

Asante Cultural Symbols, A Source for The Creation of Bamboo and Leather Souvenirs

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Abstract

This piece of presentation is on souvenirs, as the cultural belief in Ghana. In discussing this presentation, some attempts have been made to examine the nature and diversity of indigenous Asante cultural symbols as a source for the creation of Bamboo and leather souvenirs, as well as an appreciation of indigenous bamboo and leather crafts as a human achievement. There is also a general overview on Asante culture in Ghana, outlining in particular the shape of the cultural symbols, varieties that exist, and the philosophical impact it has on Asante man (the Asante community). The writer argue that the Asante cultural symbolic embellished bamboo and leather souvenirs evolved out of motivated and adoptable processes, which have social heritage components as well as devout and enlightening dimensions. These the writers concluded have experienced substantial variations over the past several periods.

Keywords: Culture, Souvenir, tourist, Proverbial souvenir, Regalia souvenirs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The possibilities of the nature and functions of souvenirs is very extensive and its components are countless, comprehensive and multilayered. For this reason, no all-inclusive and undoubted clarification of souvenirs has ever been advanced, even though many categorizations have been presented in an effort to give an idea about the nature and functions of souvenirs. The multifaceted nature and function of souvenirs notwithstanding, many people look at souvenirs as just an artifact and describe it from its artistic viewpoint, others define it in terms of educational method and others belief. Souvenirs have been the medium of communicating and expression of love, respect and care for another from a different culture. The objective of this piece of writing is to outline the nature, and function of souvenirs in complementing the Asante culture.

Across the globe, education is one of the developmental pivots; but to educating an individual, there should be a solid base which will equip the person to fit into the society. This culminates in quality knowledge to understand the culture of others and to be able to analyze issues across the world with genuine or scientific facts.

Higher dependency on formal education leads to loss of culture and values (true identity of a person). This cultural adulteration leads to corruption of norms of society and a total disarray of laid down rules and regulations and eventual break down of societal values and morals. Culture is the love of perfection; culture is the way of life of the individual in the society. Culture of a group of people in most cases is described as rich, and this is so when it is quite clear that the totality of the accrued knowledge (the forms of knowledge, communal conduct and principles of a specific societal, folkloric, or a group) of the people is enormous and cuts across a very wide study area (Arnold 1993). The tourist art system thrives on juxtaposition, tautology, and contradiction. Although it contains both visual imagery and conceptual representations, these elements alone do not account for the exchange value of objects within the system.

In the study, the term tourism was on several times used to introduce relationship that created avenues where people expressed their appreciation to others in different cultures by presenting culturally imbibed

2. SOUVENIRS IN GHANA

Souvenirs making in Northern Ghana can be said to be a learned, trend and this is an indispensable attribute of the sum total of achievement of the people of Ghana. What the Souvenirs makers do, can be described as the accomplishment of a people. Several kinds of Souvenirs are made with the parts of animals and birds. The skins of the four-legged animals are used to make what can be identified as leather Souvenirs. The choice of leather is dependent on the function of the Souvenirs to be produced. Skins of very strong animals like leopard are used for Souvenirs for chiefs, heads of clans and heads of royal families .and people of high ethical standing in society.

3. SOUVENIRS IN ASANTE

Design of Asante culturally based souvenirs

During the observation and interview sessions, it was found out that about 95% of both indigenes and tourists do

not have adequate knowledge on the past Kings and Queens of the Asante kingdom. There has not been a vivid documentation on contributions of most past influential personalities of the Asante kingdom. This brought to light the necessity to have artifacts that can depicts the heroes and heroines of the Asante people so that both tourists and local people can have or give out to friends.

The researchers chose to design souvenirs to portray the Asante culture through proverbial sayings since there is not a single conversation without the use of a proverb or a symbol. Two new symbols created and were added to the existing symbols. The three chosen modified proverbs were iconized. This is another way of adding new symbols to those available and also to educate the general public of the fact that we need to add more symbols out of the numerous Akan proverbs.

The designs are derived from proverbs such as:

- i. ‘Obi nim a, obi kyere’ literally meaning, when one does not know, others teach. **Philosophical meaning:** Knowledge does not inhabit in only one person.
When to use it: It is used to educate people during decision taking (two heads are better than one).
- ii. ‘Papaso ara opa nwoma soo, ennye n’anumuode nti ara, na mmom, ne yie nti ara. Literally meaning, the one who scrapes hairs off the skin of slaughtered animals does not do so because he wants the skins to eat, but because de-hiring is the right thing to do. **Philosophical meaning:** Proper nurturing yields positive impact on the society.

Another discovery from the field shows that regalia forms a very important aspect of every Asante Kings’ or Chiefs’ adornment. Before a Chief or a King sit in state or is presented to the general public, be it in mourning mood or jubilant condition, he is adorned with the regalia for two major reasons.

1. For security and protection purpose
2. For beautification and display of authority.

It is necessary for an art forms to be made for its aesthetic, protective and power values, so that tourists can learn and appreciate the Asante culture. The Golden Stool serving as the authority of the King and the seat of his governance and the ‘kɔ̀tɔ̀kɔ̀’ (porcupine) which is the emblem of the Asante kingdom. It is also used in the appellation of the kingdom. Asante Kɔ̀tɔ̀kɔ̀, *wo kum apem a, apem beba*. Meaning Asante Kɔ̀tɔ̀kɔ̀, if you kill a thousand, a thousand will come to fight.

The Asante Empire is one of the largest empires in the West Africa Sub-region and it is the only kingdom that has the highest hierarchy of authority in Ghana. The Asantes still maintain the monarch system to rules their people. There is the need to promote the culture and arts of such a great Kingdom to the entire world. Tourist art is one of the easiest ways in promoting cultural values of a group of people. The increasing rate of modernization is relegating most of the valuable practices of Asante culture to the background. For instance, names and information of most of the past Kings, Queens and heroes are fading out among the youth of Asantes. There is the need to bring back to memory, the activities and roles these people played in the Asante kingdom to educate the youth, the general public and tourist.

Most Asante tourist arts are in wood, metal and fabric. The alarming rate of the depletion of Ghana’s forest reserve, there is the need to investigate into other materials that can be used for the production of tourist art. Some of these materials could be bamboo, oil palm, coconut trees, and guinea grass among others. The researchers chose to work in bamboo and leather as a complementary material for tourist art production.

4. BAMBOO A MATERIAL FOR SOUVENIR

According to Baah (2001)Bamboo has a long and well established tradition as a building and construction material in Ghana. This material is widely used in many forms of construction like housing, furnishing, joinery and paneling. Bamboo constructions are characterized by resilience to wind and earthquake forces and are readily repairable. Bamboo is a renewable material and a source characterized by high strength low weight. He further explained that, bamboo can replace most of the traditionally accepted conventional wood species. He opined that when processed into local laminated boards, sympodial bamboo can be used for work in all the areas where the traditional wood species are used.

5. LEATHER A MATERIAL FOR SOUVENIR

According to Boahene (2001) skins and leather has an extensive and well recognized custom as a material for the production of cultural artefact in Ghana. These materials he explained are extensively used in the fabrication of many forms of traditionally designed works used in homes and Palaces. Leather works of art and constructions are mostly found in the Northern part of Ghana. leather is a covering from cattle, sheep and other domestic animals mostly kept in the house as a source of protein supplement in the home. He further explained that, unlike bamboo leather has no or cannot be replace by any indigenous material, like most of the traditionally accepted conventional wood species by bamboo. He opined that when processed into local art work, leather is said the carry the soul and spirit of the animal from which it was produced

6. SOUVENIRS AND TOURISM

The term tourism is related to recent branch of anthropology that deals with description of specific human cultures, using methods such as close observation and interviews. Today in the twenty first century many countries around the world look at tourism as opportunity to do business. Travelers or people who migrate from place to place buy things of economic importance and are resold for economic gains. 'Tourist art' is categorized as a commodity made by the artist for the consumers who pay a visit to our country (Haute 2008, 24). There is no doubt that the idea of 'demand and supply' play an important role in the production of 'tourist art'. However, it only serves as part of the explanation in the development of the tourist market in Africa (Horner 1993, 52).

The relationship between production and consumption in tourist art exists in four types of art markets: a) the village market b) the urban market c) the curio trade 4) galleries used by popular artists. The village market functions as an ecosystem for tourists' art while the village market functions as a site where carvers, potters and painters produce on order in an irregular basis drawing on designs and patterns developed in the village setting with the services of middlemen for circulation (Rosette 1986,43).

This art of doing business taking advantage of the arts of societies, communities, towns and countries by buying and selling is what led to the establishment of tourism as an industry the world over. Therefore, the aim of quality education can be achieved through introduction of Ghanaian culture into formal education; formal and informal education trains a person not to fit into just his society alone but into the world. According to the Educational programme for childcare services (2007), children learn through observation, imitation, interaction, listening and exploration. This implies that, what a child see, hear, touches and manipulate leads to lifelong learning.

The Asante's symbols reflect their culture which can be retold through creativity or artifacts. The study considered tourist, tourist art, the Sacred Facet of Tourist Art, Economic Importance of Tourist Art, souvenirs, materials involve in souvenir production as well as availability of tools and materials for the production.

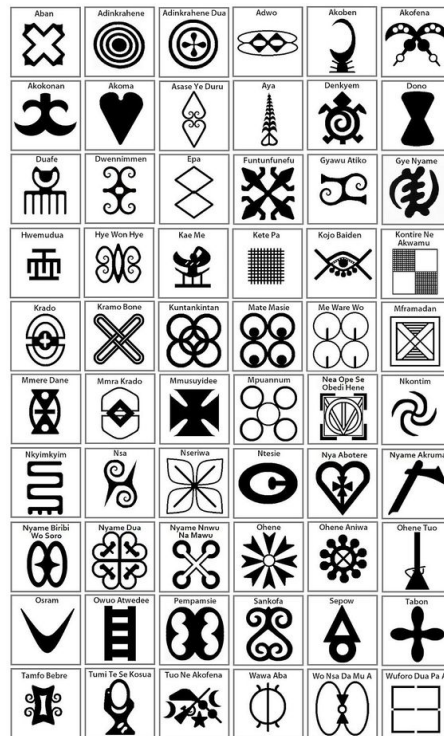
A new development has entered the industry with the blend of the dissimilar types creating a new awakening in the souvenir industry. This is a go-ahead trend resulting from the process of change emanating from cultural contacts which is cultural. It is so, because humans share in Nature and manipulate things in Nature to meet needs in different ways and this is Culture, it is dynamic and adaptable, the sum total of achievement of a people. A wide variety of creative knowledge can be tapped in the production of souvenirs when several students are set into creative thinking process to develop artefacts that reflect the culture of people, that can communicate and bring people to understand and appreciate the way of life of others through their arts. This is the philosophy under which this study was composed.

This study investigated into Asante cultural symbolisms and design to develop Asante cultural based souvenir for growth of tourism in the Asante kingdom using educated young minds in concept, idea and product development.

7. Methodology

The study adopted the participatory action research approach of qualitative inquiry to engage selected visual arts students and teachers to design Asante culturally grounded souvenirs and its production. Art-based research was employed to interrogate the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all forms of the arts. Primary data were gathered through informal discussions and the use of unstructured interview guide with students and teachers. Informal interviews conducted over 4 weeks provided additional data for the study. A total of four (4) visits of 30 to 45 minutes was adopted to obtain the concerns of student and practitioners of the artefacts. The researcher however, used the descriptive approach to discuss and explain the key findings from the field.

The Asante traditional system, in a personal communication with a worker at the cultural center in Kumasi said, the Asante system shrouded with symbols derived from proverbs. These proverbs, he explained evolved out of happenings in their everyday life. 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 culturally developed souvenirs evolved. Souvenirs were made and used in most cultures for communication, ie storing information and passing on information on ideas, beliefs, traditions, trade and commerce, moral values and standing, identification, titles, religion, medicine and science. All these Effa-Ababio (2005) said are constituents parts of culture and are the products of the achievements of the people in nature.



Asante traditional proverbial symbols (adinkra)

These symbols have been developed out of wise saying that gave foundation to the sum total of achievement of the Asante people. They are adopted to embellish most of the indigenous works which themselves are functional pieces not art for decoration. The laminated bamboo and leather wall hanging were designed and produced out of these symbols. Today several products have been created out of these in other media while bamboo and leather have not received such creative attention in the local industry.



ADINKRA' SYMBOLS WALL HANGING



BAMBOO MAKEUP KIT



BAMBOO TRADITIONAL STOOL



INTEGRATED BAMBOO AND LEATHER KEY HOLDER



BAMBOO PEN HOLDER



BAMBOO KEY HOLDER



LEATHER PAPER BIN



LEATHER KEY HOLDER



LEATHER WALLET

With the move into contemporarism of the arts, it became necessary to create miniatures that will stand in the gab to carry information on Asante culture and to sustain and educate the youth and other segment of society like tourist who through their collection are able to create market to aid the distribution and education of the larger society.

As stated briefly earlier, tourist art can be understood in terms of the fact that it is an example of commodity patronized by tourist; artifacts that originally had functional uses within Asante culture have entered the commercial world, and acquired a new meaning as objects of consumption of tourists wishing to memorialize symbolism of the African culture and their travels. Asante Carvers have since copied successful forms of artworks not only for economic benefits but to legitimatize and preserve the skill of their forefathers and also pay homage to their counterparts. Foreign art collectors tend to value objects that are old while most Africans see it as a preference to old age (antiques) and as a result see no wrong in replicating them as souvenir.

The Asante Kingdom has emerged as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Ghana and has attracted many foreign art collectors to its markets to sell its merchandise. Its tourist markets have increased exponentially in size and volume over the years. This is as a result of the introduction of varied materials used in the production of the artefacts including leather and bamboo.

A survey on knowledge of tourism conducted from selected Tourist centres

QUESTIONNAIRE	TOURIST CENTERS	YES	NO	% YES	% NO
1. Do you know who a tourist is?	6	3	3	50	50
2. Do you know what a souvenir is?	6	4	2	66.7	33.3
3. Any idea on the categories of tourists that come to Ghana?	6	1	5	20	80
4. Do you know souvenirs tourist patronize most?	6	2	4	33.3	66.7
5. Any reasons for their choices of souvenirs?	6	2	4	33.3	66.7
6. Any idea on the types of souvenirs related to Asante culture	3	2	1	66.7	33.3
7. Do you know any materials mostly used for souvenir production	5	3	2	60	40
8 Do you think there should be change in souvenirs production? (material and designs)	7	2	5	28.6	71.4
9. Do you think souvenirs on the market depicts Asante culture?	7	1	6	14.3	85.7
10. Can we promote Asante culture through souvenir production?	6	0	6	0	100
11. Can Asante culture be preserved through souvenir production?	6	0	6	0	100

According to the data collected, 3 (50%) of the artisans interviewed indicated that they are aware of tourist who patronise their work while the other 3 (50%) does not have any idea. Although 2 respondents understand souvenir and its uses but 1 person is of a different view; to some amid the 1 every small artefact can be a souvenir so far as the artefact is handy, others also believe that a work of art remains so, wherever it is found.

On the other hand, there is no proper documentation on tourist choice; this is justified by 2 respondents being aware of tourist choice as well as their reasons behind it while 4 of them have no idea. The data further confirms that, 4 out of the 6 artisans have knowledge about Asante cultural based souvenirs but 40% does not know the materials mostly used for its production, so without this knowledge how can one advance in its production. This is why there is the need for quality theoretical and practical training in souvenir production. Due to lack of adequate knowledge on souvenir production, 2 (28.6 %) of the artisans believes that there should be changes in souvenir production but 5 (71.4%) of them does not see its importance. All the 6 artisans interviewed indicated that, Asante culture can be promoted and preserved through souvenir production but it is

not being utilised as observed through data analysis.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it may be said that Asante culture can be made known in many forms and one of the major areas is the tourists' art. According to the reports from Ghana Tourist Board, over 50,000 tourists visit Ghana annually. The use of tourist art in both education and economic life of Asanteman has become viable. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism will need to evaluate and increase its investment in local crafts production for souvenirs which should be readily available at tourist centers and on the general market for such tourists. The use of bamboo will also add variety to the market and increase sales because it has provided new material and product to the market. Numerous materials are available in our localities that can be used to promote culture and increase art production in Ghana. Because these materials are local, they will increase the local resource base for souvenir production, thus improving the economy of the state. The youth must be incited to go into local art and craft production to reduce unemployment, generate income for themselves and the nation.

It is recommended that cultural information should be made available to researchers so that it can be documented and published for both academia and the public. It is unfortunate that foreigners get this first-hand information from the chiefs and custodian of culture free while the local researchers have to pay huge sums of money to get the same information.

Today Bamboo, has become great material to supplement wood by this research. It is known that Ghana have so many other indigenous plants that can be introduced for diversity on the market. This will bring competition on our local market and will increase revenue mobilization for development. It is also recommended that Asante cultural studies be included in the extra curricula activities in the basic schools alongside other cultures in the various regions in Ghana. This will go a long way to preserve the cultural values of all ethnic groupings in Ghana.

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