

On the Costume Culture in South Korean Movies and Television Series and Its Creative Industries

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to analyze the influence of the costume culture of South Korean movies and television series on the development of fashion industry. South Korean movies and television series make full use of the influence of costume culture to advocate Korea's national spirit and character as well as the confidence and vigor of the young generation. They contribute to establishing South Korea as a country with a graceful, modern appearance and great cultural heritage. The presentation and promotion of its costume culture in movie and television series stimulates its cultural competence and advances its cultural creative industry. The spread of Korean costume culture has become the pioneer and foreshadowing of clothing industries and greatly underpins its advancement overseas. In concert, the development of clothing industry helps the spread of Korean costume culture.

Key words : South Korean movies and television series, costume culture, creative industry.

I. Introduction

In the past two decades, the spread of South Korean films and television series around the world, and especially in Southeast Asian countries, makes 'Korean wave' a hot word. The success and popularity of these films and television series not only helps the rise of its film industry but also contributes to the establishment of Korea's international image as a country with great cultural heritage. Besides the touching stories, beautiful settings, and engaging narration, these films and teleplays make full use of the characters' costume to catch the audiences' attention, and most importantly, to convey a kind of unique national character and spirit. While entertaining the audiences' mind, the elegant and beautiful traditional

hanboks and energetic and high-fashion dresses worn by the characters also persuade them to accept and appreciate their traditional heritage and modern appearance. Consequently, love and admiration for the characters and their looks leads to love of their background culture and imitation of their appearances - the young people compete to dress like those stars by purchasing the same or similar clothes, which finally stimulates the development of Korean clothing and textile industry.

II. Research Results

Generally, the influence of the costume culture of South Korean movies and television series on the development of Korean clothing and textile industry can be summarized as the following two

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points:

1. Taking advantage of costume dramas to demonstrate and advocate Korean traditional clothing culture and its unique national character, so as to establish its international image as a great country with excellent apparel history.

Similar to Chinese costume drama, there are many excellent Korean movies and television series, such as the movies *Chunhyang*, *Drunk on Women and Poetry*, *King and the Clown*, and the popular television hit *Jewel in the Palace*. All of these plays derive their themes and stories from historical events, characters, or legends which provide hanboks a good stage to yield unusually brilliant results. One expert points out that clothes and other ornaments serve to reveal the body's cultural meaning, suggesting we view our body as a kind of cultural symbol. Clothes express the body's cultural meaning clearly by their unique style. Dressing oneself is necessary for the becoming of self, which not only conveys the demand of the body but also the command of spirit. Beyond the simple meaning of a stage property, the hanboks convey a deep national spirit and release its innate national character in these costume dramas. The becoming and development of traditional Korean costume is deeply influenced by the dressing style of Chinese Tang Dynasty, characterized by its bright, beautiful color and dignified, graceful qualities. While presenting and displaying the beauty and elegance of hanboks, these costume dramas make full use of their visual qualities to express innate and unique national spirit and character, and so move the audience both through its stories and its splendid culture and spirit.

Take *Jewel in the Palace* as an example. After going through many hardships, its heroine Jangeum achieves her life goal of being the first Royal Lady and the first female royal physician in the Joseon Dynasty in Korea. She is clever, optimistic, broad-minded, and full of curiosity. Facing life's ups and downs she is always calm, never loses confidence, and is full of love for life and the future. She embodies nearly all the virtues of a perfect woman and projects an ideal image

of woman. Hanboks play an important role in the creation of this perfect woman. Without designing any special costume for its heroine, this play presents the court dress as a whole. All the costumes of the characters are designed according to rigid customs of court dress that not only correspond to historical truth but also create a relative cultural atmosphere and serve to set off development of the main character by contrast. The elegant disposition emanating from the court hanboks becomes an inseparable part of the image.

The roles of maids of honor were rigidly defined in Korean royal court, such as young maid of honor, kitchen lady, royal maid, and court lady. This stratification can be recognized directly from the different styles and colors of their dresses and accessories. For example, in this television series, the young maid of honor wears light pink *jeogori* and big blue skirt with matching purple band. Royal Maid wears bright red *jeogori* and ash black skirt with purple band. They have long braids. The Court Lady usually wears bean green *jeogori* and dark green skirt with dark blue band. They wear their braids in a coil. The Queen's dresses exemplify all court dresses, not only brilliantly colorful but also decorated with many embroidered patterns, including dragon, phoenix, cloud, water, or some auspicious Chinese characters. Her hair style is also quite complicated.

According to court dress custom, the hair accessories of Queen and Royal Lady are different from that of common maids of honor. They usually wear ti (wig) on the head, which is a symbol of identity and wealth. Some rich or aristocratic women like to add a number of ti or decorate them with some accessories, such as hairpins. Some nominated court ladies also put a jade plate right in the middle of the ti which is called 'head of phoenix'. The size and color of the jade plate is a sign of identity and position. In *Jewel in the Palace*, all the dresses and accessories of the Queen and royal ladies are carefully and strictly designed according to these clothing conventions.

While the distinction and hierarchy of the common maid of honor and royal ladies or queens is embodied in their formal dresses, the color of their attire for bed or leisure is the same - it is white.

The love of white has long been a tradition in Korea, and white clothes have been worn and highly praised by both common Koreans and upper class society from ancient times. They also match this color with other colors - pink red, pink green, pink blue, or pink yellow - to successfully create unexpected effects that fully convey the wearer's elegant disposition.

Korean costume drama also makes full use of the hanboks' purity of color to compliment the energy of the people and to express their pursuit of and love for freedom and independence. For instance, the brightly colored costume of Chunhyang in *Chunhyang* and Gonggil in *King and the Clown* express the character's desire for beautiful love and the secular life respectively. The study of color psychology shows that high purity color evokes strong visual impressions and psychological responses. It is more rhythmic than low purity color, making the characters seem more energetic and lively. High purity colored hanboks in Korean costume dramas fully display the beauty and feature of traditional Korean clothing culture and ultimately helps to create a vivid and complete cultural image of South Korea.

2. Making use of modern television series to showcase contemporary South Korean clothes culture and its modern, graceful, confident, and vigorous appearance, as well as the individuality of the young generation.

Since the coming of Korean television series to China at the end of the 1990s, some excellent programs, such as *Princess of Mermaid*, *Watch Again and Again*, *Jewel in the Palace*, and *My name is Kim Sam Soon*, are well-known on the Chinese mainland, in Hong Kong and Taiwan. If the costume in Korean costume drama movies publicizes its implied national spirit and character, the costume in modern Korean television series can be seen as a splendid display and advertisement of its contemporary clothes culture, the modern appearance of the country, and its energetic, confident, energetic young generation. The colorful, elegant, and individualistic dresses engage the attention of youth and then they become infatuated with other South Korean products, like Korean-

style clothes, bags, or accessories. Roughly speaking, the primary attribute of modern Korean fashion is to 'mashup' or 'mix and match'. This is a typical fashion style favored by young people for the rhythm radiating from leisure and layers. It also inherits the features of traditional Korean costume with bright and pure color. In addition, it features all manner of delicate, new, and original accessories. The Korean modern series well display these features. Those young and energetic, handsome and beautiful images become the idol of youth and make imitation of their costume a priority. The costume, or a similar style, soon becomes popular among young people. Often the supply is unable to meet the demand.

Take the television series *My name is Kim Sam Soon* for example. The clothes of the hero, Hyun Jin Heon, radiate the flavor of times. Despite his normal suit and shirt appearance, the color and style of these clothes is changing constantly. Along with the most common white and black shirt, there are pink, apple green, dark reddish purple, light blue, cream, golden red, magenta red, and many other colors. Matching his suits with shirts of different colors integrates the handsomeness of the hero and the vigor of youth together. Mix and match is an important costume style of the heroines in this television series. The dresses of Yoo Hee Jin, Hyun Jin Heon's ex-girlfriend, are typical of this style. She wears a deep blue singlet outside of a light gray round neck short sleeve shirt, which appears leisurely and lively, elegant and quiet. In fact, the costume of every character of this television series has been designed and matched carefully and elaborately, all of which makes the characters appear pretty and energetic.

The clothing accessories in this television series are also worth mentioning. Although the heroine, Kim Sam Soon, once wore the same round earring twice, Yoo Hee Jin wears 22 earrings without repetition, and Sam Soon's older sister wears 19 unrepeated in different situations. As for other accessories such as silk scarfs, necklaces, and bracelets, they are not only pretty and full of ingenuity but also are never worn twice by the characters. Throughout the whole series, the look of every character is very good - fresh, confident,

unforgettable, and admirable.

III. Conclusion

At this time there is a buzz word - hot-selling girl - which refers to some actresses 20 to 30 years old. Their publicity and popularity depends not only on their outstanding acting skills but also their appropriate dresses in movies or television series. Their costume in the series is either famous foreign brands or some street fashion. Their costumes are by no means stage costumes, which cannot be worn in daily life, but could be worn by everyone. For example, Hwang Jung Eum, the heroine of the popular situation comedy *High Kick*, was so enthusiastically welcomed by the audience that her dresses, bags, and accessories in the play sold out quickly. There are many similar cases in Korean modern fashion series. T-shirts or cotton suits worn by famous actors or actresses become goods in high demand. South Korean clothing enterprises seize the opportunity to take advantage of the celebrity effect by making movies and television series as means of promoting and advertising their products, while adjusting the industrial structure, invigorating the development of new technology and new material, and advancing their marketing and sales.

According to some statistics, South Korean export value to China in 2002 reached 83.8 billion dollars, an increase of 12.5% compared to that of the previous year. 80% of their total overseas investment is in Asian countries, of which investment cases in China and their sum of money account for 60% and 35% respectively. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy of South Korea established a goal of 30 billion dollars for textile export values in 2010, which will make South Korea the third largest textile and clothing exporting country in the world.

The successful interaction and promotion bet-

ween the costume culture of Korean movies and television series and its clothing industries cannot be separated from the relative creative and innovative cultural and industrial policies, which are the foundation of the whole achievement. For example, South Korean government drafted the Film Promotion Act in 1994 and introduced the concept of 'invigorating the country through culture' in 1998, when it made clear the policy of setting cultural industry as the country's strategic economic pillar. The Innovation Law of Cultural Industry was enacted in February of 1999, which ascertained the category of cultural industry. In following years, other similar laws and regulations have come out in turn, all of which make Korean cultural policies more complete and practical and fully supportive of the development of creative industries. These measures effectively stimulate the integration of Korean movie and television series costume culture and its clothing and textile industries.

Finally, the costume culture displayed by Korean costume dramas and modern television series creates a great national image before Asia and the world. The presentation and promotion of Korean costume culture in movie and television series enervate its cultural competence and advance its cultural creative industry. The spread of Korean costume culture is the pioneer and foreshadowing of its clothing industries and greatly underpins its advancement overseas. In concert, the development of clothing industry also helps the spread of Korean costume culture.

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