



The Pottery-Making of Dangi and Kukuo: Ideological and Functional Perspectives

Basiru Moro¹, Kofi Asante-Kyei^{2*}, Mercy Abaka-Attah³

¹Salaga Senior High School, P.O. Box 28, Salaga.

^{2,3}Department of Ceramic Technology, Takoradi Technical University, P.O. Box 256, Takoradi.

Corresponding Author: Kofi Asante-Kyei. E-mail address: kofi.asante-kyei@ttu.edu.gh

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to examine the pottery-making ideologies and functions of Dangi and Kukuo in the Upper West and Northern regions of Ghana respectively. The indigenous potters in these communities creatively produce variety of pottery wares with astonishing philosophical concepts irrespective of foreign influences. The ideologies that underpinned the art of indigenous pottery-making in Dangi and Kukuo had not received enough scholarly attention in academia. It was for these reasons that the researchers had to conduct a study to unearth the hidden ideologies and functions associated with the art of pottery-making among the two cultures to help rekindle the loss of faith of most Ghanaian elites of their indigenous cultural values. The research was guided by the framework of cultural ecology theory, also known as human environment relationship theory. The study employed qualitative research approach. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select ten 'master potters' for the study. Direct observation, interviews, photography and examination of artefacts were employed to gather information from the master potters regarding the concepts associated with pottery-making in both communities. It was revealed among others that, Dangi and Kukuo pottery-making ideologies were highly connected and inseparable from their social life, served as an avenue for the preservation and promotion of their cultural values and societal norms such as: beliefs, tradition and artistic skills of the potters. The study recommended among others that; Dangi pottery-making could be suitable for the establishment of potential cultural tourism. Therefore, agencies like the Municipal Assemblies, Ministry of Trade and Industries, and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Arts could collaborate to establish cultural tourism in this community. In another development, that of Kukuo pottery-making could be re-engaged to help improve the economic life of the people.

Keywords: Cultural functions, Ideologies, Indigenous, Pottery-making.

1.0 Introduction

Dangi and Kukuo are ancient indigenous pottery communities located within the Sissala East District capital of the Upper West and Tamale Metropolis of the Northern regions respectively as shown in figure 1. The art of pottery of Northern Ghana cannot be disassociated from their cultural identities and values due to how it had been entrenched in their everyday lives. It is believed that the indigenous potters are either born into the profession as a family business, through marriage, apprenticeship or purely reserved for women. These indigenous potters are influenced by all kinds of ideas due to their distinctive cultural functions. Their arts of pottery-making are tied to the different and shared behaviours of their corresponding societal norms and beliefs systems. The level of craftsmanship and conceptions perceived in the art of Dangi and Kukuo pottery gives the impression that their art forms and practices were influenced by their social-cultural ideologies for centuries to date. These two societies attach great importance to their wares. The forms, decorations, sizes, and shapes of their wares seem to be influenced by the concepts of their distinguished cultures. The artefacts of the indigenous potters of Dangi and Kukuo appear interesting due to how their different cultural concepts have been ingrained in their pottery-making concerning their forms and distinctive finishing. Relentlessly, these potters are still committed to the indigenous pottery products for centuries regardless of emergence of modern ceramics wares. They are still used for various purposes such as cooking, storage, administering medicine, religio-magical reasons and among others.

The researchers observed that the philosophies that underpinned the ideological and functional art of indigenous pottery-making in Dangi and Kukuo had not received enough scholarly attention in academia, even though other scholars have respectively done few studies on the indigenous pottery-making concepts of the Northern region and Upper West Region of Ghana. The few studies however, did not delve much deeper into the ideological and functional connections of their pottery-making with their cultures. It is for these reasons that the researchers have to conduct a study to unearth the ideologies and functions associated with the art of pottery-making of Dangi and Kukuo cultures, irrespective of their distinguished geographical locations.

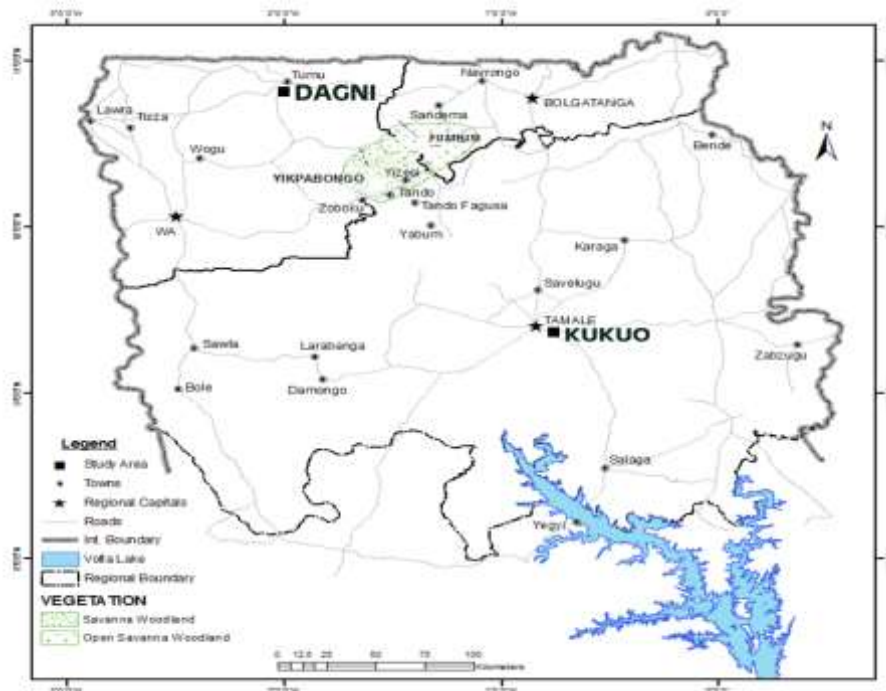


Figure 1. Northern Map of Ghana, (Asamoah – Mensah, 2013)

The general objective of the research is to critically study and analyze the ideologies and functions associated with Dangi and Kukuo indigenous pottery. Specifically, the research seeks to examine the ideologies of shapes and decorations of Dangi and Kukuo pottery.

The theoretical framework of the study is guided by the cultural ecology theory, also known as human environment relationship theory. This theory is centered on the exploitation of social-cultural systems, technological adaptation, philosophies and concepts in relation to their art forms (Steward, 2015). Lapka et al (2012) added that cultural ecology offers researchers wider platform of culturology regarding studying complexity of culture. This theory further enables researchers to compare cultures in order to determine the similarity and differences of their cultural development. In view of this the theoretical framework has been employed to help guide the researchers to define the ideologies and functions underpinning the study of indigenous pottery making of Dangi and Kuku. To attain perfect experience and understanding one's culture, the individual must know what the people do, why they do, and things that they make and use. He added that when these are learned and shared by members then we begin to learn and know about people's culture, and cultural behaviour through the concepts that drives their cultural artifacts with special meanings (Ayiku, 1998).

1.1 Indigenous Pottery Concepts and Beliefs

African beliefs that the successes of art and craft rely on the solidity of the concepts and beliefs associated with it. It is believed that this has led to the association of pottery with taboos and other beliefs to make it sacred. These beliefs are ideas, thoughts, philosophies that have been intertwined with the art of pottery making as a medium of cultural preservation. Adjei et al (2015) agreed that indigenous pottery production is the widest craft practiced by African society and has in many cases served both the spiritual and material needs of humankind. Again, Essel and Acquah (2016) confirm that, indigenous African art is purposefully produced to facelift the ideas, beliefs, status, and culture. The researchers hold the trust that indigenous pottery philosophies are well engineered to preserve the African culture, identity and values.

1.2 The Ideologies of Indigenous Pottery shapes

In Africa, every ethnic group produces variety of pottery wares with diverse shapes and finishes to serve a wide range of purposes across all cultures. Vessels used for utilitarian purposes such as cooking, serving, and storage containers for water, medicine, ritual, oil, and grains are attached with conceptual backings. For instance, in the Upper East region of Ghana vessels similar to those used for the boiling of herbs and other medicinal purposes in the northern region are used for closing tombs to serve as a medium through which the living communicates with the dead. Differently, these same kinds of vessels are used to store ritual charm in the shrines among the Lobi and Dagaaba (Saako et al, 2014). This gives the impression that in Africa pottery, ideologies and purposes are intertwined and vary from culture to culture. This means that the main philosophy of design or form is to determine the purpose of the piece.

Gijanto (2014) agreed that the greater range of designs, shapes, and impressions made by various pottery wares are more closely tied to ethnic affiliation and diverse regional areas as a result of imitation but with contrasting ideology. Dzegblor et al (2017) added that the names of vessels equally reflect exactly the conception of what they are exclusively meant for. But Nanashaitu (2017) holds the view that in indigenous African society potters produce vessels with varying forms and shapes depending on the functions and demands. She added that vessels are created with a wide range of shapes under the influence of conception. But Asamoah-Mensah (2013) argued that the Yikpabongo pottery forms in the Upper East Region of Ghana are being influenced by selections of raw material and the structural design in terms of the shape or form instead of the concepts being dependent on the intended function of the products. This denotes that they prioritized material influence because it determines the techniques and tools to be used for the production of wares. She added that the choice of potter decorations and techniques involved in their depiction on vessels also depends on the intended ideological functions the vessels are meant to serve (Asamoah-Mensah, 2013).

1.3 Africans beliefs in Pottery Forms and Shapes

The study believes that Africans fashion out vessels on the bases of their thoughts, values and functions for the sake of the preservation of their culture and tradition. It must be noted that pottery is the vehicle for the expression of conceptual cultural heritage. This proves that in African indigenous

communities and the world to date, the versatility of the indigenous pottery shapes and concepts serve as the counterpoint to the fundamental conservation of diverse pottery styles, decoration, and forms. For instance, the Ewe's in the Volta Region of Ghana decisively designed a water fetching pot "Tomedeze" with a wide textured belly, narrow neck and a bit wide thick rim to facilitate firm grip when carrying drinking water from the stream (Asante et al., 2013). Though Nigerian women produce small-mouthed pots for fetching water from streams, the wide-mouthed ones for storage and cooking, and those that are wider are used as plates and bowls (Peters, 2016). On the contrary, similar vessel "Atadzize" is used by the people of Agotime and Adedome for boiling of medicinal herbs, boiling of hot water as well as bathing (Dzegblor et al, 2017). But Peters (2016) holds the view that different sizes and shapes of pottery are made for different purposes with respect to potter's cultural ideologies. The researchers believe that ethnicity, geographical location and culture are believed to have influenced the design of the wares to such divergent multifunctional purposes. Asamoah-Mensah (2013) agreed that the stylistic difference in forms of vessels and decorations across and within the same geographical location depicts the cultural history of an area including the aesthetic consumer's inclination of product. The investigators also believe that it can be used to unveil complex socio-cultural issues regarding social structure, interregional and intraregional cultural influence on trade networks. Indeed, this can help unveil both simple and complex culture chronologically for historic studies.

2.0 Method

The researchers employed the use of qualitative approach for the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) acknowledge that qualitative research in general is an approach for the exploration and understanding of the meaning(s) individual groups ascribe to their social life. Asante et al (2013) equally agree that the qualitative research method ideally involves describing and understanding phenomena from the participants' perspective. Amissah and Afram (2018) posit that qualitative research is characterized by the aim of understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods are generated words and photographs, rather than numbers as data for analysis. Therefore, in finding the concepts and interpretation of indigenous pottery-making of Dangi and Kukuo concerning their socio-cultural tradition and settings, the researchers engaged the use of qualitative study to help establish the ideologies, functionalities, similarities and differences in pottery-making among the two communities for educational reasons.

Qualitative ethnographic method was used to unearth data to document the study. The researchers interacted and mingled with both community members and the study participants in their real-life environment to help attain the deeper understanding of their pottery-making culture. Koster et al (2016) opine that ethnography contains proof of a researcher's presence in the field as they give an account of their presence through detailed descriptions of events and activities understudy with empirical facts and analysis. Thus, studying the Dangi and Kukuo pottery concept systems was conducted from the ethnographic perspective to uncover, appreciate and describe their indigenous pottery concepts significance in relation to their individual cultural systems to establish the differences and similarities in their pottery-making.

The qualitative descriptive study method was adopted to enable the researchers to illustrate the collected data inherent in the diverse hidden concepts and traditions of indigenous pottery-making of the people. This approach also contributed to vivid narrative accounts of relevant information obtained with respect to prospecting of materials, preparation of raw materials, production, decorations, firing, and the uses of vessels with regards to cultural significance. It also created room for the researchers to obtain detailed chronological information, appreciate and examine the similarities and differences in the cultural practices of the respondents for the indigenous pottery-making concepts of Dangi and Kukuo. Kusimi et al (2020) hold the view that a descriptive study gives a comprehensive narrative to illustrate how pottery production is grounded by traditions and culture. This indeed informed the researchers' decision to adopt this approach to facilitate a vivid description of all the pottery concepts associated with Dangi and Kukuo pottery-making art in connection with their socio-cultural values.

The purposive sampling was used to select ten (10) master potters from the communities for the study, five from each community. The justification for selecting these master potters was that; they were the most experienced, highly knowledgeable, and expert in indigenous pottery-making as well as art culture of Dangi and Kuku. For the purpose of the study, all the ten respondents were selected by their various pottery queen mothers. This was because the queen mothers had power to rule over all the potters in their various societies. Again, they had good knowledge of all the potters' strength and capabilities. This endorses Cohen et al (2018) contention that, a researcher must take sampling decisions early in the overall planning of a piece of research in order to reduce research expenses, to save time and to facilitate the accessibility of gaining information from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained would be denoted as the total population under study. Concerning data collection procedures adopted for the study, direct observation, interviews, photography and examination of artefacts were employed to gather information from the master potters to unearth the concepts associated with clay preparation, production techniques including how the clay was manipulated to achieve the desirable forms, the philosophies behind their decoration techniques and the usage of vessels in the pottery-making forms. The thematic data collected were organised and transcribed for presentation and discussions of research findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018) clarify that in an ethnographic analysis, themes and sub-themes are used to map the shared patterns of behaviour, thinking, or thought as evidence. It involves describing and developing themes and sub-themes from the data. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data before inductive coding was done to highlight sections of data obtained from the study to describe the contents. Themes were generated using the emerged codes with respect to the objectives of the study. This meant that the codes and themes were derived from the content of the data itself so that what was mapped by the researchers during analysis would closely match the content of the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised that the research data analysis process should involve emerging data collected from participants setting and analyzed inductively through the building of themes to make the researcher's data interpretation meaningful. Creswell (2012) affirmed that thematic analysis gives detailed reports of "facts" and true interpretation of people's behaviours and activities. As part of making sense of the information, thematic data analysis in ethnography consists of the presentation of essential data features in themes in the cultural setting. Data obtained was critically examined to arrive at the similarity and differences of the cultures under study with regard to the objectives of exploring the concepts behind their various decoration techniques, forms, and firing and lastly to compare and contrast the pottery-making concepts of both Dangi and Kuku cultures.

2.1 Ethical Considerations

The researchers observed ethical standards to protect the rights of respondents during the study. Firstly, after introduction, the respondents were briefed about the study and their consent sought prior to their participation, and assured them of the necessary confidentiality on the information to be gathered as well as not to disclose the real identities of the participants in the study. Tabatabaei (2016) recommends that in ethnographic research, the pursuit of finding the truth is a respectable value and this has to be accompanied by respect for participants' dignity and security. Creswell and Creswell (2018) also suggested that ethical considerations need to be observed extensively throughout a research process, because it is the ultimate responsibility of every researcher to ensure confidentiality and the protection of informants from physical harm, embarrassment, or threat that may arise during the research process. Again, Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised that the researcher must also ensure that social justice and honesty are observed irrespective of the participant's social status, religion, tribe, and gender. This implies that participants' rights and protection are very crucial in obtaining cultural knowledge and valid construct from the participants of the study.

3.0 Findings and Discussions

The researchers organized the themes to ensure accurate depiction of the data obtained from the field, before presenting the results. The themes generated were Dangi and Kuku pottery-making concepts associated with vessels shapes and figures, pottery decoration and firing techniques. Talking

about the ideologies associated with Dangi and Kukuo vessels shapes and decorations, it was realized that the Dangi and Kukuo vessels shapes and its related decorations had rich cultural philosophies that underpinned their socio-cultural and religious lives. The cultural relevance and philosophical sources of Dangi and Kukuo traditional pottery wares were created largely on their shapes and decorations. Therefore, the framework of the study guided by the cultural ecology was in line with exploiting the social-cultural systems, philosophies and concepts in relation to their art forms (pottery-making) as alluded to by Steward (2015).

3.1 Cooking Pots

Addressing functional values associated with Dangi and Kukuo vessels shapes and decorations, it came out that among the Dangis, vessel used for cooking soup called “hene” measured about 8 inches high by 10 inches wide. It had a bit narrow shoulder and thick curved rim, with a wide belly and a bit curvy bottom which offered the pot stability on hearth as captured in figure 1A. However, “hene” varied in sizes due to their mode of production and the intended family sizes. It was discovered that “hene” was purposely shaped with a bit closed mouth to prevent people (charlatans) from seeing what kind of soup someone has prepared for his or her family should anybody come to fetch embers. It was also to prevent dust from falling into the soup easily when the wind blew. Interestingly, Dangi potters did not produce lid for their vessel. The reason was to discourage stealing of meat or food among children. As a result, one pot was placed on the top of the other to scare them so far as they could not perfectly cover it. However, Kukuo potters mentioned that soup pot(s) called “Duø” were designed purposely for preparation of soup. Its diverse sizes were specifically designed to serve the demands of various family sizes. The pot’s wide belly enabled the vessel to contain enough soup to serve the intended family. The narrow neck of the vessel was purposefully created to minimize spillage of soup during preparation as seen in figure 1B.



Fig. 1A: Soup pot “Hene”, from Dangi,
(Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 1B: Soup pot “Duø”, from Kukuo,
(Source: field photograph, 2024)

The study confirmed that the cooking vessels made by both cultures looked similar with certain features. The Dangi’s food cooking vessel was called “vie” as highlighted in figure 2A while the Kukuos called theirs “du” as catalogued in figure 2B. Both pots had a wide belly, round bottom, and thick rim. These shapes were to enable the vessel to hold much food as well as to fit perfectly on the hearth. The thick rims with the curved mouth were deliberately made to resist the pressure of stirring rod during food preparation, and to aid firm grips when lifting pot off the hearth. The round shape was said to be a shape of convenience for the generations. It implied that the shape had been accepted as the most ideal over the ages and that was why potters of both cultures could not stop making vessels of that shape. Though, among the Dangis it was a taboo for a potter to produce a heavy pot, with the idea of minimizing accidents, heavy hot vessels were not easily taken off fire gently as compared to lighter weight pots. But the Kukuo counterparts believed that heavy vessels were the most durable ones, and as such, they made sure the pot was always heavier or equivalent to the substance it could contain.



Fig. 2A: Food cooking pot “vie”, from Dangi. (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 2B: Food cooking pot “Duø”, from Kukuo (Source: field photograph, 2024)

The indigenous people of Dangi produced an eating bowl called “*henteri*” or “*hanneh*” for serving of food as seen in figure 3A. According to the findings, it was unacceptable for one person to eat alone in a family compound in order to keep tradition and tie of kingship. As a result, potters produced big wide bowls for serving of food in their households according to age groups. This led to the production of “*henteri*” with a very thick wide mouth to give every individual the opportunity to eat freely without interference. Even though the indigenes of Kukuo in the Northern region equally shared similar concepts with the Dangis of the Upper West region irrespective of their geographical locations. The Kukuo participants expounded that, “*labila*” shown in figure 3B was an eating bowl intentionally designed for propagating unity and trust among children as they transitioned from childhood to adulthood; and also due to their large family sizes as a result of polygamous marriages. The study further affirmed that children within the same age groups as well as the elderly in the same compound ate from the bowl. They believed that it was one of the means of promoting unity, identity, and love in both children and adults. Hence, the framework of cultural ecology has been exhibited through pottery-making for promoting unity and love among their social-cultural systems (Steward 2015). Similarly, both cultures shared the same belief of bowls being widened to be able to contain more food and thick rim to resist breakage or cracking especially, as kids play with bowls after eating from them.



Fig. 3A: “Henteri”, a serving bowl from Kukuo. (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 3B: “Labila”, a serving bowl from Kukuo. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

During the study, it was confirmed that both Dangi and Kukuo indigenes employed the use of very small vessels also called “*hene*” and “*duŕ-bila*” as pictured in Figures 4A & 4B respectively to bury the placentas of newly born babies. It was a belief that if the placenta became soiled, the spirits of the earth would cause the said woman to be barren for contaminating the land. Again, if it was fed on by animals such as dog and cat, the said child would either be an adulterer or a prostitute and a potential thief respectively. For this reason, special vessels were designed by both cultures to protect their young ones from such avoidable curses. The researchers observed that the vessels of both cultures measured between 4 to 4.7 inches high by 5.3 inches wide with the intention of making it handy to be able to hide and be buried without anyone's notice in order to prevent ‘red eye’.

During the study, it was established that both Dangi and Kukuo used variety of decoration techniques in finishing their wares to give them exclusive outlook. It was confirmed that only the Dangi potters employed black luster as a technique of decoration called “*mesina*” for all their utilitarian wares, apart from water storage containers due to the black luster’s related hazards.



Fig. 4A: Placenta pot “hene”, from Dangi. (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 4B: Placenta pot “du8-bila”, from Kukuio. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

It was revealed that all the potters applied a high level of skills and surveillance in the regulation of the temperature of the wares with regard to the blasting of the wares. On the contrary, the Kukuio potters did not practise any decoration technique related to blasting or black luster. The “*mesina*” technique of decoration involved the brewing of a concoction called “*breou*”. It was made of dawadawa fruit and other tree backs left for some days as seen in figure 5, or the use of soaked sliced unripe yellow berry “*kalitia*” as shown in figure 6 before the firing of the pottery wares.



Fig. 5: Boiling dawadawa fruits for “*mesina*”, from Dangi (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 6: Soaked sliced unripe yellow berry from, Dangi (Source: field photograph, 2024)

However, the materials for the “*mesina*” varied depending on the season. When the wares were maturely fired to the required temperature, the stockers’ used a long pole to aid the removal of the vessels from the fire to prevent skin burning, while sprinkling the brewed solution on the red-hot wares with the help of a special broom called “*chele*” as highlighted in figure 7.



Fig. 7: Black-luster finishing, from Dangji.
(Source: field photograph, 2024)

A long pole was used for turning the red-hot vessel to ensure uniformity in the solution's application. The stockers stated that the "*mesina*" was done for durability and aesthetic purposes as well as to provide consumers with a diverse choice of lustrous shades. Some of the participants added that the higher the temperature, the more attractive the finishing could become. The study revealed that this technique gave copious glossy shades with antique patterns to make the wares unique. It was again established that the "*mesina*" was mostly used in the finishing of their utilitarian wares, apart from water storage pot which was left biscuit. It was further revealed that "*mesina*" made the pottery wares more hard-wearing, non-porous, and stronger to resist shocks. As a result, it has been used for the preparation of food, fetching of water, food storage and transportation of food items. The Dangji participants again related that "*mesina*" technique was used to check the decency of both newly wedded women and old ones with regards to personal hygiene. They believed that so far as the wares were having lustrous look it should attain its shiny look till it was spoiled. If it turned to lose its beauty, it meant that such woman was not spick-and-span.

Through the study, it was confirmed that all the participants from both Dangji and Kukuo equally practised smoking as one of their decoration techniques for enhancing the aesthetic qualities of their utilitarian wares. The Dangis called smoking technique "*Obeer*" while the Kukuo's called it "*Sabigibu*". It was revealed that the Dangji potters finished their wares with smoking, not only for aesthetic reasons but for conceptual reasons as well. They again explained that their utilitarian wares were smoked, apart from water storage pots, with the concept of making them hygienic and enhancing its heat regulatory properties. It came to light that, it was forbidden for a native of Dangji to eat from either un-smoked or un-black lustered ware, even though biscuit ware was the totem of the "*Hanvia clan*" of the Dangis. The research confirmed that this was a way of encouraging good hygiene and minimizing food poison, since smoking equally made wares impermeable. The Kukuo potters rather applied engobe as part of the finishing before the smoking process to prevent crack of vessels during and after firing. They however, employed smoking techniques to decorate vessels such as serving bowls, cooking pots, and other herb boiling containers, with the exception of medicinal bathing containers which were rather coated with engobe and burnished. One of the participants similarly unveiled that, the bowls were smoked to make them lustrous and attractive to consumers as well as making them water-proof. Some of the potters further related that the inner part of the cooking pot used for serving and preparing food was smoked expressly to prevent it from warning out. However, the study also confirmed that the Dangji potters cast animal feces into the fire when the wares were matured to aid proper impregnation of colour as seen in figure 8A. The Kukuo participants spread mixture of rice chaff and animal feces on the grounds of the firing pit before stacking their wares for firing with the belief that the animal waste would make the pots dark, while the rice chaffs "*shinkafa mori*" gave it the glossy outlook which made it impervious and more hard-wearing as catalogued in figure 8B. This implied that both cultures employed divergent techniques to attain the same concept.



Fig. 8A: Smoking technique, from Dangi.
(Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 8B: Smoking technique, from Kuku.
(Source: field photograph, 2024)

3.2 Bathing and Water Fetching Vessels

During the study, the research revealed that the Dangi and Kuku potters produced both bathing and water fetching vessels for variety of domestic purposes. The study established that it was the custom of the Dangis that every newly married woman bathed her husband with water from this vessel, while she besought the creator, the ancestors and the spirits for prosperous marriage blessed with children. Differently, the Kukuos bathed their newly married women seated on the bottom of the “laayaɾ” turned upside down. It was a belief of purifying her to make her fertile with the conviction that the pot was pure. They added that, according to Dagombas tradition, newly born babies must be bathed from this “laayaɾ”. The purpose was to cleanse and protect the child from evil eyes. It was believed that the vessel had some healing powers to protect the child from wicked people. Astonishingly, both cultures forbade the usage of these vessels to boil water or herbs. Otherwise, the potency and the lifespan of the pots would be reduced.

The study confirmed that both cultures of the participants produce water fetching vessels. The Dangi potters produced a water fetching pot called “*tasa*” and measured 24 inches high by 18 inches wide at the belly region as seen in figure 9A. The vessel was designed with conical handles to facilitate firm clutch. Again, the potters disclosed that the high foot-ring of the vessel was specially designed to comfort users to position their head perfectly when carrying water. This would minimize accidents as well as to aid the container to attain balance when kept on the floor to avert breakage and waste of water should the vessel cap side. Though, Kuku potters produced reasonable size vessel called “*da-kwargu*” of about 9 inches high and 11 inches wide to fetch water from a long distance as shown in figure 9B. The vessel was made very light in weight to reduce the burden of carriers and to avoid the breakage of the pot; which in their cultures was a sign of bad omen. For this reason, potters began to decorate vessels with incisions around the belly and the shoulder region to further provide firm grips to avert this curse.



Fig. 9A: Water fetching pot “*tasa*”, from Dangi.
(Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 9B: Water fetching pot “*da-kwargu*”
from Kuku (Source: field photograph, 2024)

Dangi potters attached handles to their bathing vessel called “*kpaali*” as captured in figure 10A. Similarly, the Kukuo potters created series of incisions close to the rim of the pot, with the idea of aiding firm grips. The research again confirmed that Dangi and Kukuo indigenous pottery communities employed the use of incision in finishing their pottery wares. The indigenous potters from Dangi named this technique as “*туру*”. It involved the use of sharp tools made of pebble with sharp edge(s) and thunderbolts “*kantuansah*” for both etching and burnishing of the leather hard pot. It also included creating of textures on the surface of the leather-hard wares. Similarly, the Kukuo counterparts called the technique “*Boobu*”. They equally employed the use of pebbles with sharp edges for incision of vessels especially, water fetching pot and medicinal bathing pots called “*Laayaɾ*” as seen in figure 10B.



Fig. 10A: A bathing bucket “*kpaali*”, from Dangi (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 10B: A bathing bucket “*laayaɾ*”, from Kukuo (Source: field photograph, 2024)

The vessels were usually decorated either closer to the shoulder or mouth region to facilitate firm grasp as shown in figure 11A. Interestingly, the study also established that both cultures used incision for identification and ergonomics reasons. For instance, to provide a firm grip of vessels to prevent slipping when fetching water or taking off hot vessels from the hearth. Differently, Dangi potters positioned the incisions between the belly and the shoulder region to stop users from vapour burns when taking pots off the hearth and to prevent contamination of food especially when rags were used as seen in figure 11B.



Figure 11A. Incised pot, from Kukuo. (Source: Field photograph, 2024)



Figure 11B. Incised pot, from Dangi. (Source: Field photograph, 2024)

However, one of the participants from Dangi divulged that thunderbolts “*kantuansah*” translated as “dwarf axe” were specially used for the decoration of medicinal bathing buckets and other containers for both religio-medicinal and magical purposes. They believed that thunderbolts were fortified with unimaginable powers of the dwarfs. Therefore, anything it could be used to work on would be triumphant. This was because, it had been sent down by the spirits during thunder's strike to benefit mankind. Interestingly, both cultures used their bathing vessels for both medicinal and ritual bathing for protection and fortification of one's self to resist gunshot and spiritual sickness. They both attached foot-ring to their bathing buckets to neutralise spiritual charm attacks. It was believed that the bucket would lose its spiritual potency when its bottom cracked or leaked. The Kukuo participants disclosed that the bathing container “*laayaɾ*” was produced with purity (meaning the potters did not produce

when menstruating and after sex) with the belief that the spirits and powers bonded to the vessel would disassociate themselves thereby rendering the pots useless. To avoid disappointment on the part of users, the producers adhered to the strict protocols to save their markets. Both the Dangi's and the Kuku'o's believed that bucket used for bathing soap was forbidden to be used for other medicinal purposes for the fear of nullification of medicine. The research disclosed that the Kuku'o vessels were produced in a V- like shape whereas the Dangi ones looked a bit enclosed with a wide rim. They both produced their bathing pots with thick rims for the sake of durability.

The study established that only the Kuku'o potters practised the application of red engobe as a form of decoration as seen in figure 12. For the retention of the engobe “moora” colour after firing, a composition of red stones (iron oxide), shea-butter and kerosene were made. The participants disclosed that the vessels whose insides were coated uniformly with the engobe were meant for bathing herbal medicine. The study confirmed that for the avoidance for staining and absorption of herbs by the pot, the potters burnished the coated area with “*Tukpila*” (burnishing beads) to seal all the clay pores and cracks to prevent contamination of concoctions or medicine. This was because they believed that, some of the medicines were not edible and could endanger users if used for diverse purposes. The other ones with the criss-cross thick painted lines were meant for bathing spiritual fortification medicines for gunshots, blades, arrows, spiritual sickness and others.



Figure 12. Engobe decoration, from Kuku'o. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

Two of the potters explained that the sign at the bottom indicated that the vessel should not be kept directly on the ground because it would neutralize fornication medicines and for that reason pots used for these activities were always kept on “*kal'li*” (locally weaved stand made from straws) or rags or raised from the ground using other means as shown in figure 13. The potters again disclosed that any small pot with painted engobe around the belly region was meant for burying the placenta, while those without were meant for boiling herbs for babies. Interestingly, one of the participants disclosed that without the application of engobe, smoked wares could not be lustrous.



Fig. 13. “*Kal'li*” pot support from Kuku'o. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

3.3 Figurines “*Kimeria*”

During the study, it was confirmed that only the Dangis produced terracotta figurines. These figurines were interconnected with their totemic beliefs as well as for spiritual protection and healing. The

Dangi potters produced variety of figurines such as “gremouri” (meaning tortoise), “kilingwanaa” (meaning chameleon). The research disclosed that the Dangi’s used both “Kimeria” or “Daalicyeri” to describe figurines or statuettes. It was confirmed that such artifacts were used for variety of purposes such as clan totems and for magical or religious reasons, including twine veneration. The study again established that some medicine men also requested for some specific totemic animal figurines for family protection rituals. The figurines were usually placed in the center of their houses for both family protection and worship with the belief that those figurines have some spiritual link with their totems. Three of the participants also added that, people from the typical Sissala homes usually named their children after their totems. For instance, “Gbeligbene” meaning chameleon. A female child could be named “Hagwene” meaning the female chameleon, “Gwene” meaning male chameleon; with the belief of sustaining their spiritual link or ties to their totem as shown in figure 14. The study confirmed that, terracotta male figure with the erected penis was usually produced to address infertility-related issues in men and for other religious purposes as seen in figure 15.



Fig. 14: Chameleon “Gbeligbene”, from Dangi (Source: field photograph, 2024)



Fig. 15: Male figure “Kimeria”, from Dangi. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

Differently, regarding the female figurine, the study established that, if a woman was infertile or has been experiencing consistent miscarriages, such an individual was equally given a clay doll by a priest after rituals and sacrifices to take care of it as how she would have taken care of her child. with the belief and hope that the gods and the ancestors would grant her child. These clay dolls have some features of female such as breasts as shown in figure 16.



Fig. 16: Female figure “Kimeria”, from Dangi. (Source: field photograph, 2024)

Again, one of the participants further elaborated that the fetish priest invoked spirits of the ancestors and the gods into the doll before it was used. The study believed that the Dangi participant claimed of fetish priest invoking incantations before using the doll, was perceived as a medium by which the spirits

and the ancestors were brought closer to the patient (barren woman) to communicate to get their problem solved. The research inveterate that the terracotta figurines from the perspective of indigenous tradition of the Sissala's had both symbolic and spiritual connections to their total way of life. However, the Kukuuo potters of the Northern region were not involved in figurine production. This supports Lapka et al (2012) assertion that cultural ecology enables researchers to compare cultures in order to determine the similarity and differences of their cultural development.

3.4 Religio-Magical Vessels

The study established that both cultures employed the use of 'spike-like' shaped technique in the decoration of their respective religio-magical vessels. The study recognized that the indigenous potters of both Dangi and Kukuuo used cone-like shaped clay in the decoration of their wares. The Dangis called this technique "Soe", while the Kukuuos also called it "Goo". The Dangi's called it "*niiha*" as shown in figure 17A while the Kukuuos called it "*logɔ*" as seen in figure 17B due to its spike-like appearance.



Fig. 17A. Spiritual pot "*Niiha*", from Dangi (Source: Field photograph, 2021)

Fig. 17B. Spiritual pot "*Logɔ*", from Kukuuo (Source: Field photograph, 2021)

The respondents of both cultures explained that the 'spike-like' shaped clays were organized in rhythmic order to create chilling at a glance for it to be used for the storing of spiritual powers of medicines. Though, the Kukuuos further emphasized that, the outlook of the vessel served as a symbol of hope, trust, and assurance for users. The research confirmed that, both cultures [Dangi and Kukuuo] believed that without the scary outlook, the pot could not fit its said purposes. One of the Dangi participants disclosed that the "*niiha*" could also be used as a personal deity for the protection of one's family or farm against distractive spirits and also helped in the attainment of bumper harvest. The study also established that anyone who entered the farm with any ill intention would be struck with incurable sickness till he or she confesses. It was also forbidden for anyone with an evil eye to set foot in the farm or a woman in her menses to enter such farms unless they were cleaned. For this reason, offenders were punished by continuous menstruation and uncurable ailment till he or she compensates the spirits with sacrifices.

However, in Dangi this votive vessel was produced by only one person among the potters due to her divinity. The Dangi participants claimed that there was only one person among them who produced them (votive vessels) because she was the only divine one among them, (meaning she is the only one who communicates with the spirits). During the study, the diviner emphasized that the production of the votive vessels was entangled with complex prescriptions and rituals. The diviner claimed that, for one to produce such receptacle the individual did not have to be in her menstrual period or have sexual intercourse with the husband from the eve of the commencement of production, including abstinence from ill vices such as gossiping, quarrelling just to mention few till she finishes with the production including firing. It was believed that the vessel(s) may lose its potency if the potter went contrary to the prescription.

Correspondingly, Kuku pottery practised similar taboos but theirs was limited to only menopausal women and seers (women) with the belief that they know how to purify themselves (bathing of medicine did not involve in any ill conducts), before embarking on any production of spiritual-related vessels for the sake of the purity of the vessel(s). The Kuku's did not invoke any spirits into the vessels before sales but were left to consumers. Usually, their ritual vessels were lidless with the belief that powerful medicine did not need lids. It was their belief that the lid did not determine the potency of the vessel but the spikes because they were the medium through which powers were stored. On the contrary, the Dangi participants explained that the diviner was the only one who could invoke fearful spells and charms for the pot to be able to hold powers of medicine intended for its purpose. Because they believed that every medicine had an associated spirit and therefore such vessels must look hair-raising to attract other spirits to facilitate spiritual processes.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The specific objective of the study was to examine the ideologies and functions of shapes and decorations of Dangi and Kuku pottery-making. The study concluded that the pottery wares produced by the two communities with regard to shapes, forms and decorations were deeply centered on culture, religious, ergonomic and hygienic reasons. It was also confirmed that their pottery thoughts served as an avenue for the preservation and promotion of their cultural values irrespective of social change. Both cultures shared some common concepts with varied opposing pottery concepts which was believed to be as the results of their cultural diversity, and other cultural influence.

As results of their deep indigenous pottery morphology that reflects their divergent cultural ideologies and beliefs, the researchers have recommended that Dangi pottery-making could be suitable for the establishment of cultural tourism to cater for both national and international tourists to raise revenue to develop the community. Thus, art galleries or museums could be built to store all these indigenous pottery wares and document the ideologies and functional values to preserve the rich culture of Dangi. Therefore, agencies like the Municipal Assemblies, Ministry of Trade and Industries, and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Arts could collaborate to establish cultural tourism in this community. Additionally, Kuku pottery-making could be re-engaged to help rekindle the loss of faith of most Ghanaian elites of their indigenous cultural values, sustain and improve the culture and economic life of the people; by adding values to their pottery wares and increase production to gain incomes and expand their pottery businesses.

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