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Design Trends in Gold Jewellery Making in Ghana and Global Cultural Influence

Peggy Ama Fening¹

ABSTRACT

Although Ghana is the second largest producer of gold in Africa, its jewellery industry accounts for very little percentage of the world production total. This observation is partly attributed to the extent to which the Ghanaian jewellery products have been influenced by global culture. The objective of this paper was therefore to investigate the influence of global culture on gold jewellery designs. Data used in this study were collected mainly through direct observations at goldsmiths' workshops and showrooms, jewellery retail shops, during festivals and durbars, and visits to chiefs and traditional rulers' homes. Close and open ended questionnaires and personal interviews were also used to solicit information from 400 respondents comprising; jewellers/Goldsmith, Chiefs and traditional rulers, jewellery traders and the general public. The study showed that a new trend of jewellery design has evolved. There are new innovations in the production of old aphorisms and symbols that has been influenced by global culture. This is reflected in the usage of brand names and their logos as well as the initials of customers' names in making jewellery. The craftsmen were of the view that technological advancement and the use of modern equipment, as well as global fashion have contributed immensely to this observation. On the other hand the chiefs and traditional rulers were of the view that the impact of globalisation if not checked will lead to the erosion of the rich cultural designs of the Ghanaian people.

Keywords: Culture, design trends, Ghana, globalization, jewellery.

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¹ P. A. Department of Industrial Art. KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana. Email: amafening@yahoo.com.

1.0 Introduction

Throughout the vast continent of Africa, jewellery is greatly varied according to the materials available, the lifestyles of the people and their social cultural and religious contacts (Fening, 2001). Designs, materials and techniques are usually of local origin or brought along trade routes, some of which are centuries old (Garrard, 1989). Among some ethnic groups especially the Akans of Ghana, traditional jewellery was made of precious metal gold, probably due to the abundance or otherwise of gold in the land (Meyerowitz, 1949). The use of traditional jewellery in the cultural context of the Ghanaian is more than an adornment item. It is a visual representation of history, belief and political thoughts of a people. Each of the symbols in jewellery are denotes from historical events, individual achievements, proverbs, philosophical concepts, oral literature, moral values, social code of conducts, human behaviour and certain attributes to plant and animal life (Meyerowitz, 1949). The origin of the use of symbols as elements of designs for jewellery is not well documented. Their infusion is associated with certain past events. The Ghanaian historical tradition like most African states suffered a set-back when it confronted invading colonial values and technology. However, the resilience of the Ghanaian tradition and institution prevented a sharp break with the past during this period; a substantial proportion of the craftsmen remained relatively untouched by the new cultural infusion (Ayensu, 1997). Ironically over time trade liberalization and globalization have found its way into the industry. The objective of the paper was therefore to investigate the influence of global culture on gold jewellery designs in Ghana.

2.0 Literature Review

Culture can be broadly defined as the beliefs, value systems, norms, mores, myths, symbols, language, behaviour and structural elements of a given group or society (Parsons, 1999; Onibere et al., 2001; Hugo, 2002). Culture is not a timeless and motionless body of value systems that remains unaltered by social change: rather it is dialectic and incorporates new forms and meanings while changing or reshaping traditional ones (Parsons, 1999). Thus it is conceived as a coherent body of beliefs and practices which are dynamic and changing within particular historical periods. An important external force that has influenced African cultures is globalisation. Globalization is the process of intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries (Akindele et al., 2002). It is an evolution which is systematically restructuring interactions among nations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and several other fields of endeavours, thus increasing the integration of world markets. In some respect, globalization has had disastrous effects on African culture in general. A postcolonial perspective reveals that globalization in its current neo-liberal form has been developed on the foundation of the old colonial empires.

The concepts of culture and design complement each other to the extent that one is inconceivable without the other. Design does not take place in isolation but is embedded in the user's culture. Evidence from literature (Cross 2002), suggests that integration of culture in designing products might lead to product innovation and product acceptance. Early links between culture and design became apparent in the domain of social anthropology where civilization was evaluated through the cultural characteristic left on those objects. This implies that culture is linked with tradition as opposed to the notion of design, which is associated with modernity and innovation. Reconciling the two is a daunting task. However, culture generates diversity and it is naturally revealed in all human actions, including the products that people design. Moreover, it is argued that design shapes the culture and lifestyle of modern society. Observing the design of artefacts produced and consumed in a society often reveals the cultural situation and the people's life, education, needs, wishes and fears.

In terms of product design, identities will never dissolve completely, even in the global world. When products are exported, a glimpse into the cultural identity of the country of origin is embedded in them. However, Zec, (2002) argues that with increasing globalization of markets and competition, there are growing multicultural influences on national identities. That is, globalization is leading to greater similarity of perception and lifestyle in some cases identity. It is observed that this occurs whenever

global trade leads to a greater uniformity of product culture. It is apparent that as users' surround themselves with products, they change their way of living. This implies that cultural differences seem to become less important as users' grow towards a universal, global and homogenous culture. The objective of this paper is to assess the sustainability of this claim or notion in the context of the Ghanaian culture.

3.0 Methodology

3.01 The study area

The study was concentrated in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, mainly Kumasi, Ejisu, Konongo, Bekwai, Offinso, and Mampong (Fig 1: Table 1) however, a large majority of data was concentrated in Kumasi, the capital city of the region where majority of jewellers are found. In each town jewellery workshops, jewellery shops and traditional homes were visited.

Fig. 1: Location map of Ashanti region showing the study sites.

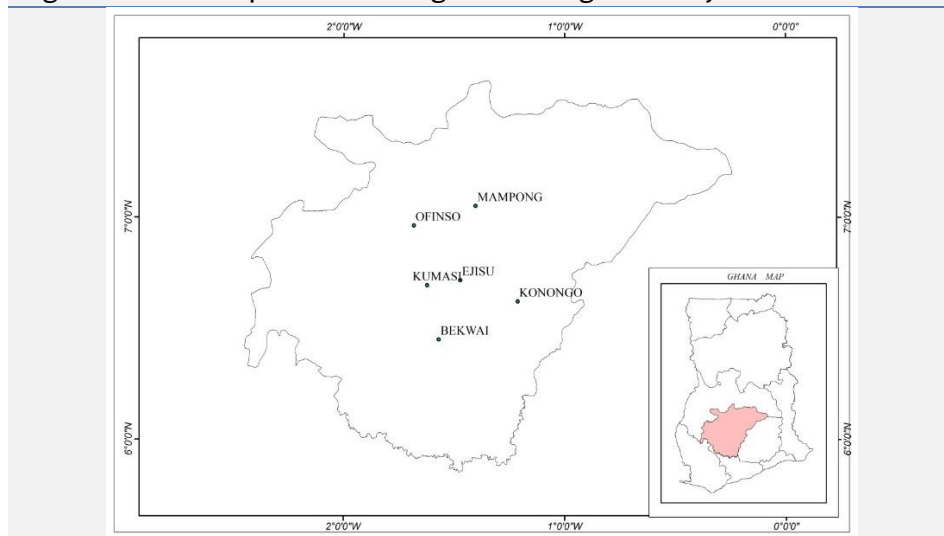


Table 1. Category of population by the study sites

Towns	Jewellers	Chiefs and traditional rulers	Jewellery traders	General public
Kumasi	120	10	45	50
Bekwai	6	2	4	20
Ejisu	8	4	6	20
Offinso	4	6	5	20
Mampong	6	4	4	20
Konongo	6	4	6	20
Total	150	30	70	150

A cross section of the population including the youth was also interviewed. Gender balance was always taken into consideration during data collection. Four hundred people comprising the following were randomly selected for this study (Table 2).

Table 2. Category of population sampled

Category	Number of people	Percentage of total %
Jewellers/ Goldsmith	150	37.5
Chiefs and traditional rulers	30	7.5
Jewellery traders	70	17.5
General public	150	37.5
Total	400	100


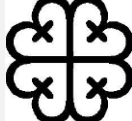





3.02 Data collection

The random sampling method was used for data collection. Data were collected mainly through direct observations at goldsmiths' workshops and showrooms, jewellery retail shops, during festivals and durbars, and visits to chiefs and traditional rulers' homes. Questionnaire and personal interviews to solicit information from respondents were also used in data collection. The questionnaires were designed in open and close ended patterns and pilot tested on 50 respondents which yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.83. This coefficient signified high internal consistency and reliability (Pallant, 2001). The data collection exercise was done between May and July 2014. Ten (10) enumerators were appointed, trained for the exercise and provided with the questionnaires. The questionnaires were orally administered to respondents using the local language where necessary to ensure more accurate information gathering. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) computer package was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency and percentage were used to analyse the facts sought from questionnaire.

4.0 Results and discussions

Goldsmiths in Ghana predominantly cast their gold jewellery following the traditional system, which involved casting from lost-wax moulds or cuttlefish bones. This gave the gold jewellery a uniform heavy two dimensional characteristic. A new trend has however, evolved. Flat sheets of metal are pasted with graphic designs often 'adinkra' symbols (Table 3). The 'adinkra' symbols are proverbial motifs or aphorisms of the Ghanaian culture which, convey messages of wealth, protection, bravery, power or serve as a warning to enemies

Table 3. 'Adinkra' symbols used by craftsmen

symbol	Name	Meaning
	GYE NYAME : A symbol of supremacy	Gye Nyame means (except God). This symbol reflects the supremacy of God.
	NYAME DUA : A symbol of worship	Nyame refers to God who is the almighty and the supreme being. Dua also refers to "tree" which signifies a place of worship.
	AKOMA: A symbol of patient	Meaning take heart or have heart.
	FUNTUNFUNEFU DENKYEMFUNEFU : A symbol of unity in diversity	This reptile is joined together and share common stomach yet they fight over food.
	AKOFENA: A symbol of authority, meaning war sword	It symbolizes gallantry and loyalty and warrior who protect a particular chief.
	GYAU ATIKO: A symbol of valour	Meaning Gyau's hind head-Gyau is the name of a former brave and self-confident Kumasi chief 'Atiko' is the back of his head.
	BIN NKA BI / OBI NNKA OBI A Symbol of harmony.	One should avoid strive for peaceful co-existence to prevail.

Seventy five percent (75%) of jewellers/goldsmiths interviewed admitted utilizing the 'adinkra' symbols than all the other designs. During the survey it was observed that even though goldsmiths are still drawing from 'adinkra' symbols, they are now experimenting with three dimensional effects. The standard of craftsmanship is quite exceptional, with the emphasis on precision. It was also observed during this study that piercing, doming, modelling, folding and wire work are at play where 'adinkra' symbols are now adapted, combined, twisted and created into various forms of jewellery. Earlier these aphorisms and 'adinkra' symbols were produced as original designs with little or no innovation. When asked why this shift or change in production, the craftsmen indicated that this was being done to suit international market and specifications of clients.

Long before independence the traditional kings in Ghana had the unique role as chief custodian of culture and heavily patronized gold jewellery. Today however, Jewellery has become a vital element in everyone's life. Men, women and even children love to wear jewellery articles all the time. Wearing jewellery is the demand of modern fashion. A few years back jewellery was used only on special occasions like festivals, weddings, engagements and other formal ceremonies and it was associated with the brides and married girls only. But nowadays it is worn casually as well as formally and everyone likes to wear beautiful and elegant jewellery items.

A global cultural influence that was observed in gold jewellery making was the trend in the usage of brand names and their logos such as Calvin Klein, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, plate 53, Giorgio Armani, Polo Raphael and others and their logos. Other known designs encountered during the field visits were the usage of the cross; the crucifix was also widely used especially in the area of silver production where both light and heavy weight items mostly produced in pendants, earrings and on rings.

Several reasons could account for the use of particular jewellery symbols and designs. This is because symbols seek to convey messages. The message may lay emphasis on power wealth or fashion. Some are also social or religious in content, conveying a moral message to society. Although a significant number of the general public interviewed particularly the males were familiar with a great number of jewellery symbols and designs, most of them did not know the meanings to these symbols.

The number of younger consumers of jewellery products has increased over the past few years. The youth of today are fashion-conscious and putting a great emphasis on the design element. In many cases, they are influenced by the global trends in clothing fashion, mainly through magazines, movies and internet. In terms of product trends, jewellery designs have been increasingly influenced by global clothing fashion. Consumers, especially women, are opting for more accessories like jewellery to express their sense of style. More women are now adding jewellery accessories as a way of their dressing. Demand for male jewellery is on a rise, as men are becoming more fashion-conscious. The concept that "jewellery is feminine" is fading. Men have realized that jewellery can be masculine. They have begun to acknowledge that fine jewellery is essential to a complete look, and has therefore become an integrated part of men's dressing. They may buy bracelets, rings and pendant necklaces to suit their looks. They may also wear jewellery such as cufflinks and tie-pins to build up a smart look. Yet, articles of men jewellery are still quite limited, and thus its market may be of a huge potential.

Commenting on the trend of the symbols, the craftsmen were of the view that technological advancement and the use of modern equipment have contributed immensely to the fine tuning of process designs and symbols. While this adds some splendour to the finished product and also more conforming to international standards, they were of the view that it also tends to promote the loss of important features. Thus the resulting symbol may fail to convey or carry the same message that the original symbol carries. To be able to understand the meaning of the symbols, one has to undergo cultural learning said the traditional rulers.

The chiefs and traditional rulers indicated that in the past not everybody was privileged to wear gold ornaments of particular design or symbol especially those reserved for traditional rulers. Presently

however, there seems to be no such restrictions. This may be attributed to several factors including education, trade liberalization, globalization and the current political dispensation which gives people the right of choice and makes it difficult to control production, designing and sale of products. This trend of affairs may have both negative and positive implications on the jewellery industry. While in one breath it gives every Ghanaian the right to any jewellery and also enhances the export drive in jewellery, on the other hand offsets the preservation objective of the Asante culture. Thus some particular types of jewellery that was once considered a valuable heritage and formed a tangible part of the historical culture of Ghana may lose its value.

5.0 Conclusion

Ghana is endowed with rich traditions and cultures in which jewellery form an integral part. Jewellery design pertaining to the culture and traditional practices of the Asantes are identified by symbols. The use of a particular design is partly influenced by status, values, rituals as well as aesthetic patterns. This notwithstanding, the trend of jewellery design has been observed to be influenced by globalization. The result is the adulteration and loss of credibility and identity of the tradition and culture of the Ghanaian as a people. The cultural policy of Ghana explains that the Ghanaian culture provides distinct identity to the citizenry. Since culture is dynamic the realities and possibilities of global influence and hybrid cultures cannot be ruled out but all efforts must be made by all stake holders to ensure loss of identity. In this direction all craftsmen in the jewellery industry must be mandated to form an association so as to regulate their production designs.

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