

Institution: University of St Andrews



Unit of Assessment: 24 – Anthropology and Development Studies

Title of case study: Knowledge exchange among Kyrgyz women craft producers through practice, exhibition and sustainable craft heritage pathways

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Since independence in 1991, Kyrgyz women's domestic felt textile practices have been exposed to the influences and expectations of the global market. Dr Bunn's research on the dynamics of continuity and change in Kyrgyz women's textile work has given Kyrgyz NGOs and craft organisations access to a wider global perspective and forum for their work. She has linked local textile practitioners with international craft organizations through organized exhibitions and showcases in the UK, thus increasing their international profile and earning income; supported their links with international agencies such as UNIFEM and UNESCO; and enabled the UK arts and research community to gain access to this little known art form. Advancements have thus been made in both individual lives, e.g. in £42,000 (equivalent to 35 average yearly wages) sales of 12 Kyrgyz artists' work, and more broadly in Kyrgyz women's craft initiatives through sustained cultural exposure.



Three of the 12 Kyrgyz artists who visited the UK at the opening of the *From Quilts to Couture* exhibition in 2011.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Kyrgyz women's domestic textiles were impacted on by both socialist and post-socialist developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the socialist period, women's textile work shifted from the domestic to the wider economy. Experts were awarded medals, their work was sold in official tourist outlets, and to a degree standardized and mechanized. At home, textile production diminished, and new textile forms developed for new living conditions, with a new socialist iconography. Independence in 1991 also brought great economic change, resulting in immediate poverty. Textiles became perceived as an avenue of income generation and many domestic textile practices were transformed into commercial production, assisted by local NGOs and international agencies. Bunn's doctoral research in the region began shortly before the end of the Soviet Union, and she has continued to build on this research during her employment at the University of St Andrews (from 2004 onwards).

In exploring Central Asian domestic textile production through apprenticeship among several Kyrgyz families, work with Kyrgyz craft organization CACSA, and archival research in museums in Central Asia and St Petersburg (underpinning research from 2004-2011), Bunn has consistently incorporated principles of knowledge exchange into her research practice. Her approach to 'learning' is as a socially dynamic process through which 'tradition' emerges and new knowledge is generated. Her longitudinal research addresses the impact of state and international influences upon the processes of continuity and change in women's domestic textile production. Her research reveals a coherence in regional felt textile production over several thousand years, despite its taking place in improvisatory, non-repetitive, migratory contexts and women's invisibility in inheritance practices and their movement between families at marriage [1, 3, 6].

Bunn has communicated the outcomes of her research in both written publications and exhibitions, including *Kyrgyzstan* (2006) where she edited and translated the work of Klavdiya Antipina (the great Kyrgyz ethnographer of costume) [5] and *Nomadic Felts* (2010) [1] based on her British

Impact case study (REF3b)

Museum exhibition on Kyrgyz felt textiles, *Striking Tents*. Most recently, Bunn's collaboration with University of Strathclyde curator and director of Kyrgyz Arts Association CACSARC demonstrates the iterative dynamic between research, knowledge exchange and impact. Her research into changing Kyrgyz textile practices and the developing Kyrgyz fashion movement (2011) [2] reveals how transition to the global market has affected technique, designs, economic success and sustainable heritage concerns [4]. Aspects of the research have also raised money for participants. For example, *From Quilts to Couture* [4] raised £42,000 for the 30 contributing Kyrgyz designers, and funded 12 of them to visit the UK.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)**Sole authored volume**

1. SJ Bunn (2010) *Nomadic Felts*, London: British Museum Press. ISBN: 9780714125572

Evidence of quality of research:

This research has been sponsored by two Carnegie Trust Awards [2008, 2010]). The Getty Foundation funded the publication of *Nomadic Felts*. Professor Caroline Humphrey, former head of anthropology at the University of Cambridge and an international authority on the anthropology of this region, reviewed the book in the TLS as '**excellent and panoramic**'. The book has wider impact beyond anthropology, extending across Museum Studies, Textile History and Art History. A reviewer in *Surface Design Journal* commented '**a great gift to the world of textiles and to rigorous scholarship.**' The quality of the research can also be shown on the merit of the publisher.

Peer reviewed paper

2. SJ Bunn (2011) 'Moving people and the fabric of society: the power of felt through time and place', in *Central Asian Survey* 30(3-4), pp. 503-20. DOI: [10.1080/02634937.2011.615901](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.615901)

Evidence of quality of research:

Published in the leading international journal for the anthropological and sociological study of Central Asia, this paper received excellent reviews. Reviewers commented the paper offered 'important insights into the process of memory-making through artisanry, propagated by 'living' or 'moving' media (epic poem recitations; felt-making, etc)'. Further, that these insights 'extended beyond Central Asian studies, to a wider anthropological audience'. The introduction described the paper as providing 'a fascinating empirical insight into the way the movement of people and ideas can be as important for understanding continuity as they can be for making sense of change.'

Book chapter

3. SJ Bunn (2010) 'Animal knowledge: thinking through deer and sheep in Kyrgyzstan', in *Animals and Science: From Colonial Encounters to the Biotech Industry*. M. Bolton and K. Degnen (eds). Cambridge Scholars Press. ISBN: 9781443825566

Evidence of quality of research:

This volume was published by a top quality publisher.

Exhibition

4. S.J. Bunn & L. Hamilton (2011) *From Quilts to Couture in Kyrgyzstan*, Collins Gallery, University of Strathclyde with parallel symposium and public workshops.

Evidence of quality of research:

Carnegie Trust (2010) £2000 to S.J. Bunn (for developmental research in Kyrgyzstan for the exhibition at Collins Gallery from 2010-11).

Extremely positive feedback comment from exhibition, symposium and workshop audiences.

Extremely positive feedback from Kyrgyz participants.

Book (ed and trans)

5. S. Bunn (ed and trans) (2006) "Traditional Kyrgyz costume" in *Kyrgyzstan* by Rolando Paiva, Klavdiya Antipina, Temirbek Musakeev. Firenze:Skira. ISBN: 8884919703

Peer-reviewed paper

6. S.J Bunn (2005) From the Domestic to the Divine: Kyrgyz *Shyrdak* Felts. In *Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia* No 7, pp131-150.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Bunn's research, described in section 2, has contributed to (1) enhanced cultural understanding across disciplines and international boundaries, (2) enhanced creativity and society at a micro-level, (3) economic impact as a result of knowledge exchange between Kyrgyz and British partners, and (4) cultural preservation on the world stage through a consistent practice of knowledge exchange between her own research findings and different domains of textile knowledge and expertise, linking international practitioners, museums, art galleries and agencies. Long-term work as an academic partner with Kyrgyz organization CACSA/CACSARC, researching local knowledge, working with local organizations and writing, has encouraged local practitioners in developing the visibility of felt production at an international level. Exhibitions and UK educational activities have impacted on British public and UK craft practitioners and links have been established between UK and Central Asia textile artists and institutions. Financial benefit has been achieved for visiting artists which will impact on their local communities. Long-term support has encouraged Kyrgyz partners in their bid for Intangible Cultural Heritage status which they achieved in December 2012, and which is designed to protect the appropriation of their cultural property. The networking opportunities provided by *Quilts to Couture* (4) have since been built on and have enabled Kyrgyz artists to return to the UK to exhibit and sell their work, which they had never before been able to do. There has been an alternating, iterative dynamic between global and local audiences and experts, and overall significant change to the lives of individual women and in Kyrgyz women's craft initiatives through sustained cultural exposure.

Through her concern with knowledge exchange, Bunn has consistently generated links between Kyrgyz and UK organizations, linking different domains of textile interest, from practitioners to museums, art galleries and international agencies. Since the publication of *Nomadic Felts* (November 2010), the author has been invited to lecture on the subject at international institutions and conferences, including at the University of Oxford and Washington Textile Museum. The exhibition subsequent to her work in 2011 generated both impact and further research data, engaging the British public with the creative arts of the region and enabling 12 Kyrgyz practitioners to come to the UK to work with British textile artists and establish economic links.

Enhanced cultural understanding across disciplines and international boundaries. Following Bunn's initial participation in the UNESCO Steppe Route expedition as an 'expert in felt handicraft' and her collaboration with the British Museum on the exhibition *Striking Tents* (on Kyrgyz felt textiles), the Museum commissioned Bunn to write an 'ethno-history of the world through felt' covering all Eurasia felt-making traditions. This formed her recent volume *Nomadic Felt* (2010), published in the British Museum Press academic series *Artistic Traditions in World Cultures*, Bunn's underpinning research, specifically *Nomadic Felts*, which as both a scholarly and publicly accessible volume, has brought knowledge of this subject to increasingly wide audiences (including anthropology, history, textiles and general interest) in the UK, the USA and across the world. From the Kyrgyz perspective it both positioned their work along other world felt traditions and profiled it [S1]. The book sold 1,161 copies in the first 18 months of publication [S5] and has been favourably reviewed in diverse journals from the Textile Society of America to the Times Literary Supplement. Bunn's experience as a curator, practitioner and workshop leader (skills built up during her research), have led to the interactive and collaborative aspects of her exhibition, symposium and workshops, which have further extended the impact of her work to British audiences [S6].

Enhanced creativity and society at a micro-level. Bunn and her close field contacts have continued to develop their work together from the field period onwards, and have seen their lives enriched through their on-going mutual collaborations, as agreed by participants [S4]. Two field contacts ultimately secured employment as leading figures in international agencies (UNIFEM and CACSA), while several field participants secured international invitations and subsequent

Impact case study (REF3b)

employment in Kyrgyzstan as trainers. This widening, ongoing network enhances and regenerates the benefits of collaboration, influencing further developments in both individual lives and more broadly in Kyrgyz women's craft initiatives. It is necessary to mention the specificity of this impact, because the domestic, low-profile aspect of many women's work in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, and the informal networks through which impact upon their work and lives are disseminated, do not necessarily comply with the kinds of more visible, pre-existing agencies through which impact can be identified. To produce evidence for this informal kind of impact would be to reduce its inherent social relations to mere data. However, participants have contributed to exhibitions and events in the UK, such as the Queen's Jubilee, since the 2011 exhibition.

Economic Impact as a result of knowledge exchange between Kyrgyz and British partners.

Bunn's recent research into Kyrgyz fashion (2006-12) parallels her concern with the impact of globalization on Kyrgyz domestic textiles and local livelihoods. An exhibition in 2011 followed the initial collaborative research project, *From Quilts to Couture*, co-curated with Collins Gallery (University of Strathclyde) manager and Kyrgyz craft professional [S2]. This revealed the dynamic nature of developments in Kyrgyz women's textiles since independence. The work of 30 Kyrgyz artists was exhibited, 12 Kyrgyz artists visited the UK at the opening of the exhibition, participated in a symposium and workshop during a week. The artists made £42,000 from the sale of their work (for many Kyrgyz, a monthly wage is approximately \$100) and attracted an audience of over 7000 [S2]. Questionnaires and feedback forms to both participants and audiences reveal a strongly positive view about the benefits of the exhibition in profiling the work of Kyrgyz makers, enabling UK audiences to become cognizant with the work, providing new input to Kyrgyz practices through contacts made in the UK, and in financially remunerating participants for their work [S4].

Cultural preservation on the world stage. Since this event, the Kyrgyz *shyrdak* and *ala kiiz* felt textiles have been inscribed as one of four elements on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in need of Urgent Safeguarding, 3-7th December 2-12 [S3].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Email of thanks re the UNESCO stats, CACSARC

[S2] Report from Collins Gallery on the *From Quilts to Couture* exhibition. Verifies the final sales figures and audience numbers. Link to Craft Scotland web page listing about the exhibition: http://www.craftscotland.org/whats-on/event_details.html?from-quilts-to-couture-in-kyrgyzstan&event_id=184.

[S3] <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&USL=00693> (URL to "Ala-kiyiz and Shyrdak, art of Kyrgyz traditional felt carpets", part of the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.) Verifies the listing of Kyrgyz felt textiles, the object of Bunn's research, on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

[S4] Questionnaires completed August 2011 by participants of the *From Quilts to Couture* exhibition. Provide evidence of the impact of the research and exhibition on regional (i.e. Kyrgyz) participants of *From Quilts to Couture*.

[S5] British Museum Press summary document. Illustrates the sales of *Nomadic Felts*, and thus the rapid dissemination of the broader research to academics, textile enthusiasts, textile historians and the wider public through textual form.

[S6] Feedback forms from exhibition, symposium and workshop audiences at *From Quilts to Couture*. Illustrate the impact of the research, exhibition, and symposium on the wider British public through media other than text, i.e. visual material, public debate and workshop practice.