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Preservation and Enculturation of the Metal Smithing Industry in Ghana: The Case of Traditional Brass Casting in 'Krofrom' Village

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Abstract:

Globalization and competition with modern industrial products is the basic and fundamental setback for the viability, sustainability and preservation of local cultural heritage of traditional arts in most part of the world. However, in the Krofrom village of the Ashanti region, this is the opposite because the traditional brass casting industry is still maintained and developed from generation to generation. This study examined the adaptation strategies in the preservation and sustainability of the Krofrom village traditional brass casting technology.

The theoretical and qualitative research methods were used for the study. The results showed that the industry is family based and male dominating. The artisans are aged between 16-68 years with the majority (64%) in the 25-45 age range. The basic tools of the artisans include weighing scale, mortar and pestle, sieve, spatula, plastic containers and a heat source. They use local materials such as bee wax, clay, charcoal, palm fibres and cow dung, which are all obtained from the locality. The artefacts produced are visually aesthetic, unique and simple portraying values of their life orientation, and the cultural belief of the people. The products are mainly purchased by middle men and tourists from the diaspora who visit the village. The enculturation process in the family of artisans is naturally created through informal education or apprenticeship system. The artisans derive maximum satisfaction from the trade and revenue that accrue are functionally able to meet their economic, social, and cultural needs. This has contributed to the cultural mechanism that has sustained and preserved the industry through the generations.

Keywords: Artisans, artefacts, culture, metalsmithing, sustainability.

1. Introduction

Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behaviour. It includes the ideas, value, customs and artefacts of a group of people (Schaefer, 2002). Culture is a pattern of human activities and the symbols that give these activities significance. It is what people eat, how they dress, beliefs they hold and activities they engage in. It is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing people from their neighbours.

However, culture can be transmitted or acquired through information or symbol. Cultural identity is those attributes, behavioural patterns, lifestyles, social structures and norms that distinguish a people from other peoples (Omeoku, 2003). These are passed on laterally or inherited from one generation to another (cultural heritage), or horizontally passed on from one society to another through such agent as globalization

The globalization of the production and distribution of goods and services is a welcome development for many people in that it offers them access to products that they would not otherwise have. However, some are concerned that the changes brought about by globalization threaten the viability of locally made products and the people who produce them. The expansion of trade in cultural products is increasing the exposure of all societies to foreign cultures. And the exposure to foreign cultural goods frequently brings about changes in local cultures, values, and traditions. Although there is no consensus on the consequences of globalization on national cultures, many people believe that a people's exposure to foreign culture can undermine their own cultural identity.

Numerous commentators, from across the traditional political spectrum, have argued that markets destroy culture and diversity. John Gray, an English conservative, in his book entitled *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (2000) has argued that global free trade is ruining the world's politics, economies, and cultures. In his view, traditional and local culture in many parts of the world is being battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the developed world.

Meanwhile, Krofrom a village in the Kwanwoma district of Ashanti Region of Ghana has long been known as the traditional brass casting industrial centre. The industry has survived because of its aesthetic values and become the cultural identity and the economic resources for the village. Although the industry faces many challenges it continues to grow. What could probably be responsible for the sustainability and viability of the industry? Is it the knowledge, values, and beliefs that guide the artisans or is there any cultural mechanism in place that has caused the artisans to maintain and continue with the trade?

This paper evaluates the enculturation process of the Krofrom traditional brass casting industry against the background of, human and material resources, and economic viability of the industry.

2. Methodology

Two basic research methods were used. First, the interdisciplinary theoretical approach was used which involved theories of culture, structural functionalism, traditional art aesthetic, adaptation, and enculturation. Secondly, the qualitative research method was used to solicit information from the artisans and the community.

2.1. Research Theoretical Framework

Krofrom village is one of the villages which is culturally located in the AtwimaKwawnoma district of the Ashanti region, about 10 km from Kumasi the capital city of the region. It is located on Latitude 6°24' N and 43° 15' and 104° 46' West.

Krofrom has been identified as a growing tourist centre mainly due to the attraction of its brass casting industry. Brass casting workshops are scattered all over the town and craftsmen are found busily working most of the time. The total population is about 2,000. The main occupations are farming, sand quarrying and brass casting. There are basically three (3) major religious groups in the community: Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion. Christianity is the dominant religion, which constitutes 86.6% of the population. The other two (2) religions; Islam and Traditional have 5.3% and 0.4% respectively. There are however 6.4% of the population who do not profess any religion. There is religious tolerance and acceptance as all the groupings live in peace and harmony in the community.

The purposes of production are two fold, economically-driven and a responsibility to maintain their cultural heritage. The artisans consider the trade as a source of employment for all the actors along the production chain. The trade is also regarded as a unique cultural identity which is significant to uphold and maintain. Consequently, they have sustained and promoted it against the threat and competition of modern technology.

This believes collaborates the assertion of Suparlan, (1983) who explained that a culture can exist, be developed, and maintained in a social tradition in a community. Such social tradition involves a complex of knowledge, values, and beliefs which are used as a guide or reference to act and behave to meet the needs of the community. A culture therefore has a control mechanism and system of symbol for adaptation by human behaviour in their environment (Geertz, 1973). The process of the adaptation, as explained by Kaplan and Manners (2002), is a process which connects a culture with its environment.

Thus human behaviour is guided (ruled, directed, and controlled) symbolically by his culture consisting of knowledge system, values, and beliefs. Therefore, as a cultural product, traditional brass casting can be seen as a symbol in reflecting its culture by its uniqueness in special aesthetic form; its simplicity, uniformity, and populist. It represents a cultural value and a model that can be reproduced and regenerated through generations. Following this it can be stated that the sustainability of brass casting activities in Krofrom village still function in the conservation of the social system. The structural function (Ritzer & Goodman, 2007), is also reflected in the fact that the trade provide revenue for the artisans to meet their daily needs.

Furthermore, a culture is a social heritage (Rohidi, 1993) which is practiced through enculturation from generation to generation, in the form of socialisation, transmission, and internalization. Kottak (2008) writes that; Enculturation is the process where the culture that is currently established teaches an individual the accepted norms and values of the culture or society where the individual lives. The individual can become an accepted member and fulfil the needed functions and roles of the group. Most importantly the individual knows and establishes a context of boundaries and accepted behaviour that dictates what is acceptable and not acceptable within the framework of that society. It teaches the individual their role within society as well as what is accepted behaviour within that society and lifestyle.

Lindsay (2009) view this process as a means by which people learn the requirements of their surrounding culture and acquire values and behaviours appropriate or necessary in that culture. As part of this process, the influences that limit, direct, or shape the individual (whether deliberately or not) include parents, other adults, and peers. If successful, enculturation results in competence in the language, values, and rituals of the culture.

Scupin (2005) highlights this statement by saying that without enculturation, someone cannot think, behave, and develop himself to function in society. This is also supported by Rohidi, 1993 that cultural mechanism used in the society functions to maintain and continue the existing heritage to the next generation. This is conducted by creating social institutions in a family through enculturation process. Therefore, enculturation is a cultural process to inherit cultural tradition from generation to generation.

It can thus be concluded based on this model, that the artisan community in Krofrom can sustained the brass casting culture to the next generations if the artisans as parents can develop the adaptive strategies through enculturation in their families.

2.2. Qualitative Research

The study was conducted in the Krofrom community. The study sought to gather information on the brass casting industry in relating to the cultural patterns, processes of production, products and marketing channels, function in maintaining life styles, and the enculturation processes within the artisan family environment in the community. The subject of data source was the artisans, their family members, the local community leaders, chief of the village, assembly man, religious leaders and junior high school teachers. Data collection was done using participatory observational technique, questionnaires and interviews, individual life's history, visual recording, archival recording data of village potential and history, photographs, and videos of cultural tradition activities of the community. Data on the artisans was gathered from a sample size of 30 professional craftsmen out of an accessible population of 50 metalsmiths operating at Krofrom. The questionnaires were designed in open and close ended patterns and pilot tested on 20 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 September and November 2015. 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 analyze the facts sought from questionnaire.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Background of Krofrom village

According to Rattray (1923) the art of casting in brass and bronze did not reach any high state of development in Ashanti until after the foundation of the Ashanti kingdom.

The origin of brass casting at Krofofrom coincided with the reign of Nana Prempeh I. It is however, still not known when exactly the art of lost wax casting began in Ashanti nor can it be certain that it was Ife, Benin or Egypt where the technique of lost wax casting was acquired. In spite of the lack of clear evidence as to the origin, brass casting is considered an ancient craft of the Asante (Rattray, 1923).

Krofofrom used to be a farming village until the introduction of lost wax casting by Nana Agyare who reportedly was a member of the Asante King's guild of metalsmiths at Adum in the 17th century. On retiring from active service, Nana Agyare is said to have imparted the knowledge of the technique to his son, nephew and all those who desired to learn the craft (J. Owusu Personal communication, 5th October 2015). The craft which began in Krofofrom as a family trade handed down from father to son has now become the main occupation of virtually the entire population of Krofofrom.

The following physical and social facilities are available which support the industry. There are schools, shops, a market and a community centre for recreation purposes. There are also roads that connect the village to other nearby market centres.

3.2. The Artisans

Results obtained showed that all the artisans interviewed were males and natives of Krofrom. This is not surprising since by their culture it is a taboo for a female to practice as a metal smith. The females are mostly engaged in the sale of raw materials to the artisans (charcoal, clay and sawdust) and sales of the finished products. The artisans are full time practitioners who are in active practice. A few of the older ones above the age of 70 served as master craftsmen who provided backstopping for the younger ones to ensure that the culture of the profession is preserved and passed on appropriately to the next generation. Some of the artisans in addition operate mini shops where the artefacts produced are showcased and sold. The majority (682%) were between the ages of 25 and 45 years. Most of them work in groups of between two and three. The minimum level of education was the junior high school. Each artisan had a minimum of two apprentices, mostly family members or from the community who were under training. By oral tradition the apprentices are taught the history and culture of the trade.

The artisans developed ideas or took inspiration from natural and artificial objects, from myths, proverbs and daily activities. There were no preliminary sketches made. Whatever idea the artisans had was first tried out in wax as sample work. Designs brought in by customers for production were first modelled in wax for the customer's approval before production. The artisans use manual-traditional technology for the production of the artefacts. They work in open spaces, court yards and in front of their houses. An artisan workshop comprises a simple wooden shed, under which the artisan works, a working table and chair, a modified crucible and a container for keeping tools. The furnace is sighted a few metres from the shed. The artisans' tools included the following; weighing scale, mortar and pestle, sieve, plastic containers and a heat source. They use local materials such as bee wax, clay, charcoal, palm fibres and cow dung. The initial funds required for the establishment of a workshop is therefore not very high.

3.3. The Culture of krofrom Village Community and Brass Cast Production

The behaviour and attitude of the people reflects their knowledge, values, and beliefs in nature and God. Their belief system is manifested during cultural and social ceremonies such as marriages and funerals. Their language is interspersing with proverbs and they cherish hard work and sincerely. The elderly people in the community are well respected. These values serve as sources of motivation and regulation for the artisans.

The production techniques for brass casting in the village have survived throughout the generation to the present day, except for a few modifications such as the use of an electrical power blower instead of a bellow and the use of electrical grinder. Some myths and

believes that surrounded the trade such as the performance of certain rituals before commencement of work by artisans are no more practiced (J. Owusu Personal communication, 5th October 2015).

The artisans basically use the lost wax casting method for the production of their artefacts.

The designs are beautifully sculpted out of soft beeswax. Then they are dipped into a mix of very fine charcoal and water to give a coating which holds all the fine details. This is then covered in a mould of coarse palm fibres and clay.

The mould is heated and the wax is poured out. Scrap brass is then melted in a crucible and poured into the mould which is put into a clay kiln for about 4 hours. This allows the metal to melt and drain down into the spaces left by the wax. The mould is taken out of the kiln and after cooling broke open to obtain metal mould. Charcoal is removed from inside hollow moulds and metal is filed down to get smooth finish which is then polished using lemon juice, an iron brush and water.

The artefacts produced are visually aesthetic, unique, and simple. They carry messages which represent the content of their culture that is knowledge, views, values of life orientation, and the belief system. The castings are relatively thin walled (1.5 - 0.3 centimetres). Some of the artefacts are drawn from the natural and manmade world of the people and their perception of the environment, the behaviour and relationships of animals and the functions of various objects. Some animals are known for their strength, wisdom, bravery, or patience. And an object may be identified with peace, war, or the family.

The artefacts are sold as decorative pieces and some can also function as objects for holding flowers, as bed-side lamp holders or receptacles for pens, pencils, keys and kitchen napkins. A whole range of artefacts of different art forms are produced and each art form symbolizes the culture of the people as represented in Fig 1A – I.

3.4. The Production and Marketing System.

The production system starts from the acquisition of raw materials which is obtained from their own environment, the neighbouring villages, or from suppliers. These activities are mostly performed by women some of whom are family members of the artisans. The moulding process is basically performed by the male artisans. The products are mostly showcased at the workshops and marketing is actively done by the artisans themselves some of who own artefacts mini shops. One significant channel of marketing is done by selling to buyers particularly, tourists who visit the village and their workshops. There are other vendors who also buy from the artisans and in turn sell at various markets in cities and towns and cultural centres. Local middle men also purchase the products by lending money to artisan before or during the production process with lower market prices. These middle men market the products in neighbouring countries including Togo, Burkina Faso and Cote d'ivoire.

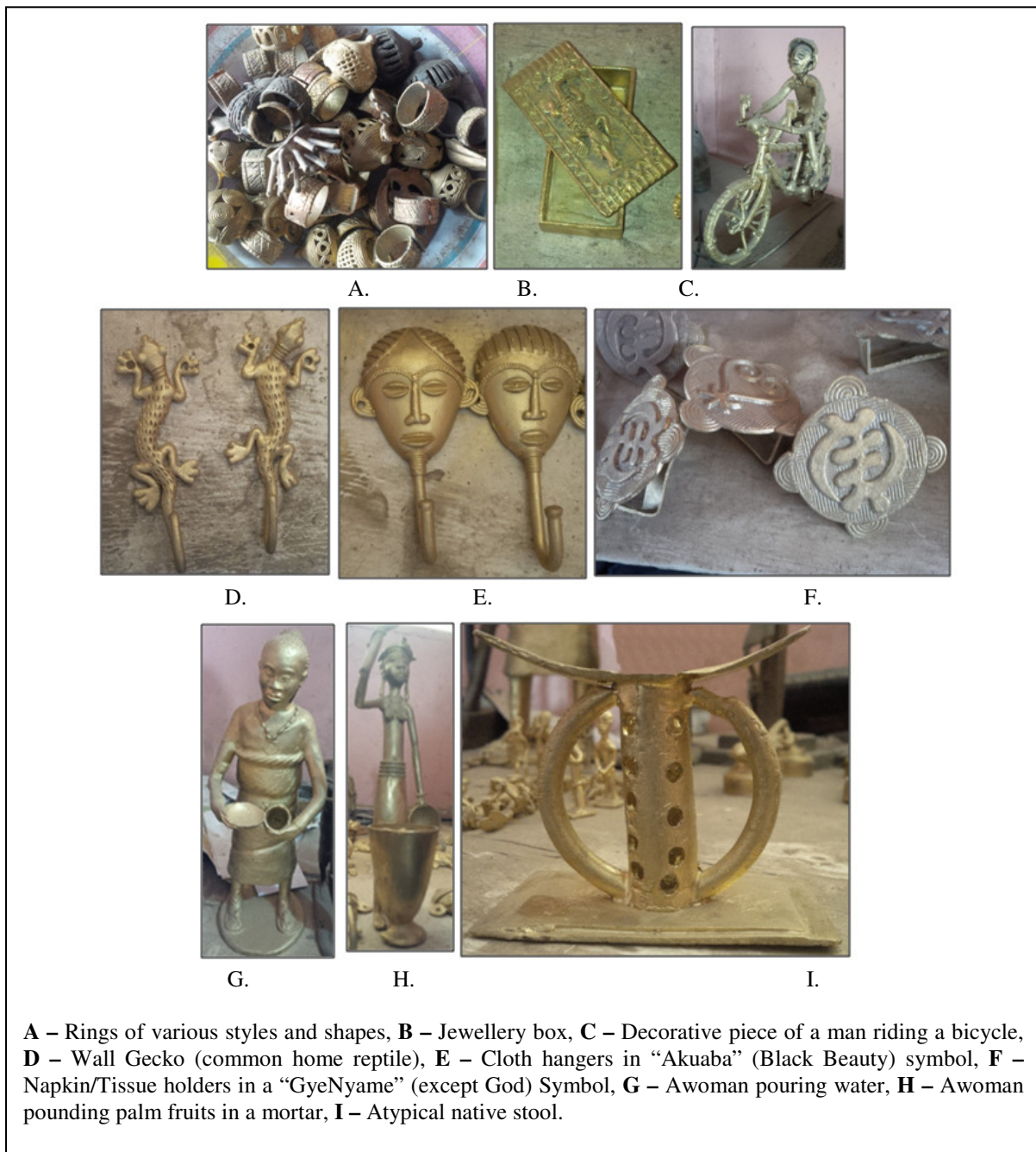
3.5. Role of Brass Casting in the Life of Artisans' in the Community

The sustainability and enculturation of the brass casting industry at Krofrom is dependent on its role in the community. The functionality meets the needs of the artisans economically, socially and culturally. Revenue generated from the sale of raw materials and artefacts serve as a principal source by which their daily livelihood is met, in matters of feeding, clothing, health, transportation and education. The average monthly income generated is comparable to the standard minimum salary of people who work in Government Institutions. The production chain is also conducted by different actors, both male and female which creates employment and a social field that serve as a vehicle for social interaction and maintenance in the community. Also some social needs required in the community can be fulfilled from the income of the business. Brass casting furthermore has become the cultural identity symbol that local residents of Krofrom are very proud of. This has created awareness and the need for its maintenance and sustenance by the community from generation to generation.

3.6. Enculturation of Brass Casting

The process of enculturation in brass casting at Krofrom is manifested through patterns of apprenticeship and informal training. Through the enculturation process, brass casting culture is maintained and continued from generation to generation. The trainee is usually a family member or someone from the community. The apprenticeship system of training is a social institution that contains rules, regulations, and patterns of apprentice and master relationships, in accordance to traditions and customs of the community in order to introduce, maintain, and develop their traditional heritage.

The main pattern of apprenticeship involves helping the master craftsman in the process of production. The learning process uses a teaching approach based on context, which is gradually introduced and trained, learning the stages of production process. Since the learning process takes place in a long period, unwittingly children are able to learn and acquire the needed skills. The artisans in the community at Krofrom are connected to each other to form a system of social action which enables them to realize their creative potential on the local culture.



4. Conclusions

The sustainability and viability of the traditional brass cast in the Krofrom community in Ashanti, Ghana is based on community and family enculturation process. This enculturation process is naturally created through apprenticeship and informal training system. This functions as a cultural mechanism in sustaining the industry through generations. The artisans perform their tasks in a social institution in which people earn their thought, habit, and behaviour from existing customs, norms, and rules of social lifestyle. This social institution serves as the cultural mechanism through which the adaptation strategies for maintaining and preserving the local culture creative potential from generation to generation is achieved.

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