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Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas - Some Next Steps

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Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas (2004) examines the impact of the economic transition from subsistence and agriculture to money and commerce on the transmission of weaving know-how, textile design, pattern representation, and the creative process of Zinacantec Maya weavers, following a large group of families in Chiapas, Mexico over a period of two decades. With the development of commerce, a relaxation of traditional "textile rules" and increasing innovation took place. Part of this process involved a shift in the definition of creativity from a community concept - in which the goal of clothing design was to demonstrate that the wearer was a member of the community - towards an individual concept - in which the goal of clothing design was also to identify the wearer as a unique individual. An intermediate step was a concept of family creativity in which clothing design identifies the wearer as a member of a family, with textile designs that differ from those of other families. Supporting this shift in the nature of creativity and textile design was a shift in the apprenticeship process. Learning to weave changed from a learning process carefully guided and modeled by the older generation, usually the mother, to one of more independent learning, trial-and-error experimentation, and peer input. While these changes took place in one small village, this analysis sheds light on changes taking place all over the world, as the global economy develops and spreads.

While the book covers the period through 2003, in this paper I extend the timeline forward to present a new case study of the creative process that occurred in 2004 and 2005. This case study illustrates that the transition previously identified in the book - the movement from a community concept of creativity towards an individual concept - continues and expands in new directions, even as the driving force for this transition - commerce continues to expand. This case study will constitute the third phase in a three-stage progression of changing creative processes in textile design. Phase 1 is community creativity, Phase 2 is family creativity, and Phase 3 is individual creativity.

Community Creativity

A model of community creativity was prevalent in the first wave of our research in 1969 and 1970 (Greenfield, 2004). During the period of subsistence agriculture, there was one *bats'i* or "true" design for every item of clothing; and change was minimal. Instead, interindividual and interfamilial similarity and constancy over time was universal in Zinacantan. I illustrate this with the female *huipil* or blouse. Figures 1-4 show a constant design from 1948 through 1971.

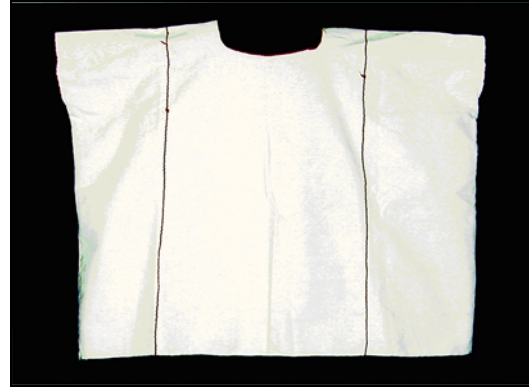


Figure 1 (left). Zinacantec woman's huipil or blouse, 1948. From the Petul Vasquez family. Collection of the author, UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

Figure 2 (right). Zinacantec woman's huipil or blouse, 1960. San Diego Museum of Man. Photograph courtesy of the Museum.



Figure 3(left). A Zinacantec girl from Nabenchauk wearing a huipil, 1966. Photograph courtesy of Frank Cancian.

Figure 4 (right). Huipiles. Zinacantan Center, 1971. Photograph by Frank Cancian from *Another Place*. Reproduced courtesy of Frank Cancian.

Family Creativity

To illustrate how the creative process changed over time, I begin with some case studies of textile design that took place in 1992 and 1993 (Greenfield, 2004), at a time when the transition from agriculture to commerce had already affected many families in Nabenchauk; both illustrate that the creative design process had a large familial component. In the first one, a mother and daughter produce very similar blouses (fig. 5, 6). The mother says, “She showed me” a literal translation of the Tzotzil is “She gave me to see.” The daughter says of this blouse “I taught my mother.”



Figure 5 (left). Huipil embroidered by Lupa Z'us at the same time as her mother made the blouse shown in the next figure. Nabenchauk, 1993. Photograph by Patricia Greenfield

Figure 6 (right). Huipil embroidered by the mother of Lupa Z'us. Nabenchauk, 1993. Photograph by Patricia Greenfield.

In the second, one cousin designed and embroidered a *huipil* utilizing printed paper patterns (fig. 7); she wore her new *huipil* to the Guadalupe fiesta in December 1992. Her mother, who does not use paper patterns, embroidered an almost identical *huipil*, albeit slightly simpler, in accord with the norms for an older woman; she wore her new *huipil* to the same fiesta. (fig. 8). There is little doubt but that she observed and copied her daughter's *huipil*. A cousin also looked at the girl's *huipil* and embroidered an almost identical one that she wore for the first time to a fiesta in May, 1993 (fig. 9). This is a process of family creativity, where a textile style identifies you not only as a member of a community - because the *huipiles* all follow the Zinacantec "rules" for *huipil* design - but also as a member of an extended or nuclear family, and the creative process involves interaction and mutual influence among family members. A number of other case studies of family interaction and influence in the design of *huipiles* is presented in Chapter 6 of *Weaving Generations* (Greenfield, 2004). It is important to note that, in this model of creativity, copying is interpreted in a positive way as learning from other family members.



Figure 7(left). Huipil made by Maruch, a teenage girl, for the Guadalupe fiesta, December 1992. Photographed in Nabenchauk by Patricia Greenfield.

Figure 8 (right). Cousin Loxa's version of the huipil made for a fiesta in May 1993. Acrylic. Photographed in Nabenchauk by Patricia Greenfield.



Figure 9. Loxa's mother's version of the huipil made for the May 1993 fiesta. Acrylic. Photographed in Nabenchauk by Patricia Greenfield.

A Self-Directed Process of Creativity

Background. This is a case study of a young Zinacantec woman who has been helping me since she was nine-years-old (in 1991) and who is now my *comadre*. In 2003 she lost her husband with an eight-month-old baby. Moving back into her parents' and siblings' home, she turned to weaving as a way to support herself and her daughter as a single mother.

The multistep process. By August 2004, she had invented new styles which people wanted to buy. She told me proudly that no one else knows how, and she showed me a beautiful purple woven blouse with squares done in supplementary-weft brocade. Indeed, I had never seen a woven blouse with an overall pattern woven into it. This style of woven blouse took three weeks to make; I ordered one (fig. 10).

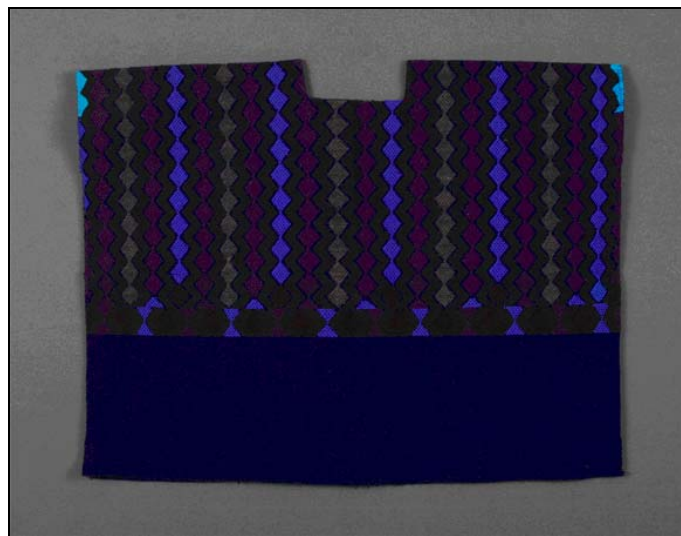


Figure 10. Huipil woven by Paxku' Pavlu. Acrylic. (24" high by 30 1/2" wide) Nabenchauk, 2004. Collection of the author, UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

But my *huipil* turned out to be a middle step in a very interesting new type of creative process - a self-directed one. And I now turn to describing the process that led up to and followed from this woven blouse.

Eventually, Paxku' showed me a beautiful *huipil* she had embroidered in 2004 on storebought cloth, the most common way of producing *huipiles* since my first visit Nabenchauk in 1969 (fig. 11). Its significance in this context is that she had used this *huipil* as a model for the design in the woven *huipil* in figure 10.

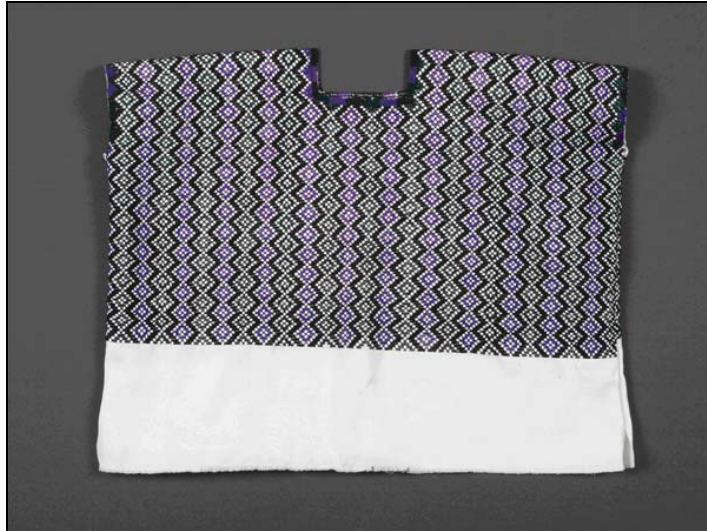


Figure 11. *Huipil* embroidered on storebought cloth by Paxku' Pavlu. Acrylic. (24 1/2" high by 30" wide) Nabenchauk, 2004. Collected by the author in 2005. Photograph by Don Cole.

After this embroidered model, she wove a *huipil* for her two-year-old daughter with a simpler pattern (fig. 12); she saw this as practice for the woven *huipiles* she planned to make for my student, Alethea Marti, then working in Nabenchauk, and myself.



Figure 12. First woven *huipil*, made by Paxku' Pavlu for her daughter Marielena, then one year old. Nabenchauk, 2004. Acrylic. (12" high by 16" wide) Collection of the author, UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

Paxku' was now ready to make the planned woven *huipiles* for Alethea and me (fig. 10). Following my *huipil*, she varied the design of squares a bit and wove a gorgeous *huipil* for her daughter in the same color scheme (fig. 13).



Figure 13. Woven *huipil*, made by Paxku' Pavlu for her daughter Marielena. Nabenchauk, 2004. Acrylic. (15 3/4" high by 16 1/2" wide) Collection of the author, UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

I wore my *huipil* to the book presentation in San Cristobal for *Weaving Generations* in September 2004. I was introduced at the event by Pedro Meza, the President of Sna Jolobil, the Maya weavers' cooperative in San Cristobal. Pedro noticed and admired my *huipil* and wanted to know who had woven it. I introduced him to Paxku', and he invited her to become involved in Sna Jolobil. He ordered a *huipil* just like it for the cooperative, and I left my *huipil* with Paxku' so that she could copy it. But after she delivered the first one, Pedro asked her to make subsequent versions in cotton, rather than the acrylic thread that was omnipresent in Zinacantec textiles. So Paxku' returned to practicing with small versions for her small daughter Marielena; and she wove her first model in cotton thread, which she purchased from Sna Jolobil (fig. 14). (The cooperative wants their weavers to use the high-quality materials that they obtain for them.)



Figure 14. Marielena's cotton *huipil*, woven by her mother Paxku' Pavlu. Acrylic. (13 1/2" high by 16 1/2" wide). Collected by the author in Nabenchauk, August, 2005. Photograph by Don Cole.

At that point, Paxku' was ready to weave her designs in cotton for Sna Jolobil. I saw her cotton *huipiles* in Sna Jolobil's store in San Cristobal in August 2005. I asked her to copy them for me and purchased two cotton *huipiles*, each in new colors and slightly varying in design (figs. 15, 16).



Figure 15 (left). A copy of Paxku' Pavlu's cotton huipil woven in Nabenchauk for Sna Jolobil in 2005, woven by Paxku'. (24 1/2" high by 29" wide). Collected by Patricia Greenfield in February 2006.

Figure 16 (right). A copy of a second cotton huipil woven by Paxku' Pavlu in Nabenchauk for Sna Jolobil in 2005, woven by Paxku'. (25" high by 29 1/2" wide). Collected by Patricia Greenfield in February 2006.

At around this same time, she began to design cotton woven bags for Sna Jolobil using related designs. She now had a sewing machine and had learned to sew in zippers. I ordered one (fig. 17, left), which I got in the summer of 2005; Paxku' decided it was a little too small and made me a larger one, which she gave me as a gift in the summer of 2006 (fig. 17, right). This latter one uses almost exactly the same design as in the dark blue woven *huipil* (fig. 16).



Figure 17. Cotton bags, originally designed for Sna Jolobil. Red one (6 1/4" high by 7" wide) woven in Nabenchauk in 2005, blue one (7 1/4" high by 7 1/4" wide) in 2006. Collection of author. Photograph by Don Cole.

Note the essential difference from the family model of creativity I found in 1993. Whereas that process involved interaction and influence among family members, in 2004 and 2005, Paxku's process was entirely self-directed. She transformed her own textile models rather than transforming those of another family member. This creative process was a much more independent one than what was typical a decade earlier. In line with my basic theoretical model, the increasing independence of the creative process was accompanied by increasing development of the commercial economy and the virtual disappearance of agricultural subsistence in Nabenchauk.

Conclusions

This research focuses on social change and how it affects the transmission of a weaving tradition, the definition of creativity, and the creative process itself. Social guidance and a community definition of creativity are adapted to a subsistence environment. Independent learning and innovation are adapted to an entrepreneurial commercial environment. The progression from a community model of creativity to a family model to an individual model took place as the subsistence economy was gradually replaced by a commercial one. I feel that these adaptations of creative models and learning styles to the economic environment are applicable to textiles and the transmission of textile traditions in many parts of the world. This is because all of these changes take place as adaptations to a changing economic environment, an environment that, as in so many parts of the world, is inexorably moving toward ever greater commercialization.

Reference

Greenfield, Patricia Marks. *Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas*. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2004.