

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Directions for Future Work

In this final chapter, the objectives of this research are recalled to determine whether this study has been successful in its endeavours.

6.1 Weavers Identifying Markers of Authenticity of Their Own Textiles

Yes, the conclusion of this study is that it is possible for weavers to identify markers of authenticity for their own textiles. For institutionalised hand-woven textiles such as Harris Tweed, weavers are more ready to use the paradigms set out in Figure 33 – Object: Objective / Materials and Non-Material - as indicators to identify and articulate markers of authenticity. Similarly with Bhutanese weavers, the different categories of kira have a clear notationality system and expert weavers are able to state the characteristics of each category of kira clearly. In addition, they employ Object: Subjective / Abstract concepts by making use of the intentions of the wearer and the context of where the kira will be worn to identify markers of authenticity. However, for non-institutionalised textiles such as the Mosuo cloth, weavers are less able to identify markers of authenticity as there is no notationality system in their textiles.

6.2 Methods Weavers Use To Identify Markers of Authenticity

The study found that different groups of weavers use different means to identify markers of authenticity in their work. For legally institutionalised textiles such as Harris Tweed, weavers have internalised the HTA definition of Harris Tweed and cite these as markers of authenticity.

For culturally institutionalised textiles such as Bhutanese kiras, weavers identify markers of authenticity by responding to the cultural framework and understanding the contexts and the occasions on which the kira will be worn. With these contexts in mind, the weaver is then able to identify markers of authenticity employing the appropriate physical properties – the quality of yarns, density of weave and the type of loom used to weave the kira.

For Mosuo weavers the markers of authenticity of their textiles reflect their cultural identity and traditions; as such, these markers of authenticity are intangible in nature.

6.3 Methods To Elicit Weavers' Markers Of Authenticity

This study has developed and tested a method to elicit markers of authenticity from weavers.

Based on the paradigms of authenticity and the synthesis of the various theories of authenticity, hand-woven textiles are deconstructed into Object: Objective / Material, Object: Objective / Non-Material, Object: Subjective / Abstract and Experience of the weaver as described in Section 2.5.1. These encompass the various components that make up the textile and its production: the form (shape, size, weight, material, colour, design, etc.), the way it is made, the tools and equipment used, the function of the product, the people making it, the skills involved, where it is produced, the intention of the weaver and the meaning of both product and the artisan's work.

The methodology asserts that when a component is present, constant and unchanging in all the hand-woven textiles produced by the community (including past and present examples), it is an essential and intrinsic aspect of the product. The approach that this study adopted was to isolate and examine each component one at a time while holding all others constant. The proposition was that for any component of the cloth to be identified as a marker of authenticity, it must be clear that its absence, change or compromise would render it culturally unacceptable or 'inauthentic'.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges that the notion of what makes a cloth authentic in the weavers' mind may not be explicit. Rather, it is often tacit, hidden within the unconscious. Hence, this research aimed to search out not only the overt elements, but has tried to 'draw out' the essence of the cloth's authenticity through indirect enquiry.

Indirect enquiry methods employed include unobtrusive observations, examinations of exemplars, talking informally with other members of the community and reflections through 'thick descriptions' in reflective journals. Past experiences and familiarity with non-Occidental cultures have provided the researcher with a range of triggers by which weavers can be helped to identify markers of authenticity. For example in Bhutan, knowing that each family has a yanggam where old treasured kiras were kept enabled the researcher to request to view and examine them.

In order to ground the findings in a credible manner and to validate them, the principle of triangulation has been used, obtaining answers from weavers of different skills levels, age, gender, etc. Furthermore, once the preliminary markers of authenticity were identified, these were further confirmed through a quantitative methodology involving a larger group of weavers from the same community. The criteria to determine authenticity in a marker was dependent on the responses and context within the individual case study, the context of the community's life and the diverse theories of authenticity.

6.4 Identification Of Markers Of Authenticity For Community-based And Culturally Bound Hand-woven Textiles

As described earlier (Section 6.2), depending on the context of each group's production, weavers from the Mosuo, Bhutan and Harris communities (and the sub-groups within each community) used different methods to identify markers of authenticity.

For the Mosuo weavers, it was the spirit of weaving and the ability to trace the transmission of weaving skills and knowledge through the weavers' matriarchal family line that rendered their work authentic for them.

The findings showed that the physical markers of authenticity of Bhutanese kiras - the appropriate quality of yarn, density of weave and the looms on which the textiles are woven - were related to the social and cultural contexts of where they are worn. In addition, the pride taken to weave the kira was a component of its authenticity; this was manifested through the quality of the workmanship, the design, the way in which the motifs and patterns were executed, the neatness and cleanliness of the textiles and finally, the way in which the kira was folded and presented to the person commissioning or purchasing the textiles.

Harris Tweed weavers stated that the markers of the authentic textile included: the site and geography of production, weaving in isolation, use of 100% virgin wool, working only on hand looms and construction techniques specified by HTA, and the quality of the cloth that is used to make clothes which last the lifetime of the wearer.

When analysing the comments of weavers through the existential lens, the study found that all three groups identified pride in their work as a universal marker of authenticity. However, the manifestation of such pride varies from group to group.

For the Mosuo weaver, pride in their work is manifested at three levels – the macro, the meso and the micro. At a macro level, weaving is a political and cultural statement of community survival and tenacity. At the meso level, it endorses the group's identity and distinctiveness from other neighbouring groups. At a personal level, pride is seen through an individual weaver's position as both an economic and symbolic head of household within a matriarchal society.

The pride of Bhutanese weavers in their work is made evident through the quality of their craftsmanship, the sophistication of their designs, the techniques by which motifs and patterns are woven, the neatness in the work (on the reverse side of the textiles), cleanliness of the final product and even in the way in which the textiles are folded and presented to the person who has commissioned or purchased the textiles. Bhutanese weavers also felt their work had contributed to their country's cultural identity as 'living traditions' where hand-woven textiles are worn on a daily basis. Hence, they also feel that they are an intrinsic contributor to Bhutan's GNH (where cultural preservation is one of the four pillars of GNH).

Harris Tweed weavers prided themselves on repairing and maintaining their mechanical looms and weaving to the best of their ability. Their skill in weaving, which is acknowledged by the stamping of the Orb on their work, confirms their role as a Harris Tweed weaver.

6.5 Implications Of Markers of Authenticity

As the analysis of the Harris Tweed case study showed, weavers have adopted the institutional definitions of Harris Tweed. This was attributed to the institutionalisation of markers of authenticity; as a consequence, weavers were less inclined to innovate new types of textile. They were concerned that new developments would not be approved by HTA. Therefore, innovations such as the creation of 'fabric flavour' (Section 2.4.3) are industry-led rather than driven by individuals pushing the boundaries of creativity.

Hence, when analysing the three case studies, the inevitable question arises whether non-institutionalised community-bounded textiles such as those produced by the Mosuo should model the development of their industry by following in the footsteps of Harris Tweed.

The trajectories for commercial development of both types of textiles are similar - as well as the risks and threats which could result. Therefore, it is necessary for the Mosuo community to consider institutionalising their products as a means of mitigating these dangers. (In reality, many of the threats are already present, such as the use by Han Chinese of powered machines to imitate Mosuo scarves and shawls and passing them off as Mosuo hand-woven textiles at a much lower price). However, because of the differences in social and cultural contexts from those relevant to Harris Tweed, it is necessary for the Mosuo community to develop their own forms of institutionalisation.

For example, the Harris Tweed model of authenticity is most clearly viewed from the Object perspective where the physical characteristic of the cloth and the geographical site of production serve as markers of authenticity. In contrast, for the Mosuo, the marker of authenticity is not physically embedded in the cloth or where it was produced but is focused on the person weaving it and the spirit of weaving the cloth.

For Bhutanese kiras, the markers of authenticity are framed against the complex cultural framework of Bhutanese society. Authentic kiras woven for local consumption can only be identified by one who is familiar with Bhutanese culture and its code of conduct. Therefore, although it is possible to identify markers of authenticity through the appropriateness of each kira for a variety of wearers (for example, royals, urban and rural people, the young or old, etc.) and for different occasions (weddings, funerals, going to the office, working the fields, etc.), these markers will be complex and convoluted. The challenge for APIC and DoT is to develop a simplified range of markers of authenticity for foreign buyers (such as tourists) through identifying events such as attendance at a tsechu, and recommending that a particular kira be worn that is appropriate, rendering the kira 'authentic' while at the same time providing a positive existential experience to the wearer.

6.6 Significance Of The Maker's Articulation Of Authenticity

One of the most significant impacts of the artisan's articulation of authenticity is that they are now empowered in their work, no longer a victim of commercialisation as described in Graburn's study (1976). Rather, this thesis supports Wherry's contention (2006) that artisans in this research have the power to assert their own concept and definition of authenticity, giving meaning to their own work beyond its purely commercial value.

In terms of policy formulation and programme interventions to assist artisan development, Maruyaman, et al., (2008) maintained that if maker's views were not taken into consideration, initiatives by outside bodies would alienate individuals and might even be counter-productive to empowering these communities. The Harris Tweed case study illustrates this argument clearly. The institutionalization of the textile was entirely commercially driven. The markers of authenticity were identified, based on its market presence, in order to carve out a niche to differentiate itself from other types of tweeds. The inputs based on the experiences of the weaver and the cultural contexts are symbolic, limited to the conjuring up of a romanticised nostalgia of the cloth. Mill weavers (who are the majority of the producers of Harris Tweed) are divorced from creation of the cloth; according to both Wherry's (2006) and Kettler's (n.d., 2007) writings this renders their perspective as inauthentic.

The genesis of this work stems from reflections on the researcher's practice: to find the cultural boundaries within which artisans can innovate their products with credibility while retaining their cultural essence. The findings of this research provide crucial insight for both the researcher's future practice – and for those in a similar position. It demonstrates the importance of consultative sessions with artisans to elicit and understand their concept of authenticity with respect to their work. Identifying these markers is an essential first step so that interventions and innovations can be executed confidently within their cultural boundaries, thus retaining their products' cultural USPs.

At a macro level, the findings from this study align themselves with UNESCO's publication 'Designer Meet Artisans' (2005). Craft, according to the publication, is rooted in the cultural context of where it comes from. It emerges from cultural and social needs of the community. As long as there is such a need, craft thrives. Hence, the authenticity of the object must be directly related to the voices of the artisans and their

community. From this perspective, it is the experience of the maker that marks out the object as authentic – or not. Hence, it is not unexpected that a common element amongst all the weavers from the three case studies is pride in the execution of their work, which is existential in nature.

When crafts are taken out of their context, they become objectified and production becomes mechanical. In such situation, the markers of authenticity need to be objectified in order to replace their existential characteristics.

Based on this insight, one can understand the need for the markers of authenticity for Harris Tweed to be legitimised by law, while Bhutanese kiras and Mosuo scarves and shawls do not need such a stamp, being still rooted within the cultural framework of their communities.

6.7 Contributions To The Current Discussions On Authenticity And Other Cultural Realms

Using the principles of this approach and the methodology developed in this study, markers of authenticity in other forms of cultural expression – dance, music, architecture, visual arts, performance arts, food, games, etc. could be identified. Significantly, this study of markers of authenticity, although starting from a theoretical premise, has a practical application and implications, especially when transforming traditional cultural forms into contemporary products - very pertinent in a world of constant change.

6.8 Directions for Future Work

Using this study as a baseline, future studies can be used to support the two concepts expounded in Chapter Two. Viewing authenticity from the Constructive perspective (Cohen, 1988[a]; Oslén, 2002), it is an ‘open’ and evolving concept. Hence, the markers of authenticity identified in this study are only relevant to the period of investigation. Changes in the context of the community may consequently change the markers of authenticity of the cloth. Based on this premise, longitudinal studies could be carried out in the future to discover whether these markers of authenticity have changed and evolved. Conversely, future studies could also identify the extent of ‘fundamental authenticity’ (Lui, n.d.) where the markers of authenticity as determined in this study may have remained the same in spite of change in circumstances.

For the Mosuo case study, this research focused only on the weavers in Walabie village and did not venture to other Mosuo communities. In order to further validate the authenticity markers for products and textiles made by Mosuo weavers, the author recommends similar research with Mosuo weavers from other communities, especially from those in Sichuan province (on the north and north-east side of Lugu Lake) to understand whether the Mosuo weavers who are politically identified as Mongolian confirm the same markers of authenticity in their textiles.

At a practical level, the findings from this study will assist the UNDP project with the Mosuo weavers (Section 2.2.4) because one of the aims of the project was to establish more effective channels to market for Mosuo hand-woven textiles. As requested by the Project Management team (Section 4.19), the recommendations below will be shared with project stakeholders.

Branding, advertising and promotional activities are important elements of marketing and making product authenticity explicit to customers. Specific to the contributions made by this study, the marker of authenticity of Mosuo hand-woven textiles – that it is only woven by Mosuo women – should form the foundation for institutionalisation and in branding, advertising and promotional initiatives.

The core of these marketing plans and promotional activities should focus on the meaning and significance of weaving within the Mosuo matriarchal culture. Reference to Mosuo history and traditions such as identifying genealogies of weavers within families, the skill passed from mother to daughter amidst major political, social, economic and cultural changes highlighting the resilience of Mosuo people, will furnish each individual textile and product on sale with an aura of unique value and significance.

Practically, the Mosuo weaving association (already established under the UNDP project) could invite registration of individual Mosuo weavers, especially those intending to participate in marketing of their products, thereby creating an official list of Mosuo weavers. Furthermore, the establishment of a unique mark for each weaver within a wider Mosuo brand, such as a logo printed on a fabric label and attached to all the products she makes, would ensure traceability of each hand-woven textile to its

creator – and to the spirit of her predecessors. Publicity for the process, together with full documentation, would serve as the physically visible marker of authenticity, mitigating against the sale of counterfeit material.

Reinforcing the link to an individual weaver, their stories and photos produced as point of sale material would add to the credibility to both product and creator. Through demonstrations in shops of the many stages of weaving (warping, dyeing, winding, etc.) by registered Mosuo weavers, potential customers could be educated about hand-woven techniques to reinforce the aura of the artifact.

As this is the first study to be reported about the authenticity of Bhutanese kiras, it is proposed that other types of Bhutanese textiles, such as Bhutanese gho textiles (textiles for traditional male dress) be examined in a similar way. The aim should be to confirm the impact that Driglam Namzha and the Bhutanese social ethos have on Bhutanese hand-woven textiles. Furthermore, as this research was restricted to weavers in the Thimphu area, similar studies should be undertaken with weavers in other parts of the country, in particular, the Lhuntse/Kurtoe region which is noted for its hand-woven textiles.

Such future studies would cast new light onto the impact of Driglam Namzha on Bhutanese identity while the country undergoes its modernisation programmes. The inferences could be extended to other forms of cultural expression that are undergoing modernisation such as architecture and the performing arts.

6.9 Significance of This Study

As evidenced from the literature review and the case studies of three very different communities, this is the first published research to elicit markers of authenticity of textiles drawing on the weavers' own words and perspectives.

The methodology has been based on ethnographic principles, and its application to communities at different levels of institutionalisation and at different points in their economic development. It has enabled the researcher to discover both common aspects of authenticity (e.g. pride in the successful production of a valued artefact) as well as unique markers of authenticity that are specific to the contexts of culture, history and environment of each case study. In this way, the research has identified a means of

establishing authenticity to support the development of these communities by enabling the adaptation of their products to the needs of the contemporary markets.

This is a small first step towards understanding the complex nature of authenticity in community-bound hand-woven textiles. It is the author's hope that those who follow will uncover new insights, applying these for the betterment of the life in communities throughout the world.