

# Fashioned for Fashion, the Dynamic Culture of Bamboo in Ghana

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## Abstract

This piece of writing on fashioned for fashion, the dynamic culture of bamboo in Ghana, attempts to examine the nature of bamboo as material for fashion accessories. It also attempts to expose a comprehensive impression bamboo have created in Ghana, at the same time describing meticulously selected fashion accessories that have been made out of bamboo in Ghana. The writers explained that bamboo is a lively material which can be used as complementary material in a self-motivated and adoptable process in product development, which has a social heritage component as well as a sacred aspect. Some of the conclusions drawn are that bamboo art is a constituent of our incorporated systems and tradition, and has undergone remarkable transformation.

**Keywords:** Bamboo, culture, fashion preservation, biodegradation, tradition.

## 1. Introduction

Owing to the fast growth, strong adaptability and the extensive uses, bamboo is closely associated with aspects of people's lives such as clothing, lodging and appliances. Regarding clothing, bamboo exercised important influences on the start and development of some people like the Chinese. In this bamboo was used for shoes, clothing, hats and umbrellas. Steiner (2006) said that the close affiliation between citizens and plants has resulted in the discovery of a number of processing and preservation technologies, several of them specific to the material, the people and end use. Steiner (2006) agreed with Effa-Ababio (2005) and said these have been the bodies of indigenous technologies that represented the achievement of people.

Effa-Ababio (2005) said culture is the human achievement in nature and it involves the whole of life. It is within the frame work of culture that bamboo art evolved. Bamboo arts were made and used in most cultures for onward development, which is directed towards achieving a meaningful way of life. These developments Effa-Ababio (2005) said are constituent parts of culture and are the products of the achievements of people in the natural world and bamboo art in Ghana is not excluded.

The multifaceted nature and the utility value of bamboo notwithstanding, many people look at bamboo as just a type of grass, a non timber forest product and define it from a non utilitarian perspective. Bamboo on the other hand can be defined, as a material that is full of life, dynamic and adoptable that lends itself for processing and manipulation in more than a few ways in product development and production. Bamboo art has been an extremely respected talent throughout the world from earliest times. The Republic of Indonesia according to Steiner (2006) consists of several islands in South-East Asia, almost half of which are inhabited, because it is a scattered island nation, many Indonesian communities rely on boats, such as bamboo rafts, skillfully constructed in Java, for transport, communication, and commerce.

The aim of this piece of writing is to outline the nature, and value of bamboo art in complementing Ghanaian cultures.

## 2. Bamboos in Ghana

According to Baah (2001), there are seven known species of bamboo in Ghana. These are bambusa arundinacea, bambusa bambos, bambusa multiplex, bambusa pervariabilis, bambusa vulgaris, bambusa var. vitata and dendrocalamus strictus. Among these, bambusa vulgaris is indigenous to Ghana.

## 3. Traditional uses of bamboo in Ghana

Bamboo is traditionally and usually used for purposes that do not require much durability. The culms, whole or split, provide fencing material for courtyards, outdoor kitchens and bathrooms in rural dwellings and low-income areas in the cities. Culms split into two halves provide temporary roofing that last two or three years. Split or whole culms are used to make seats that are fixed to the ground, often under shady trees to provide relaxation. Handicrafts such as spoons and spatulas are made from the split culms; sharp spikes are made from the split culms for various purposes, such as roasting sticks for kebab and a spike for removing snails out of their shells.

The ribs of large, royal umbrellas are made from splits of the mature culms. On farms, bamboo is used as props to support plantain, as climbing poles for yam vines, as tool handles, as roofing beams for farm huts and storage barns and as protective fencing material around farms against pests. Splits of the long culms are used to weave a bottomless basket locally known as 'kono' for the storage of cola nuts. Fishermen around Lake Volta in Ghana also use it to trap fish. In one method, slivers of bamboo are woven into a trap-net into which the fishes are

baited. In another method, pieces of culms with the node intact at one end and the other end open are suspended under the water to provide false shelter for the fishes. The fishes swim into the culms but are unable to swim backwards out of them. Canoe operators also use the long, slender poles to push canoes over shallow waters. Flutes are made from the small culms of about 25 mm diameter. The renowned Ghanaian musician, the late Dr. Ephraim Amu is well known for his bamboo flutes. Culms are cut to various sizes and the diaphragms are removed. These are pounded lightly against a flat stone surface to produce a variety of musical sounds.

#### 4. Bamboo art, a culture of man

Bamboo arts are the effect of the imaginative feedback of a people to nature. This is the result of man's encounter with nature to fashion a meaningful approach to life for onward development. It forms a tiny yet very important fraction of the civilization or culture of a people. Effa-Ababio (2005) said culture is the human achievement in nature and it involves the whole of life. It is inside the enclosed effort of culture that bamboo art evolved. Arnorld (1993) said that culture is the love of perfection. He further explained that culture is everything. If culture is everything then bamboo art is not an exception. Effa-Ababio (2005) said that man's purposiveness and endeavours in his encounter with nature distinguish culture from nature. If this is so, then the diverse products fashioned in bamboo in different parts of the world constitute the sum total of achievements of the people, and this Arnorld (1993) and Effa-Ababio (2005) says is their culture.

#### 5. Bamboo, a dynamic and adoptable material

In Ghana today, bamboo is proving to be one of the adoptable engineering material for the fabrication of crafts. Steiner et al (2013) said bambusa bambos, a sympodial bamboo in Ghana has now been adopted as one of the most important manufacturing resources for flooring. This material now provides an alternative to timber wood for flooring. It is the adoptability of bamboo which made this possible. Within the adoptable nature of bamboo, several products have evolved which are complementary or accessories or garnishing for fashion. This writing makes known some of these products as a confirmation of the dynamic and adoptable capabilities of sympodial bamboos in Ghana.



Figure 1. Plain and Dyed bamboo bag & slippers

In the production of the artifacts in figure 1 and 2, bambusa vulgaris was processed into slivers, reduced of its natural sugar content by submersion in water, dried and drawn through rough, intermediate and smooth abrasive surfaces. After that, the slivers which were produced out of internodes of bambusa vulgaris were submerged in sanding sealer for a short time and were finished by a final draw over emery cloth. The emery cloth gave it the required smoothness and necessary preparation for polishing with wax. The slivers were woven off loom, integrated with synthetic leather to produce the bags in figures 1 and the lady's footwear in figure 2. Some of the slivers were dyed with suede dye and were hand woven and used for the bag and slippers integrated with batik in figure 1. Bamboo pendants, fashioned emblemically were cut out with a piercing saw, sanded, polished and attached to add to the ultimate look of the bag. Wax was used to polish the final products.



Figure 2. Bamboo lady's footwear

Figure 3, 4 and 5 are necklaces and ear rings produced out of bamboo. These were made to show the divers ways bamboo can be fashioned into jewellery. In this different forms were cut out of the culm and were given several abrasive treatments to bring it to the expected end. After that the blow torch was used to scorch parts and ends of the shape, giving effects pleasing to the eye. The butterfly was the central motive that was used for the first set. The second set was developed from a traditional form that symbolizes wisdom, the union of three heads, trinity. This was made in bamboo, integrated with metal rings and complemented 3mm glass beads. The third necklace is a composition of bamboo beads and flat pendants arranged to symbolize life. Life as expressed in this presentation is a time to be born, a journey with a mission from God as the first pendant, youthfulness, strength and hard work as the second pendant, the pick of life with achievements and successes, the fourth represents a time for reflections and amendments and finally the last pendant is representation of departure back to God. With understanding of the philosophy behind the art, wearers walk with hope and understanding of their future, and as such have meaning for life. This particular work piece was fried in oil to finish, hence the dark brown colour.

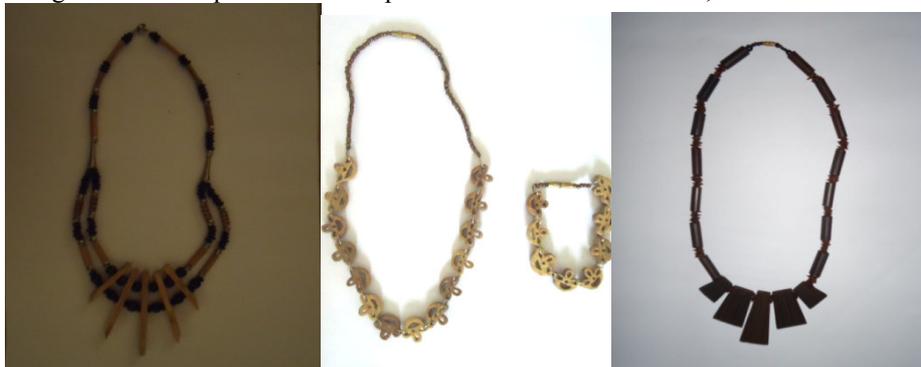


Figure 3. Bamboo Necklaces



Figure 4. Bamboo Necklaces, bracelet and ear ring

Several intentions and philosophies form the foundations upon which most of these accessories were designed and made. The use and choice of material contributes to an attempt to bring the users to have an encounter with nature, a source believed to link up man with God. In this art more than a few supplementary materials in nature are employed to complement the design and production of the art and all are directed towards placing man in a

position to develop an evolution, spiritual assurance, and a means of continued existence.



Figure 5. Bamboo ear rings

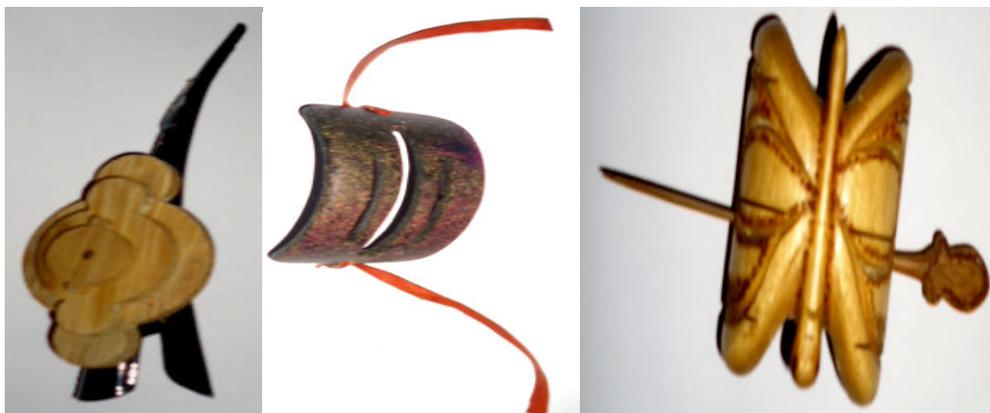


Figure 6. bamboo hair clips



Figure 7. Bamboo hand bangles

#### 6. The social span of bamboo art

Bamboo art production is a social heritage which is handed from generation to generation. As a social heritage. Most bamboo art producers do not acknowledge anything that comes as an alien to their original way of doing things. In most cultures, according to Boahin et al (2013) these artist work in groups and one of the distinctiveness of such operational groups, involved in that which has been handed down from generations to them is that, they become increasingly organized as they advance, so they form cooperative and advanced macro system. The requirement for the continued existence of such groups according to Effa-Ababio (2005) necessitates the making of rules. This attitude unites the artists giving them a character and an operational culture.

The social scope of bamboo art production uncovered the fact that, bamboo art is not only an occupation, but an effort to convey a message of an interaction with nature. This is believed to be a way to perfection and it is acknowledged as development.

### **7. Sacred facet of bamboo art**

Bamboo Art has an operational culture that is shrouded with convictions, belief systems that involve stories, custom and traditions. In most cultures, artists and users of art are influenced by the things they believe. Producers on their part develop designs that divulge the concepts of belief, faith or conviction. This idea that has been worked into a product brings to the user understanding that give insight into how the user should feel, think or behave, giving meaning to the actions of people. Some cultures adopt forms and shapes from nature like, insects and animals to produce fashion accessories believed to influence their strength and their ways of doing things. This idea is believed to have a link with the practice of sympathetic magic. One famous insect in use is the butterfly used for the production of the lady's hair clip. Boahin et al (2013) opined that the most prominent systems of beliefs tend to be those associated with formal religions, nevertheless any system of belief in which the interpretation of stories affect the behavior of the people can be an important component of culture of a society, and bamboo art is not an exception. Another animal whose form is used is the python and it is used by warriors. The python is use as a belt hook or hair pin or clip or a mask worn for identification. In cultures where bamboo is the most abundant material and naturally available raw material, bamboo is seen as life for the people.

### **8. Conclusion**

The underlying principle of this writing was to examine and make understandable the capabilities in the sympodial bamboo in Ghana. The study has recommended that bamboo arts are one of the out puts of man encounter with his environment. From the analysis so far, bamboo art is an integrated scheme of conviction, values and traditions. The rationale for the art is widespread for majority of world cultures and forms a tie linking citizens of diverse cultural backgrounds. It has under gone vast changes and growth through creativity and commercial activities across cultures. In search of development and progression more than a few innovations have evolved placing man in a position to develop an evolution, spiritual assurance, and a means of survival that has it lineage near the beginning of time.

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