

The Fabric of Time and Space: Social Impacts on Textile Production

Katherine Jones & Dr. Amy Kowal

Background

- Textiles are significantly impacted by the social influences of any society, such as trade, immigration, gender roles, language, and status.
- From how garments are worn to their associations with doctrine and symbolism, the physical qualities of textiles embody more than just a simple garment.
- The Carraway Building houses numerous exhibits developed by Dr. Kowal's museum studies class; the research required to aid students in creating an accurate reflection of the exhibit's topic is imperative for a quality display.
- This research project provides a platform that ushers in the introduction of a textile exhibit focusing on the Seminole Tribe, Peru, and India while promoting cultural diversity and a more global perspective.

Methods

- To acquire appropriate sources, a variety of historical accounts, information from museum archives, and scholarly journal publications were reviewed and selected depending on their relevancy to the topic and their usefulness for student curators.
- These papers and excerpts are to serve as a baseline for their research and their descriptions concerning particular images and display items along with their importance in accurately portraying the intricacies of social relations and respective textile industries.
- Besides this, museum curators were consulted to navigate archival systems in the selection process of potential display or reference items to represent the material.



Left: a woven cotton bag (circa 1930-1948) from box 11 of the Bowman Collection. Right: woven silk cloth from Assam, India (circa 1944).

Results

- When analyzing accounts, cross-cultural similarities appeared. In the field of anthropology, one would consider an individual study of a particular group of people to be an ethnography. However, when one examines the cross-cultural similarities of these ethnographies, the following information developed from it is known as an ethnology. This research project would classify as such.
- From this research, the following general similarities were noted. Textile production is dominated by women in these three cultures (especially as contact with European colonial entities influenced social structures and gender roles). Social stratification dictated access to material quality (especially if it is of foreign origin), the ornateness of the fabric/clothing article, and the frequency with which the article was created.
- All three societies created textiles for tourists and trade; thus, they began to cater form and purpose to outsiders' demands in addition to producing items that met their own needs. Domestic social influences also impacted the process of generating textiles, such as legislation, economics, and warfare. The extent to which these impacted garments and other fabric goods varies by region.



Top left: a Peruvian wooden weaving tool. Top right: an example of a Quipu, an Incan textile used for accounting (made by Katherine Jones). Bottom left: an Incan effigy pot depicting a Moche shaman, AD 400-700.

Discussion

- This research synthesizes numerous accepted academic perspectives and elaborates on the cross-cultural comparisons made by scholars.
- However, many publications seldom focus on comparisons of such distinct geographic regions as well as the significant time spans that the research has encompassed.
- Due to the limitation of space allocations, some sources and factual elements had to be excluded from this project, though it does imply that a key element of the textile industry is plasticity due to social forces and their influence over supply, demand, and associated characteristics.
- An idea for future research is to see how textiles influence the local community of Tallahassee - especially amongst the FSU student body.

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Left: a cotton cloth from India featuring block-print pattering (ca 1940) courtesy of the Bowman Collection.

References

