
PROMOTING THE BEAUTY OF YORUBA TRADITIONAL FABRIC OF ASO- OKE FOR INTERNATIONAL CONSUMPTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: *Yoruba people are predominantly found in southwestern and north central Nigeria, some part of Benin republic and Togo. The Aso-Oke weaving was introduced into Yoruba land in the 15th century, and since then it has been part of the culture till date with different modification over time. This paper examines how this fabric can be promoted to gain acceptance for international consumptions which will helps develops the local crafts industry as this leads to employment opportunities, increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a veritable source of foreign exchange for Nigeria. The paper provides an insight into the local production technique of the fabric, the types of fabrics and other wares that can be made from the fabrics, sewing methods and types of garment that can be produced for export and possible export channels for international market.*

KEY WORD: Aso oke, sustainable development, employment, fabrics, local craft, sewing and market.

INTRODUCTION

The potential role of small-scale and traditional industries, particularly culturally oriented ones, in the development of a country cannot be over emphasized. Ho and Huddle (1975) asserted that Because of the particular attributes of this class of industries, we believe they can contribute importantly to the development of low developed countries (LDC) by reducing the degree of inequality in the distribution of gains from development, balancing the geographical distribution of population, and generating employment and foreign exchange earnings. The production of traditional handcrafted textiles among the people of Africa is long rooted in their culture. These textiles are produced from locally sourced materials ranging from cotton, local silk, bark, goats wool to raffia, commonly used in weaving (Renne, 1995; 102). *Aso Oke* traditional textile industry can be used as a tool for national development especially as it was discovered that sustainable nexus exists among traditional, cultural, consumption and manufacturing economies. Olutayo *et.al* (2009). The production of *Aso Oke* has been exclusively produced in Yoruba land, part of Kwara and Kogi states. The consumption has been the Yorubas people, while other tribes also have a fair share of the products especially when it is used as *Aso Ebi* (worn by a group of people e.g. friends, families e.t.c.) and the occasion involve people from other tribes. The localized consumption pattern of the fabrics especially as it is become occasional wears, results in decline patronage and production. The aim of this paper is to promote the fabric *Aso Oke* for international consumption, thereby creating employment opportunities, preserve Nigerian culture by promoting cultural image of Nigeria and serve as a veritable source of foreign exchange for sustainable development.

METHOD OF PRODUCTION

Preparation

At the inception of the production of *Aso Oke*, the production of the yarn were made hand spun locally grown cotton and silk which were dyed with natural dyes. But with the industrial revolution in Europe, mass production of yarns of different cotton counts as well as synthetic dyes with good fastness properties and varieties of colours were made available which replaces the manual method of yarn and dyes production. *Aso oke* is a warp faced fabric, which means that the face has more ends than picks; the stripes in the fabric are made when setting up the warp yarn with brocading done using supplementary weft.

Weaving

We have two major production methods: first, the broad loom (used by women) is a fixed vertical frame upon which the warp is held under tension used to weave cloth of a pre determined length with about 30 to 90 cm width. Second, the double heddle loom (used by men) is an horizontal loom with the unwoven warp yarns stretched out several yards in front of the weaver with a heavy shed to maintain tension. The loom produce strips of woven fabrics which is about 10-20cm wide, are sew together to make the entire cloth.

The double heddle loom used by men has many accessories which includes: heddles (*omu aso*), treadles' (*itese*), beater (*Apasa*), shuttle (*oko*), winding shaft(*gogowu/ikawu*), shedding stick (*oju/poporo*), and pulley (*ikeke*), this makes it possible to accomplish (though manually) the primary motion of shedding using foot pedals (treadles) to open and close the shed by raising and lowering the harness, weft insertion and beating up is carried out by simultaneously handle the shuttle throws it inside the open warp to be received by the other hand and the beater is used to complete the beat up. The secondary motion of let off and pick up mechanism are also done by placing a fairly heavy object in warp end to maintain tension and mechanically drag along as the weaving progresses and manual take up using weighted hanger hung into the fabric to maintain tension in the woven fabric. While the auxiliary motions are detected manually as the weaving continues and necessary corrections are made. In most traditional weaving, the use of colour in the warp direction and the ability to controls the various motions produces colour strips along the fabric, Figs.4a and b, or as Picton (1989) reported that many factors such as: the nature and colour of yarn, the warp wise arrangement, relationship between warp and weft, the method of embellishment of the surface of the fabric with extra weft go into the designing of the weave pattern.

Weaving complete the process of the fabric production.

Types of *Aso Oke*

There are 3 types of *Aso Oke*

1. *Etu*: is a deep blue, and almost black, indigo dyed cloth often with very thin light blue stripes.



Fig. 1, Etu type of Aso Oke

2. *Alaari* : (crimson and white). Is woven from magenta waste silk.



Fig. 2, Alaari type of Aso Oke

3. *Sanyan*: (Grayish/taupe), also the most expensive woven from the beige silk obtained locally from the cocoons of the *anaphe venata* moth, forming a pale brown beige cloth.

4.



Fig. 3, Sanyan Type of Aso Oke



fig. 4a

Source; Nairaland forum



fig. 4b

Traditional usage

Thompson, (2005) asserted that mostly at traditional occasions such as betrothals, weddings, funerals and other festivities, a person who wears anything else other than *Aso Oke* looks out of place and has the feeling of not belonging. And after the occasion some people may never wear the same cloth again.

Since the period of industrial revolution, where fine cotton count were produced which made it possible to produce light weight fabric, compare to traditional hand spun yarn which is coarse with high imperfection rate and makes heavy fabric, *Aso Oke* has continued to gain acceptance in casual wear clothes for both adult and children. Peoples now wear it to churches, markets, offices and other places of interests as fashion is moving towards that trend. In some cases the fabric is combined with other clothes either as *Gele* (head gear) and *Iborun* (a type of shawl). It can be joined and sew together with other fabrics.

Through creativity and innovation, different types of products such as fancy bags, shoes, slippers, sneakers are produced from the *Aso Oke* which can be used for all classes of people irrespective of sex and age. This can also go for export for international consumption.



Fig. 5a. Fancy Bags



Fig. 5b. School bags/ Conference bags



Fig. 6a. Boot Sneakers



Fig. 6b Sneakers



Fig. 6c. Ladies high heel slippers



Fig. 6d Men slippers



Fig. 6e. Boot

International consumption

International consumption of locally made products leads to increase industrial productivity of indigenous products, and the resultant effect is job creation and better quality of life for citizens. The performance of a given economy in terms of growth rates, output and per capital income has not been based on domestic production and consumption activities alone but also on international transaction of goods and services. Countries that are open to international trade tend to grow faster, innovate, improve productivity and provide higher income and more opportunities to their people. Be that as it may, promoting the consumption of *Aso Oke* is one of the classical examples of how Nigeria can penetrate the world market with indigenous products.

Aso oke which is made from cotton materials, can be used to make any type of dress which can be worn for occasion as a formal dress, casual wears or vacation dress, for both male and female, and in any of the season. The fabric has a good flexural rigidity and moderately drape, hence, during construction and its use, it poses a good advantage. Seram and Rupasinghe,(2013) asserted that Bending and drapability properties of fabrics are very important for a garment's aesthetic appearance and also play an important role in garment comfort and determining the fit of clothing around the human figure. The fabrics can also be used for car upholstery, home furniture, throw pillow etc. Apart from the clothing, fancy bags, shoes, sneakers, slippers, booths etc can be made from the fabrics as shown above.



Fig. 7a Suit;
Source: Zinkata.tumblr.com



Fig.7b. jacket;
Source: Datina design



Fig.8a. Aso Oke gown:
Source: Stilettosandpearls.com



Fig.8b. Aso Oke gown:
source: rstyle.com



Fig.9a: Skirt
Source:esty.com



Fig.9b: Skirt:
Source: Boriah clothiers

All the articles i.e. the bags figs 4a &b, different types of shoes, 6a – 6e and the clothing's in figs 7a- 7f and many more are potential export materials for international consumption. The production of these materials follows the same principle as in other goods made from other material like leather and other fabrics.

Aso oke width is narrow, and the length is short, the regular length of Aso oke is 90 inches and each stripe width is about 4inches. This would be joined together to make the required size of fabric needed, during joining, lapped seams method is the best as the edges are joined together using a topstitching method so as to prevent wastage of the fabric and bulkiness after joining. During cutting, the fabric frays badly when cut on the straight grain but not so much on the cross grain, therefore it is advisable to cut it on the cross grain.

Aso oke garment can be lined or not, depend on the end use, when lined, it helps to cover and protects the inner construction of the garment and gives the garment a comfortable and luxurious feeling. The type of lining must be smooth and static free that complement the fashion fabric and must be constructed on the same grain as the fashion fabric. However, lining must not add excessive bulk to the garment.

CONCLUSION

Promoting the usage of Aso oke locally and internationally will increase the production both in quality and in quantity which will lead to jobs creation. According to Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco publication on November, 2019, job growth is classified as a coincident economic indicator, meaning that job growth rates moves closely in line with GDP which is the most

comprehensive measure of overall economic. Exportation of these locally made fabrics and its acceptability in international market will serve as a veritable source of foreign exchange which will lead to sustainable development.

Aso oke production is part of Yoruba cultural heritage and by and large Nigeria; it can only be sustained through continuous production and the application of innovation and creativity so as to add value to the method of production and the output to make it marketable in local and international market. This is the only way the cultural heritage can be preserved.

Aso Oke production is potential foreign exchange earner, with creativity and proper packaging; the goods can be exported to any country, especially the United States of America through African growth and opportunity acts (AGOA). Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) asserted that Textile and apparel goods from an AGOA beneficiary country (Nigeria) will only receive preferential duty treatment once a visa arrangement is established the visa are issued is issued by the government of beneficiary sub Saharan African countries.

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