the findings of the three case studies.

	<b>Mosuo</b>	<b>Bhutanese Kira</b>	<b>Harris Tweed</b>
<b>Object: Objective/ Materials</b>	Inconclusive	Seam lines Horizontal placement of designs Dimension of kira	Virgin raw material Quality Orb stamp
<b>Object: Objective/ Non- Material</b>	Manual looms Transmission of skills	Quality of yarn, density of weave and employment of the type of manual looms in relation to the social/cultural context of the wearer and occasion on which the kira will be worn.	Labour – Weaving alone and in weavers’ residence Tools and Technology – manual looms, loom repairs and maintenance Construction of cloth (weave structure)
<b>Object: Subjective / Abstract, Context</b>	Spirit	Appropriateness to social/cultural context	Mill Weavers: Inconclusive Independent Weavers: Creation of the textiles
<b>Setting</b>	Inconclusive	Inconclusive	Site and geography
<b>Experiential</b>	Pride	Pride	Pride

Table 59: Comparing Markers of Authenticity from Mosuo, Bhutanese Kira and Harris Tweed Textiles

Analysing the results of studies on artisans making Mosuo, Bhutanese kiras and Harris Tweed textiles, the research has determined that there exist a wide variety of markers of authenticity as articulated by the respective groups of weavers. Several broad themes have emerged and these are discussed in the following sections.

### 5.4.1 Institutionalisation

With reference to Chapter One (Section 1.5), this study has selected case studies of hand-woven textiles with the weaving groups at three stages of institutionalisation, the Mosuo at one end of a spectrum (being least institutionalised) and Harris Tweed at the other - the most institutionalised.

Weavers producing textiles in an institutionalised context such as Harris Tweed employ Objective/Material markers of authenticity while the non-institutionalized context for the cloth woven by Mosuo weavers results in an absence of this type of marker. Therefore, there is a clear division between weavers (such as the Harris Tweed artisans) who relate mentally to the concept of ‘Cool Authenticity’ (Selwyn, 1996) and those who practice ‘Hot Authenticity’ through their tacit understanding of authenticity (such as the Mosuo weavers) (Notar, 2006).

The discussion of the institutionalisation of hand-woven textiles cannot ignore the legal issue. Harris Tweed, as described in the earlier discussion, is the only hand-woven textile in the world that is protected by an Act of Parliament. It encapsulates the Western concept of authenticity whereby authenticity is closely linked to legality and disputes are settled in courts as described previously (Section 2.1.1). As the characteristics of the cloth are legally defined, Harris Tweed weavers often quote these objective legal characteristics of the cloth as the relevant markers of authenticity.

On the other hand, textiles with no legal status such as those of the Mosuo peoples do not necessarily rely on such physical characteristics to determine their authenticity. Rather, the emphasis of authenticity is on their intangible characteristics as discussed earlier (Section 5.1.3).

For the third group, Bhutanese kira which have no legal status but are highly entrenched within the psyche of Bhutanese society, the identification of physical markers of authenticity are closely linked to the social and cultural context of the person wearing the kira and occasion at which the kira is worn. Hence, although not explicitly institutionally defined, the physical markers of authenticity for Bhutanese kiras are clearly evident in relation to the appropriate Bhutanese social and cultural norms and are embedded in the consciousness of both weavers and native wearers.

One can also examine authenticity of institutionalized hand-woven textiles through the concept of notationality (Section 2.1.4). While non-institutionalized hand-woven textiles such as the Mosuo have no notationality system, both the Bhutanese kiras and Harris Tweed textiles have a clearly defined notationality system. Yet, the way in

which weavers handle the cloth (as in the case of Harris Tweed) and the creativity expressed by weavers (such as those Bhutanese kira weavers) result in each bale of cloth or kira being unique and special. According to Benjamin (1936), these individual pieces of cloth embed ‘aura’, thus rendering this cloth authentic.

#### 5.4.2 Social Perspective

Examining markers of authenticity of these textiles from the social perspective, the debate on what constitutes a ‘Mosuo woman’ has been inconclusive. However, drawing from the findings that transmission of skills is important as it enables traceability of a Mosuo women’s lineage or genealogy, this study proposes that Mosuo textiles are socially ‘closed’ as only Mosuo women are eligible to produce authentic Mosuo textiles. The only access for non-Mosuo women to weave authentic Mosuo textiles is for them to embrace the Mosuo culture. Weavers who are not ethnically Mosuo and do not practice Mosuo culture cannot produce authentic Mosuo textiles.

For Harris Tweed weavers, there are no such restrictions. Rather, people from any background and ethnicity can produce authentic Harris Tweed, provided they obtain the necessary skills certification and are living in their homes (but not necessarily owning the residence) in the Outer Hebrides. Hence, it is more socially ‘open’. Pushing the logic further, if the demand for Harris Tweed expands even further, it is not impossible to imagine migrant weavers settling down temporarily in the Outer Hebrides to weave authentic textiles.

Bhutanese weavers do not restrict non-Bhutanese in weaving authentic Bhutanese kiras, as long as the kira corresponds to the appropriate social and cultural norms. Therefore, the social ‘openness’ is conditional, as it depends on the weaver being familiar with Bhutanese cultural norms and mores.

In both Bhutan and the Mosuo lands, weavers are open to weaving alone or in the company of others. In some cases, weaving can be regarded as a social activity (as in the case of Mosuo weavers) reinforcing the cultural identity of the group (Section 2.1.7). However, for Harris Tweed, weaving today must be done in relative isolation (a maximum of two looms per shed are allowed) perpetuating the Occidental concept of authenticity located in the experience of the lone individual (Kreiglesten, 2008).

### 5.4.3 Psychological Dimension

The studies have examined how markers of authenticity can enhance or limit the empowerment of weavers. It is found that weavers who create, design and weave their own textiles such as the expert Mosuo, Bhutanese weavers and individual Harris Tweed weavers feel empowered as they are able ‘create’ their own cloth. When they are able to transform conceptualized designs into physical entities they are at their most fulfilled. This is a definite marker of authenticity where the relationship between the object and the maker is established (Wherry, 2006; Kettler, n.d., 2007)).

However, the legal issues involved in certifying a cloth as authentic (in the case of Harris Tweed) has in some cases limited weavers’ initiative to innovate and experiment by explicitly bounding the markers of authenticity (Section 5.3.3). This goes against the vision of Picton (1995), Jones, et al., (2005) and Cohen (2007) who maintain that authenticity is intrinsically linked to creativity, innovation and development.

### 5.4.4 Site and Geography

While Mosuo weavers feel that the ethnicity of the weaver is instrumental in producing authentic textiles, the emphasis of Harris Tweed weavers is on the geographical site of production as the key determinant of its authenticity. Therefore, even if Irish Tweeds are similar to Harris Tweeds (also considering that the native weavers from both communities are from a similar cultural background), both tweeds will be labeled differently.

In contrast, Bhutanese weavers do not specifically emphasize the geographical site of origin when considering the authenticity of kiras, falling back to the Bhutanese social and cultural context as of greater significance.

### 5.4.5 Commercial and Non-Commercial Considerations

Reviewing all three case studies, the framework of understanding of markers of authenticity can also be examined from two other perspectives – the commercial and non-commercial. For Mosuo and Bhutanese weavers, authenticity is not primarily based on its commercial aspects. For example, for the Mosuo artisans it is the spirit of

weaving the cloth, in relation to the community's culture, heritage and identity that is given the most prominence in weaving authentic Mosuo textiles (Section 5.1.4). For Bhutanese kira textiles, it is the appropriateness of the kiras corresponding to the social/cultural context of who and where the kira is worn that determines its markers of authenticity. Thus, the foundation of identifying markers of authenticity for both these types of textile is culturally based while its commercial considerations are secondary; for Mosuo peoples, it is a means of income generation while for the Bhutanese weavers, it is the legislative requirement to wear traditional dress that has given rise to a stable commercial demand.

However, for Harris Tweed, authenticity of the cloth is largely commercially driven. The symbolism of authenticity is expressed in the Orb Stamp, which is a certified trademark, a commercial brand differentiating Harris Tweed from any other types of tweeds.

#### 5.4.6 Pride

In spite of all these different types of markers of authenticity identified by weavers, one universal characteristic that is shared by all weavers is the element of pride in weaving the textiles. This study proposes that this intangible quality be identified as a marker of authenticity for community-based hand-woven textiles, as identified by weavers themselves. However, this concept of pride is manifested in a variety of forms.

- Mosuo

The Mosuo weavers are proud of their ability to self-actualise, transforming a mental concept into a physical product. Pride is also manifested in their ability to generate income to provide for the family. This is especially important considering that, within a matriarchal society, Mosuo women are both symbolic and economic heads of the family. Finally, as a distinctive cultural group, Mosuo weavers are proud that weaving is an intrinsic part of their heritage and culture, distinguishing them from other ethnic groups. Mosuo weavers comment that weaving as a tradition has survived the test of time, a skill that has been handed down from one generation to another and is as relevant today as it was in the past.

- Bhutan

Bhutanese weavers are most proud of their skills in producing extremely intricate and complex kira designs. Besides their skills in weaving, they are also proud of their creativity and inventiveness, elevating an ordinary woven piece of textile into the realms of art, enabling them to express themselves artistically while feeling a sense of achievement when a kira is completed.

Pride is also manifest in the way in which the kira is presented to the customer – clean and neatly folded. They feel a sense of self-satisfaction when others, especially their customers, admire their artistry and skills. Significantly, their reputation in the community as skilled weavers acts as a barometer of their work. From a more practical perspective, their ability to generate income from weaving also contributes to their sense of self-worth as a weaver.

Collectively, weavers feel that their skills and the quality of their product is distinct from all other hand-woven textiles produced in the surrounding areas. It is a means of differentiating themselves from other weavers in the region. Within the country, weavers are proud to be an essential element in establishing the national identity of Bhutan. Furthermore, they also identify themselves as contributing to Bhutan's national living heritage even as their work is a necessary component of everyday life – producing kira textiles which are an essential part of the national dress, to be worn by all Bhutanese for all formal functions.

- Harris Tweed

Pride for Harris Tweed weavers is made manifest in different forms. For individual weavers, their sense of pride stems from maintaining their looms. They also feel a sense of fulfillment when their textiles pass HTA's quality inspections and are stamped with the Orb logo, as a recognition of high quality production. The sense of achievement is realized when they cut the finished textile from the beam, signifying that the work is completed.

Practically, weaving is a means of livelihood for most weavers. As stipulated by HTA, each weaver is autonomous, working for him/herself, even if they are weaving for the mills. This empowers the weaver considerably because weavers are able to choose the conditions of work – what to weave and when to weave. As commented by one of the artisans, ‘each weaver is his or her own boss’ – another sense in which pride in their work is demonstrated.

For independent weavers, because they design and create their own textiles, it is a method of both self-expression and self-actualization. It gives them a sense of pride to be able to compose a complex design by working out its mathematical structure and program the loom accordingly.

This feeling of pride extends beyond the self to the community at large. For native weavers, weaving is part of the island’s tradition, heritage and culture. Consequently, the cloth they weave physically exhibits the values of the islanders – hardwearing, resilient and austere.

Importantly, because of the international reputation of the cloth, weavers are proud to be part of this successful international phenomenon. As the only hand-woven cloth in the world that is protected by an Act of Parliament, it is unique and special. Even non-native weavers stated that they are privileged to be weaving Harris Tweed, with the weavers feeling that this was almost like being a member of a prestigious club and a member of a successful community.

- Pride in their work as a common marker of authenticity

The existential experiences of weavers have been elicited through self-reflection and analysis, guided by probing questions. Using these methods, the study has discovered an emotion common to all three groups of weavers – pride – which is embedded within the unconscious realm of the all handloom weavers, as a universal experience. Based on this finding, this study proposes that weavers’ pride could be identified as a marker of authenticity for community-based hand-woven textiles.