

Adinkra: An Epitome of Asante Philosophy and History

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Abstract

This paper investigated into the philosophical and historical representations of the celebrated Adinkra cloth production using the case study approach at Ntonso in the Ashanti region of Ghana. Data were solicited through personal and telephone interview as well as participant observation from respondents who were purposively sampled. The study revealed that the Badie dye was locally obtained and prepared using the barks from the Badie tree. There are no additives mixed with the prepared dye as purported by several writers. It was also realized that the entire Adinkra cloth process from the acquisition of the tools and materials, production processes and the symbols usually printed in the cloth was firmly rooted in an interesting and thought provoking philosophical and historical foundation which portrays the African as a wise, creative artist. The study more importantly voiced out that though Asantes and Africans in general usually do not have written documentaries of their histories and philosophy that in anyway does not imply that these literally are absent. The rich artistic productions of residents in Africa are in fact a visual representation of their unadulterated histories and philosophies. The Adinkra cloth is but one example of such inspiring assets of the Asantes that are repositories of their rich philosophy and history.

Keywords: *Adinkra* Cloth; History; Philosophy; Badie dye

1. Introduction

The *Adinkra* cloth is one of the indigenous and traditional artifacts that is making inroads in the big umbrella of the rich cultural heritage among the Asante ethnic society. It said to be the only African cloth printing tradition in pre-colonial Africa (Frimpong, Asinyo & Amankwaah, 2013). It is a type of planographic or surface printing that employs the relief block as a stamping tool for registering designs on a laid cloth (Awutah, 2012). Danzy (2009) views Adinkra as an ideographic form of writing. She says that the *Adinkra* cloth with its pictorial forms portray the beautiful cultural heritage of the Asantes. It is one of the wonderful and breathtaking artistic productions that drag several tourists from their homelands to the soils of Ghana. The histories surrounding the *Adinkra* cloth as an artwork and as a craft have to be known to help the general populace appreciate the genesis of this marvelous cloth. More importantly, the *Adinkra* cloth has various philosophical concepts and ideologies. They are tools that convey the thoughts, beliefs and values of the Asante people. Frimpong et al views the *Adinkra* as pictorial symbols that represent the ideals and values of the Asantes vividly incorporated in folklores, proverbs and historical events. They give warnings and offer advice in the light of acquisition of tools and materials, the actual cloth production as well as the *Adinkra* symbols used as the principal motifs in the cloth.

This research paper is a critical eye opener to help in ascertaining the undiluted information of the *Adinkra* cloth since there are misinformation as well as contradictions in the already written histories and philosophies of the celebrated cloth among the Asantes. It sets matters straight regarding the origin of the cloth, its philosophical and historical connotations. This will broaden the knowledge base of readers on the *Adinkra* cloth.

2. Methodology

The research design employed by the researcher in carrying out the research was qualitative research. The researcher adopted this approach to help him collect an extensive amount of verbal data from a small number of participants through interview and observation. He then organized the collected data into small forms that gives them coherence, and used verbal descriptions to portray the situation he studied. Interpretative narratives were constructed from the data to capture the complexity of the phenomena under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The descriptive research method was used for the study. The researcher decided to use the elements of this research method to assist him vividly describe the chain of events about the *Adinkra* cloth production witnessed at Ntonso in a systematic fashion to enable him decipher the philosophical and historical underpinnings of the marvelous indigenous art creation. This accounts for the choosing of the descriptive study for the research.

The population for the study was *Adinkra* cloth producers at the study centre thus Ntonso. Purposive sampling was implemented for the selection of the sample for the study. Two skilled masters and five apprentices were deliberately selected and interviewed because these were seen to help immensely in realizing the objectives laid out for the study (Kumekpor, 2002). Participant observation, in-depth interviews as well as telephone interviews were the main instrumentations used for the soliciting of the required data for the study. The researcher also took part in the activities witnessed at Ntonso such as the cutting of *Adinkra* blocks and

printing of the patterns in the clothes. This aided him in gleaning detailed information about the philosophies and histories surrounding the *Adinkra* cloth production. Also, the researcher used the semi-structured form of interview in addition to the participant observation because he believes that being flexible with the interviewees will assist him get the needed data. Moreover, the researcher intended making an intensive and systematic notes on the responses from the respondents so as to draw valid and objective conclusions about the *Adinkra* cloth and its philosophies and histories. This explains why the researcher used the semi-structured interview.

The researcher implemented the data analysis spiral that employs the interpretivist theory to analyze the data for the study. The data was first organized by arranging the specific facts in a logical or chronological order. Large amounts of text was broken down into smaller units such as sentences, stories etc. Then, the entire data was perused severally to get the sense of what it contains as a whole. Preliminary interpretations of the organized data were made. The data was classified or grouped into common categories or themes. Meanings and interpretations were then sought from each of the categories by identifying patterns. The data was then finally summarized.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. *Adinkra* cloth: An Epitome of Asante Philosophy and History

The word *Adinkra* is a term that is used to bid farewell to the departed soul (Adom, 2011; Asihene, 1978). It is the name assigned to the cloth that is generally accepted among the Asantes as a traditional mourning cloth though other types of the same cloth can be worn for other occasions. There are several views with respect to the history concerning how the Asantes learnt the *Adinkra* printing skills.

Adinkra, according to oral tradition, was originally the name of a king of *Gyaman* in Cote d'Ivoire who was beheaded at the beginning of the 19th century during the reign of Nana Bonsu Panyin of Asante for claiming to have in possession, a replica of the prestigious the Asante Golden Stool which was in reality a farce after it was captured by the Asantes. After his demise, the craftsmen who worked for him were taken as captives to the Asante kingdom. It is asserted that they introduced the art of making *Adinkra* cloth using the patterns or symbols found on king *Adinkra's* clothes and on the columns of his stool in Asante (Rattray, 1927). Awutah (2012) however opines quite in contrast to the view of Rattray (1927) that the *Adinkra* cloth was rather the mourning cloth worn by the King of *Gyaaman* after his people were defeated and captured by the then Asantehene. It is said that the guild designers who designed this cloth for the kings were forced to teach the Asantes the craft. King *Adinkra's* first son, *Adinkra* *Apaa*, who was said to be well versed in the *Adinkra* craft, was forced to teach *Kwaku Dwaku* who later taught his two friends *Kwadwo* and *Pinkyehene* (Quarcoo, 1994). This origin of the *Adinkra* productions clearly portrays the history regarding the Asantes. It educates us of the warlike and fighting spirit of the forebears of the Asantes. Again, it shows the superiority and powerful nature of the Asante kingdom since the 17th century. Moreover, it shows that our ancestors had relations with the *Denkyiras*.

Asihene (1978) as quoted in *Adom* (2009) also traces the origin of the *Adinkra* designs that they were first produced for the kings of *Denkyira*, *Takyiman* and *Ashanti* in ancient times several years before the reign of king *Adinkra*. It is said to have been called *Adwinikena*, which was later believed to have been later adulterated to *Adinkra*. This clearly shows that the *Adinkra* cloth was won by the royalty and important personalities like kings and other well meaning individuals in the Asante society. There is however a contradiction with the date of origin of the *Adinkra* craft among the Asantes. Another view traces it as far back as 1817, when the English T.E. *Bowdich* took a piece of *Adinkra* cotton cloth from *Kumasi*. The symbols on the cloth were printed using the carved calabash stamps and a vegetable-based dye (*Adinkra aduro*). There were fifteen different *Adinkra* symbols in the cloth. Some of them were *nsroma* (stars), *dono ntoasuo* (double *Dono* drums), and diamonds. The *Adinkra* cloth is now deposited at the *British Museum* in *London*. The picture below was the *Adinkra* cloth in question which was sent to *King Williams I*. This reminds us and teaches our future generation of the relationship *Ghanaians* in general had with our colonial master *Great Britain*.



Fig.1. *Bowdich's Adinkra* cloth sent to *king Williams I*

Some scholars believe that the Asantes learnt the *Adinkra* cloth production from the Brongs after the Asantes defeated the Dormaas before 1699. It's asserted that the Asantes learnt various craft productions from the Brongs including the *Adinkra* craft in the late 17th century. This may account for the various marital relations the Asantes have with the Brongs. There is yet another belief held by the indigenous Asantes that the *Adinkra* cloth together with its symbols came along with the Asantehene's golden stool brought down by Okomfo Anokye, the first chief priest. They believe that *Adinkra* cloth was on top of the stool when it was brought down from the heavens. However, this is not generally accepted by scholars since early depictions of the golden stool in paintings and in stories never mentioned this.

Other scholars are crediting the invention of the *Adinkra* craft to the Muslims because of the trade relations that the Asantes had with them in the North. This is largely because some of the *Adinkra* symbols resemble the Islamic writing, amuletic symbols and the Kufic script used by the Mohammedans (Danzu, 2009). Some of the *Adinkra* symbols that have Muslim roots include *Aban* (Compound house), *Damedame* (Checkerboard game), *Kramo bone amma yeanhu kramo pa* (It's difficult to distinguish between the good Muslim and the bad Muslim) etc. This underscores the hospitality of the Asantes, welcoming people from diverse cultures to live in their midst, having economic and social dealings with them. It a reminder to this generation and our future generations that we must always live in unity, not divided by political affiliations, racial differences, gender, ethnic societies etc.

3.1.1. History of the *Adinkra* Cloth production in Ntonso

The *Adinkra* cloth production is credited to three friends who were natives of the Ntonso village by names Kwaku Nsiah, Kwadwo and Pinkyehene (Nubour, 2006). According to oral tradition, these friends prepared their dyes in small vessels with mud and later with 'Kuntunkuni' roots and 'Koben' natural fibre dyes. They used cocoyam and cassava to create their relief blocks of the *Adinkra* patterns. Later, Kwadwo Anane carved the first calabash stamps used for the *Adinkra* printing today (Nana Yaw Boakye, personal communication, November 10, 2015). The substrate for the printing was hand woven cloth made with hand-spun yarns. Formerly, about 90% of the population of the Ntonso community was engaged in the *Adinkra* cloth productions (Frimpong, Asinyo & Amankwaah, 2013). However, there is dwindling in the number today since the youth are no more interested in the *Adinkra* cloth production business.

3.1.2. History of the *Badie* Dye (*Aduro*)

The dye used for the printing of the *Adinkra* cloth is not bought but is prepared locally by the use of the barks peeled from the stem of the *badie* tree (*Adansonia digitata*) grown mostly in the Brong Ahafo region in the North Savannah areas though the *Adinkra* production villages have few plantations of the tree (Adom, 2009). The stems of the *badie* tree are not broad but estimating measures between 15cm-35cm. The *Adinkra* dye is a vegetable dye. 'Ba' literally means the 'baby' in the local dialect meaning it is the young fresh barks that greater quantity of dye is accrued but not the dried barks (*Dadie*- dried barks) which yields less or no dye. For conservation purposes, the tree is not cut but the barks are gently peeled off the stem after marking along the section to be cut. It is left for about forty minutes for the bark to freely separate itself from the stem. This is because a sticky substance binds it to the stem. The *badie* tree develops fresh barks for peeling every three or four months. This is dependent largely on environmental conditions such as the availability of water, sunlight etc. If a *badie* plant gets the required nutrients and resources, it easily develops the fresh barks for constant usage. An interview with one of the workers revealed that the people are very cautious of the *badie* plants and treats it as if it were human because they do not want it to be extinct or even scarce like Teak and other plants. The researcher realized that the *Badie* plant used for the production of the paint for the printing have been conserved for posterity by their forebears. Several taboos concerning the indiscriminate felling of the tree would result in serious health implications and an eventual death. This has sustained the *Badie* plants over the several decades. Formerly numerous rituals were performed around the colossal *Badie* trees to thank the gods and ancestors for the constant production of 'Aduro' thus dye for the printing of the cloth. This is an eye opener to us how our forebears lived in harmony with the things in nature. This educates us that our ancestors had the value of stewardship towards the things in nature and thus conserve resources in nature. Also, it tells us that our forebears believed in animism and belief in God and ancestors.

The prepared dye paste can last for years without spoilage or losing its potency. However, if it is left uncovered and items like banana etc. fall into it, it will lose its stickiness and will lose its potency. The stereotyped processes for the acquisition and preparation of the dye have remained the same with few infiltrations which is very minimal. This explains how the Asantes values the traditions of their ancestors and how their rich cultural heritage has been promoted and sustained.

3.1.3. History of the *Adinkra* Symbols

The researcher gathered that there are sixty (60) main *Adinkra* designs that are used for the production of *Adinkra* production. This seems contrary to the hundred (100) *Adinkra* designs asserted by some authors. The reason that may account for this is that different renditions of the same *Adinkra* pattern are counted as one. For instance, the researcher saw three different versions of the Sankofa *Adinkra* pattern which was counted as one by

the interviewee. However, there have been various modifications of the *Adinkra* patterns and thus additions to the original *Adinkra* patterns handed down to us by our forebears (Adom, 2009).

The *Adinkra* symbols and its meanings stamped and used for the mourning of a particular deceased relative usually informed us of the behavioural traits of the deceased. For instance, a mourning cloth with the Aya (Fern) *Adinkra* symbol stamped in it tells us that the deceased had an enduring spirit like the fern that can stand several weather conditions and still survive. A cloth of such nature is worn to show honour and respect for the deceased soul and to inform the living to mimic his splendid example.

The *Adinkra* symbols were also believed to be used to communicate with the dead ancestors who are said to be policing the living to seek for their favour and blessing. It is said that kings used the *Adinkra* clothes as mediums in conveying their attributes, personal philosophies and style of governance to the public.

The *Adinkra* cloth and its symbols is a window to the religious life of our forebears. The '*Gye-nyame*' (1) symbol which means 'except God' points to the strong belief of our ancestors about the supremacy and magnitude of the omnipotent creator who is at the apex in the hierarchy of spirits believed to exist in the cosmos among Africans in general. Danzy (2009) is of the view that the Gye Nyame symbol is the most popular of the *Adinkra* symbols used for decoration on various artefacts, showing the deep religious character of the Ghanaian people. Other symbols like '*Nyame nti*' (5) (Because of God), '*Nyame nnwu na mawu*' (4) (I won't die because God does not die), '*Nyame biribi wo soro*' (3) (God there is something in the heavens), '*Nyamedua*' (2) (God's tree), '*Nyame ye hene*' (6) (God is king) are indications of the pivotal role God played in the everyday life endeavours of our ancestors. It projects their staunch devotion and faith in him that successful events are as a result of his blessings. Therefore appease him with loyal devotion and reverence coupled with good moral life in line with the laid down rules and regulations by the ancestors would ensure one's success in life.

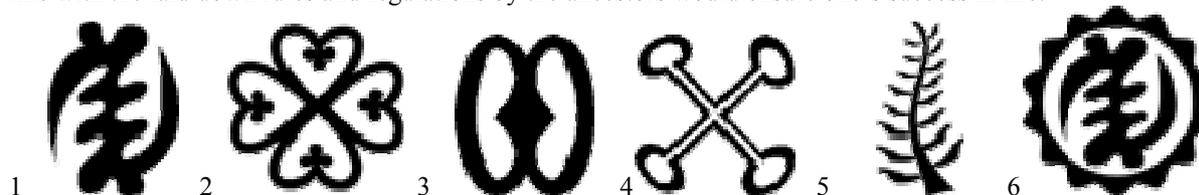


Fig.2. Adinkra Symbols

The '*Mframadan*' (Wind-resistant house) historically tells us the architectural structures that occupied the landmass of our ancestors that though they were made from bricks and stone, they were carefully crafted to make it resistant to environmental dangers such as wind, rain etc. Today's architects and building constructors must learn a clue from the way our forebears constructed their architectural structures.

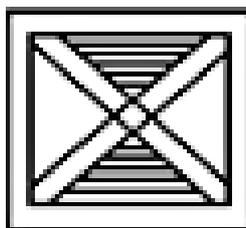


Fig.3. Mframadan

We learn the political, economic, religious and social life history of our forebears through the various ceremonies and ritualistic performances which were attended with the wearing of various types of the *Adinkra* clothes. The printed patterns of Kings and chiefs differing greatly from subjects portray the social status and respect for authority among the Asantes.

3.1.4. History of *Adinkra* Blocks

The stamps for printing the *Adinkra* patterns are hand cut from gourd or pieces of calabash usually referred to as '*Mpakiwa*' by the Ntonso indigenes. It measures about three inches in diameter or 5-8 centimeters. Three or four sticks of stiff palm-leaf ribs are hammered at the back of the calabash and attached. It is tied together at one end with a strip of cloth to serve as a handle, held between the forefinger and thumb.

Owusu-Sampah (2014) explains that the carvings of the symbols on the gourds are done by men. This may be because the first gourds that were used for the *Adinkra* cloth production might have been produced by men. To be able to preserve them, the calabash stamps are soaked for a few minutes in hot '*Adinkra duro*' to keep them bug-free between use.

Before the symbols are carved on the outer part of the calabash, the inside of the dried, thick-skinned calabash is covered with shea butter for a year to slightly soften it. Then the outer skin is scraped gently with a sharp knife. The symbol is first drawn onto it with a pencil. The negative space is carved away with a gouge.

Today, silk screens and hand blocks are used alongside the gourd created stamps for registering prints in *Adinkra* clothes. The gourd or calabash stamps still maintain the originality and uniqueness of the *Adinkra*

cloth production. Also, it paints vividly, the cultural heritage of the Asante people.



Fig.4 Adinkra printing blocks
(Source: Photographed by the researchers)

3.1.5. History of the Cloth or Material for Adinkra cloth production

Cotton fabrics especially Calico are mainly used for the production of *Adinkra* cloths. Others woven Kente strips and embroidered fabrics are sewn in-between the Calico stamped sections. In the past, dark brown, black or red background fabrics were used as supports for the printing of the *Adinkra* clothes. This suggests the primary use of the *Adinkra* clothes thus for funeral ceremonies. The restricted use of the cloth mainly for funerals has been widened to its usage for gay and festive occasions such as weddings, outdoorings, naming, etc. Several coloured background clothes such as yellow, orange, white etc. produced with silk, rayon, satin, khaki and cotton are imported into the country and used for *Adinkra* cloth production normally referred to as *Kwasiada Adinkra* or Sunday *Adinkra* (Frimpong et al, 2013).

3.1.6. History of Badie Dye Preparation

The barks are cut into smaller pieces and are carefully pounded to break the pieces into their fibrous state. They are soaked for some days to make them soft. The liquid surrounding the barks must look brownish like the Coca-Cola beverage drink and quite sticky. It is then pounded. The pounded barks look fluffy. It is a labour intensive process and the pounding can take about five to eight hours to be able to break the barks into their fibrous state. If the pounding is not done efficiently it adversely affects the dye yield, reducing it considerably. Owing to the intense and vigorous pounding, the workers sometimes have some health implications. This may account for why men domineer in the production of the dye. With the advent of technology and to curb this labour intensive process, machine was implemented in the pounding but unfortunately, the machine breaks it into powdery substance. The powdery substances do not yield a lot of dye and subsequently renders the barks useless after the dyeing. This is because the fibrous barks after gleaning the dyes are used for mushroom production. The fibrous substance is watered for ten (10) days for the mushroom to spring up. This cannot be carried out if it is powdery.

The fibrous substance is then boiled for exactly five hours. If the required five hours is not reached or even exceeded, the dye stuff turns into hard black flaky substances and does not yield a lot of dye. The required quantity of water needed for three bundles of badie barks needed for the preparation of a quantity of dye as their yardstick is 120 gallons of water which is equivalent two barrels of water. After the five hour boiling, distillation takes place and the liquid substance turns sticky and blackish dye. The quantity usually reduces to only ten (10) gallons. Today, the same traditional processes for the dye extraction from the badie barks are carried out thus peeling and breaking of the barks, soaking, pounding, boiling, sieving and extraction. This tells us that the forebears of the Asantes put up measures to protect their rich cultural heritage. Therefore, the younger generation must tread their footsteps by endeavoring to constantly maintain our traditional cultural values and beliefs. This in anyway doesn't suggest that we embrace some changes that would embellish our rich cultural heritage after all the good adage of our forebears says 'The one creating the path do not know his steps are crooked' thus, our forebears reckoned that their steps could be wrong or even outmoded with time and years of experimentation. Therefore, we couple our rich traditional processes with modern technological processes that maintain and heighten the traditional processes while maintaining the gems of our cultural heritage.



Barks of the Badie Tree

Soaking of the barks

Pounding of the barks

Fig.5. The Prepared Badie paste (Source: Photographed by the researcher)

3.1.7. History of the Adinkra cloth Printing

According to Asihene (1978) the large piece of fabric is stretched taut on a clean ground by pegging the ends. Sometimes, the fabric is spread on a floor and covered with hard paper boards and nailed at the corners and the selvages.

The stamp block is dipped into the dye bowl and is shaken a bit if it picks too much of the dye. The stamp is applied directly, freehand onto the stretched cloth. The block is stamped on the cloth according to the design planned by the textile designer. Usually, rectilinear grids are create with the comb printing where wooden combs are dipped into the dye and printed on the cloth. Repeated patterns of the Adinkra symbols are registered in the created spaces in a form of tessellations. However, the researcher noticed in the study area that preliminary planning of designs was not very important to the textile designer. The designer always felt that he has done the printing for a long time and thus do not need any prior planning.

On some occasions, to heighten the design, Asihene noted that the cloth to be printed is sometimes decorated with horizontal bands of silk yarns arranged in a repeat pattern of yellow, red, black, green and blue. After printing, the cloth is dried and there is neither after-treatment nor any other finishing process.



Fig.6. Adinkra printing process (Source: Photographed by the researchers)

Today, there are several industrial machines that are used for Adinkra machine printing. These machines, according to Frinpong et. al (2013), perfectly simulates the indigenous Adinkra cloth productions . However, the originality and uniqueness of the designs are lost. The various stamps carved from the calabash are tinted with dye and pressed in sequence onto plain cotton cloth, pegged on the ground. Today raised platforms with sack covering act as the printing table. The designing is done according to the message the wearer or owner

of the cloth intends to convey to the participants of the event. The quality of the cloth also shows the status of the one wearing it.

3.2. Types of Adinkra Prints

There are four types of *Adinkra* cloth, namely, the *Mpakyiwa* (plain background type); The *Nhiwimu* (linear marking type); The *Kente* strip type and the *Nwomu* type.

The Mpakyiwa (Plain background type)

In this process, the cloth to be printed is laid on the printing table which is padded with either foam or newspapers. The *Adinkra* block is dipped into the evenly mixed Badie dye and stamped onto the fabric at a planned arrangement pattern by the printer. The cloth is then removed and dried. It has no designs at the background of the cloth thus, *Mpakyiwa* or plain.

The Nhwimu (Linear marking type)

After the cloth has been laid on the padded table, a wooden comb with strands of yarns at the tips of the projections is dipped into the Badie dye and it is dragged in the cloth horizontally and lengthwise with equal spaces to create an interconnection of squares. The spaces in-between the lines should measure about 45cm. These spaces are stamped with *Adinkra* patterns.

The Kente Strip type

The background cloth used for the production of this type of *Adinkra* cloth is a blend of Calico fabric and Kente. The Kente stoles are sewn in-between the Calico strips. The *Adinkra* blocks are then stamped on the plain parts of the Calico fabric leaving the kente sewn areas unstamped.

Nwomu (Embroidery type)

The process for this type of *Adinkra* cloth is very similar to the Kente strip type. The difference however is that instead of sewing Kente strips with the Calico material, embroidered pieces of cloth are rather used. The plain Calico sections are stamped leaving the embroidered areas unstamped.

Frimpong, Asinyo & Amankwaah (2013) contends that the embroidery *Adinkra* type is one of the recent developments in the *Adinkra* craft enterprise which is as a result of technological advancement. Today, *batiking* has been incorporated into *Adinkra* cloth production. This has heightened the aesthetic value of the *Adinkra* cloth today and thus widened its usage for diverse occasions.

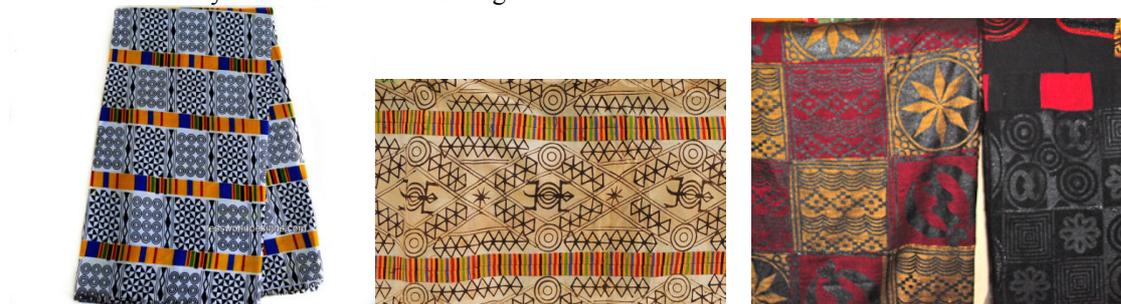


Fig.7. Different types of Adinkra Cloth
(Source: Photographed by the researcher)

3.2.1. Finishing of the Adinkra cloth

No additives are added to the prepared dye to give it a shiny or glossy effect though some authors like Asihene (1978) asserts that originally, iron fillings known as '*etia*' were added to the solution during boiling. He adds that to make the dyes look shiny after printing, honey, albumen or sugar is added and stirred when it cools down. These finishing techniques as well as fixing such as ironing is necessary as far as pounding and boiling processes are carried out well. However, ironing can be done but the caution is that the ironing is done at the back of the printed cloth.

3.2.2. System of Training for Adinkra cloth production

The skills of the *Adinkra* dye preparation and printing are acquire through informal education thus apprenticeship. Parents pass on the skills to their children and children to their children. This explains why the art production is usually a family based business. Therefore the *Adinkra* production was handed to the present generation by their forebears or ancestors.

3.2.3. Functions of the Adinkra cloth

The darker shades of the *Adinkra* clothes are mostly worn during funerals. These darker shades include red, brown, russet etc. The black and white *Adinkra* clothes are usually worn for thanksgiving ceremonies, naming ceremonies and parties. This same type of *Adinkra* cloth is worn during the funeral rites of the first child of a couple known as '*Sodoo*' by the Asantes. Important durbars and festivals also witness the parading of *Adinkra* clothes. For instance, during Awukudae and Akwasidae occasions when purification rites are carried out, white *Adinkra* clothes as well as black *Adinkra* clothes are worn at various sections of the performances. The *Adinkra*

clothes with Kente or embroidery strips sewn together with the stamped sections are worn chiefly for joyous occasions.

3.3. *Adinkra* cloth: A visual representation of Asante Philosophy

The symbolic *Adinkra* patterns are embedded with philosophical concepts of the rich culture of the Asantes. They probe into the accepted way of life, values and norms that were to govern the life of every Asante. These though are seen as mere religious and cultural values, a critical analysis reveal that they are pregnant with philosophical underpinnings that ensure moral chasteness and uprightness as well as good communal living of peace and prosperity.

For instance, the *Adinkra* symbol '*Sankofa*' was always a wakeup call to Asantes to fetch what was forgotten. Thus, if words and actions were wrongly shown, one needed to be humble, apologise and ensure peace. After all, it is not wrong to correct our mistakes. What does this tells us about our ancestors? Indeed, they were humble, peace loving individuals. What do we learn from this? We also need to mimic their lives by being humble and peace loving.

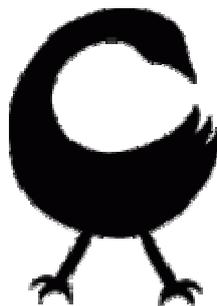


Fig.8. The Sankofa Adinkra Symbol

Gyawu Atiko, literally means 'the Gyawu's occiput. Gyawu was a sub-chief of Bantama who at the annual Odwira festival is said to have had his hair shaved in this fashion. The Asantes celebrated several festivals. One of such festivals is the Odwira festival to thank gods and ancestors for their blessings to societal activities. Coiffure and hairstyle was of great importance in the former Ashanti kingdom even permeating from women to men. It is also possible that this *Adinkra* symbol '*Gyawu Atiko*' narrates vividly the warlike commanding spirit of this Asante king Gyawu, who was a great warrior. It is said that he fearlessly led the Asantes to defeat their enemies in wars. Why is only his back skull or occiput represented? It was probably because he always took the initiative during wars, standing at the forefront and others only saw and could perfectly describe his back skull. What lessons do we glean? That our ancestors were bold and confident, never gave up easily to daunting situations. Therefore, we need to demonstrate their warlike, persistent attitude to confront the numerous challenges we face as individuals, groups and as a nation.



Fig.9. Gyawu's Occiput

The '*Nkinkyim*' (Twisted pattern) *Adinkra* symbol is an embodiment of the social and economic concepts of the Asante. There was the need to adjust oneself to suit any economic situation one finds himself. Also, as a symbol of versatility, it reminded the Asante the need to amass several skills so as to help him in diverse economic situations. This underscores why our forebears were hunters, fishermen, farmers, artists etc. If the season for hunting fails one could switch to farming or weaving. What do we learn from this philosophical concept? There is the need for us to experiment and learn various skills to help us succeed in various economic heats, a situation that marks the world we live in today.

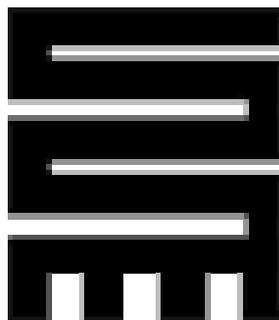


Fig.10 Nkyinkyim

The 'Dwennimmen' Adinkra symbol symbolizes strength coupled with humility. The ram will fight fiercely against any adversary, but it also submits itself humbly to slaughter. This indicates that even though we may be strong thus powerful or influential, we need to cultivate the quite quality of humility. After all, the Holy book compares the righteous or favoured ones to be saved to sheep. Also, the humility nature of the animal may stand for one's readiness to learn and develop wisdom.

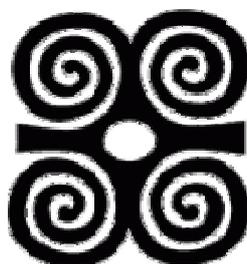


Fig.11. Dwennimmen-"ram's horns"

The *Nkonsonkonson* Adinkra symbol literally means 'connected chains'. The individual chains are connected together portraying the ideas of unity among humans. It serves as a reminder to societal members that in unity lies strength thus, humans have to be united to foster the development of the society. It symbolizes the cooperation among individuals in the community.

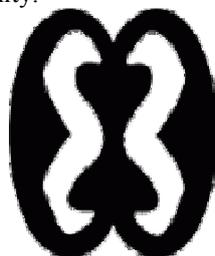


Fig.12. Nkonsonkonson-"Chain Link"

The Adinkra symbol Wawa aba-"seed of the wawa tree" because of its hard nature is used to represent the spirit of perseverance or insistence to trial some situations and conditions such as sickness, poverty, the loss of a dear one etc.

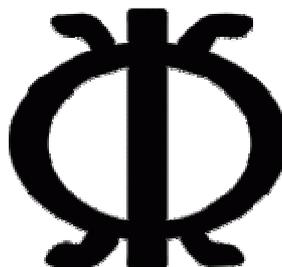


Fig.13. Wawa aba-"seed of the wawa tree"

The Ananse ntontan-"Spiders web" Adinkra symbol stands as a symbol of wisdom, creativity and the complexities of life. Ananse, the spider, is a well-known character in African folktales believed to be the wisest. Also, the mastery manner and skill that the spider weaves its spider's web portrays its wisdom and ingenuity.

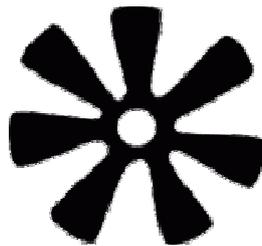


Fig.14. Ananse ntontan-"Spiders web"

Each of the *Adinkra* patterns has philosophical meanings and interpretations that educates us about the history and cultural life of the Asantes. It throws more light on the accepted norms, values and general way of life accepted in the Asante community. Adom (2009) agrees when he said that 'the *Adinkra* symbols manifest a number of proverbs and the verbal arts of Ghanaians which are epitomes of specific values'.

There is however various variations as well as entirely new *Adinkra* symbols as handed down to us by our forebears. These new ideas that have developed are because of the social, cultural, and historical changes we experience today.

(Danzy, 2014) cites an example of an *Adinkra* symbol that has undergone some of these changes. The *Nkonsonkonson Adinkra* symbol was created before the slave trade with Europeans. The symbol meant law and justice. Offenders of crime in the past were sold into slavery as punishment. However, in present day Ghana, the symbol has undergone a change in meaning. Offenders are no more taken as slaves but rather for today, the breaking of the law would result in imprisonment.

Another *Adinkra* symbol that has undergone some changes is the symbol Gye Nyame or 'except for God'. This symbol in the past reflected the Akan's belief in the supremacy of God. Today it also stands for the supremacy of God though it is often applied to the Christian God.

3.4. Philosophy behind the *Adinkra* Blocks or Stamps

The forebears of the Asantes might have used calabash or gourd to create the designs or symbols for several reasons. It may be because of the durability nature of the calabash shell, thus, its ability to withstand any harsh weather condition prolonging its lifespan and usage.

Also, the calabash shell is non-porous, ensuring the conservation of the *Badie* paste which would have lost if any porous material was used. The material is light in weight thereby making its handling easy. This poses less stress on aged printers who print several yards of the *Adinkra* cloth.

3.5. Philosophy behind the cloth for *Adinkra* production

Since the *Adinkra* cloth was meant for funerals, the background colours for the cloth for the *Adinkra* production were somber colours like red, brown, black etc. Black symbolizes sadness and thus portrays the melancholy state in which the family of the deceased is in. On the other hand, red also symbolizes close blood relations, therefore close relatives of the deceased wore it to portray their relationship with the deceased. It again shows the seriousness of the loss associated with the death of their relative. Brown, though is a mourning colour, is mostly worn by the friends, neighbors and societal members who in a communal fashion mourns with the bereaved family (Frimpong et. al, 2013).

4. Other Observations Made By The Researchers

4.1. Preliminary Planning of the Printing

The wrong perception that due to mastery, there is no need of preliminary planning by the designers at Ntonso is highly unprofessional. No matter the mastery and skill that one acquires in the undertaking of a project, there is every need to plan. That is why the spaces in the stamped patterns in a demonstrated print witnessed by the researcher were not equal and thus lacked the proper implementation of principles of design.

4.2. Health and Other Benefits

The *badie* tree is not poisonous nor tastes bitter. It is tasteless and it has several health benefits. It can cure menstrual pains, diarrhoea, stomach ache, etc. The fibrous substance is boiled and taken as a beverage drink.

4.3. Restriction in Production

Special designs of high personages in the Asante community are not produced for the ordinary Asante. For instance, a designed *Adinkra* cloth for the Asantehene or a paramount chief is not produced for any other person. This is because it is a taboo in the Asante community to parade oneself in the same cloth as a king or chief during a function. Also, the designs are especially not made for people from other ethnic societies for fear they might abuse its usage since every designed *Adinkra* cloth has a particular occasion it is worn.

4.4. Challenges faced by the Adinkra Cloth Producers

1. A major setback to *Adinkra* cloth production is the availability of firewood as source of heat. *Adinkra* cloth producers find it difficult sometimes getting firewood.
2. There is also the scarcity of water for the production of the *Adinkra* dye production. This problem has been somehow remedied by the construction of a bore-hole well for the community by some foreign aids.
3. Lack of ready market for printed *Adinkra* clothes is also one of the challenges faced by the *Adinkra* cloth producers.

4.5. Conservational Strategies

To prolong the lifespan of the Badie trees, the people mark and cut the fresh barks of the tree rather than felling down the entire tree. This conservational strategy is helping in the preservation of the plants for posterity. Also, they carefully preserve their blocks for the *Adinkra* printing by always rinsing it in hot water after every printing is carried out. The researcher asked of why they do that and was informed that doing this would reduce the felling down of the calabash and the palm fronds or '*Ntonto*' for the production of the *Adinkra* blocks thus the former for the actual block and the latter for the handle.

Moreover, prepared dyes are not needlessly wasted. Printers of the *Adinkra* cloth shakes off the *Adinkra* block in the container to free it of excess dye and conserve it for prolonged usage.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study attempted to investigate into the historical and philosophical concepts behind the *Adinkra* cloth and its production. The study buttressed with vivid examples from the tools, materials, symbols and production techniques that the cultural cloth is in fact embedded with very succinct and rich history and philosophy of the Asantes. The *Adinkra* cloth productions though have its challenges or setbacks. These include the acquisition of raw materials for the production of the cloth such as source of fire, marketing etc. Some of the *Adinkra* cloth printers lack technical training in idea development and layout. The onus therefore lies on the government, corporate bodies and agencies that are keen to the development of the indigenous arts of our country to address these challenges and help in the preservation, propagation and survival of the *Adinkra* cloth which is one of the geniuses we can boast of as Ghanaians.

1. The government and other corporate bodies must supply the indigenes with oil and gas heating equipment as a substitute to the firewood which is used by the people. This would help in the conservation of our natural resources while curbing the challenge of obtaining firewood.
2. The local designers must be taught through workshops and seminars, the rudiments and principles of good planning before printing is carried out. This would ensure that the finished products meet current aesthetic requirements.
3. Exhibitions must be organized periodically by local *Adinkra* cloth producers leasing with Art associations and foundations to raise the sensitization of the general public to the marvelous designs of the *Adinkra* cloth thereby maximizing its sale and patronage.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized by art associations and groups for the *Adinkra* textile producers who are not abreast with the European production processes and tools and materials to equip them on how to effectively utilize them in their cloth productions.
5. The *Adinkra* textile production centres should be well equipped to motivate the textile producers to work harder and to help the youth in realizing how lucrative the textile industry is.

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