Analysis of Hip-hop Fashion Codes in Contemporary Chinese Fashion

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the type of fashion codes hip-hop fashion has in contemporary Chinese fashion, and the frequency and characteristics of each fashion code. Text mining, which is the most basic analysis method in big data analytics was used rather than traditional design element analysis. Specific results were as follows. First, hip-hop initially entered China in the late 1970s. The most historical turning point was the American film "Breakin". Second, frequency and word cloud analysis results showed that the "national tide" fashion code was the most notable code. Third, through word embedding analysis, fashion codes were divided into types of "original hip-hop codes", "trendy hip-hop codes", and "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture".

I. Introduction

As Fredric Jameson said, "culture is everything in a society of spectacles, a society of images, and a society of media"(Kim & Yang, 2006). Correspondingly, in modern society, cultural content has become inevitable. This trend has led to the emergence of a buzzword called "cultural IP(intellectual property)" in China. Unlike in the past, as new trends are often created for each country's unique culture, high-value addition in the fashion industry through the development of creative cultural fashion content has become a key component (Yum, 2013).

Hip-hop refers to a culture and lifestyle that includes elements such as music, dance, art, and fashion, which were popular amongst the black American resistance groups in the early 1970s. In addition, hip-hop fashion is a genre of hip-hop culture and refers to a fashion code and identity composed of music, dance, and art.

According to Fang(2020), the popularity of "hip-hop" in China has nearly tripled since 2017, and the consumption of hip-hop fashion-related products from online stores has rapidly increased among young consumers. This is because the hip-hop craze has been blowing in China since the first season of "Rap of China(中国有嘻哈)", an online broadcast hip-hop selection audition program aired in 2017. By August 22, 2017, the number of video playbacks of episode 9 of the "Rap of China" exceeded 1.5 billion, the number of views of the issue on Weibo(微博) was 3.26 billion, and the number of discussions was 10.73 million. In addition, the number of views of the finals set a record of 150 million(Chen, 2020). Hip-hop has a huge influence in China and the number of views, and the phrase "Do you have a Freestyle?" in the program for a while has become a popular Internet buzzword in China.

Consequently, in China, research on hip-hop has been increasing since 2017. Especially, there has been an increase in studies on the spread of hip-hop in China(Fang, 2020; Li, 2019; Wu, 2019; Xu, 2019) and studies on the degree of acceptance of hip-hop and self-identity construction(Bai & Zang, 2013; Huang,

2020; Shang, 2020). Others include studies on the localization of hip-hop in China in the background of the globalization era(Chen, 2013; Zhou & Sheng, 2012) and studies on how hip-hop fashion design elements are applied in fashion design. Notably, most of the studies done so far have focused on the process of American hip-hop propagation to China, the localized situation, and the elements of hip-hop fashion that can be applied to fashion design. On the other hand, studies on the characteristics of Chinese hip-hop fashion from the perspective of Chinese culture were insufficient.

Therefore the purpose of this study was to find out the type of fashion code hip-hop fashion has in contemporary Chinese fashion, and the frequency and characteristics of each type of fashion code. In addition, this study aimed to present data that can be practically applied in designing hip-hop fashion for young Chinese consumers.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Hip-hop and Hip-hop Fashion

In the dictionary, "HIP" is a noun meaning "hip" and "pelvis", and "HOP" is a verb meaning "to run on one foot". Hip-hop is a combination of "HIP" and "HOP", and can be interpreted as "to run while shaking the hip"(Jiang, 2018). The origins of hip-hop differ from scholar to scholar. Chen(2010) stated that the word hip-hop first appeared in the lyrics of rapper LovebugStarsky's song "to the hip, hippedy hop". Kang(2010) states that hip-hop originated in New York in the eastern United States by DJ KoolHerc in the early 1970s, and became commercially viable in 1979 when the Sugar Hill Gang released the "Rapper's Delight" album. According to Wu(2019), hip-hop originated from Kevin Donovan, the founder of ZuLu Nation in the Bronx, USA. Although there are various views on the origins of hip-hop, it is true that hip-hop started with the resistance of black music groups in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hip-hop fashion, part of the hip-hop culture,

appeared under the influence of subculture music in the late 1970s, and gradually developed as alienation, resistance, and deviance from the general concept of society were further combined(Park, 2011). There are various opinions about the origin of hip-hop fashion. According to Lee(1988) and Kang(2010), hip-hop fashion started when the second generation of the working class in Harlem slums had no money to buy clothes, so they inherited clothes from their fathers. Also, other studies reported that big-size fashion gradually became a street fashion because most of the children who grew up in Harlem became gangsters and wanted wide trousers and many trouser pockets to carry a lot of pistols and drugs(Kang, 2010; Lee, 1988). However, like hip-hop music, hip-hop fashion originated from black culture, and it is a way of expressing their lifestyle.

Based on the above, this study defines hip-hop to mean the culture and lifestyle of American black resistance groups in the early 1970s, including elements such as music, dance, art, and fashion. In addition, hip-hop fashion is a genre of hip-hop culture and refers to the fashion codes and identities composed of music, dance, and art.

2. Chinese Hip-hop

Hip-hop in China is translated as "嘻哈", meaning a positive and optimistic spirit that doesn't care what other people think(Wu, 2019). According to the contents of previous studies(Fan, 2019; Huang, 2020; Jiang, 2018; Jin, 2017; Zhou & Sheng, 2012), the process of the spread of hip-hop created in the United States to China can be largely divided into three categories: "the period of first introduced(late 1970s-early 1980s)", "the period of development in resistance(2000s-early 2010s)", and "the period of heyday(after 2017)"(Figure 1).

Hip-hop first came to China in the late 1970s, and the American movie "Breakin(霹雳舞)" became a historical turning point; in 1978, when the American movie "Breakin" was released in China, breaking dance, part of the hip-hop culture, sparked a hip-hop trend among Chinese youth(Fan, 2019). After that, Hong Kong rappers such as Lin Zixiang(林子祥) attempted to spread hip-hop in China(Huang, 2020).

In the 2000s and early 2010s, hip-hop developed amid resistance in China. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as Korean and Japanese culture continued to develop,
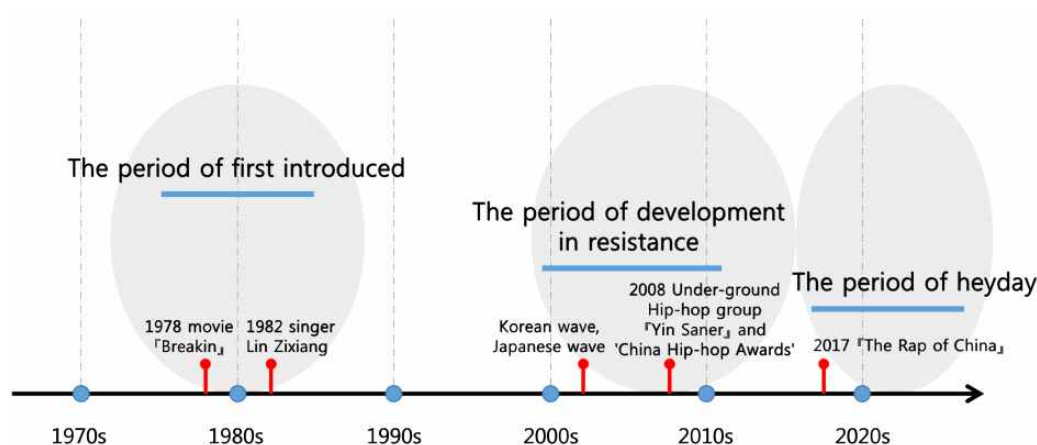

Figure 1. *The Development Process of Hip-hop in China*
(drawn by authors)

Asianized hip-hop became popular again in China together with the "Korean Wave" and "Japanese Wave" craze(Jin, 2017). Notably, in 1993 Chinese pop singers Yi Xiangjie(尹相傑) and Xie Dong(谢东) released an album called "Someone(某某人)"(Fang, 2020; Jiang, 2018; Jin, 2017), and hip-hop laid the foundation for redevelopment in China. In particular, in 2008, underground hip-hop group Yin Saner(陰三兒) released a hip-hop song called "Beijing Welcomes You Back(北京歡迎你回來)" for the Beijing Olympic Games and received public attention. In addition, the first "Chinese Hip-Hop Awards(中国嘻哈大会)" was held in the same year, causing hip-hop to develop in earnest in China(Jin, 2017).

Finally, in 2017, with the background of a hip-hop selection audition program called "Rap of China" aired online, hip-hop reached its heyday in China. And even if you searched for the keyword "嘻哈" in Chinese on Google Trends, it is consistent with the peak in 2017 in China(Figure 2).

3. Types of Chinese Hip-hop Fashion Codes

A code is any rule or practice in the society, class or profession, and it also means an abbreviation or sign(记号) used by a company internationally("Korean Dictionary," 2020). Also, according to Han(2005), a code means a promise when expressing a sign with other sign affiliations, or the sign affiliation. In other words, code can be associated with a "sign", to define the concept of a fashion code. According to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Sassure, signs do not create meaning based on the reality of an independent object world, but rather create meaning through mutual reference(Chris, 2000/2009). A sign is composed of a signifier(medium) and a signified(meaning). The union of the signifier and the signified is called "Signification". Signification refers to a semiotic operation that accepts(or convinces) sign users of the relationship established between the signified and the signifier by means of a promise. This is also called "codification", codification is a cultural phenomenon that occurs over a relatively long period of time, and codes are generated as a result of codification(Han, 2005).

The concept of fashion code can be found in the field of fashion design. Han(2005) defined the clues that appeared in clothes and accessories worn by humans as fashion codes. In other words, he emphasized the epoch while defining the fashion code as a characteristic message that is commonly interpreted by members of a society in each era. Meanwhile, Han and Na(1997) defined the fashion code as an important pattern provided by culture. In other words, he emphasized the cultural aspect by defining the fashion code as a kind of "etiquette" for dressing.

Based on the above, in this study, fashion code was defined as an epoch and cultural characteristic that appeared in various ways in hip-hop fashion design. From these characteristics of the epoch and culture, the fashion code of hip-hop was divided into three categories: "original hip-hop codes", "trendy hip-hop

Figure 2. *The Attention of Hip-hop in China*
(trends.google.com)

codes", and "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture". "Original hip-hop codes" refers to the characteristics of traditional black American hip-hop fashion in contemporary Chinese hip-hop fashion. "trendy hip-Hop codes" refers to the contemporary and trendy characteristics of American black hip-hop fashion in the process of introducing it to Chinese society. Lastly, "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture" refers to the traditional cultural characteristics of China in contemporary Chinese hip-hop fashion(Figure 3).

Ⅲ. Research Questions and Methods

1. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows.

Research question 1. What are the fashion codes related to contemporary Chinese hip-hop fashion, and what is its frequency?

Research question 2. When looking at hip-hop fashion codes by type, what is the relationship between the subdivided fashion codes?

2. Research Scope and Methods

To achieve the purpose of this study, we focused on the internet home-pages of "CLOT" and "HIPANDA", the representative Chinese hip-hop fashion brands. The reasons for this are as follows.

First, according to Jiang(2018), "XIHA CHINA(嘻哈中国, http://www.xihachina.com)" is a website that has gained great public confidence and influence in China. There are about 60 Chinese hip-hop fashion brands on this website, including "CLOT" and "HIPANDA". Second, according to Lui(2020), brands such as "CLOT", "HIPANDA", and "Li Ning(李宁)" reflect the current state of hip-hop fashion in China. Therefore, in this study, "CLOT" and "HIPANDA", were selected as research subjects. However, whereas the above two
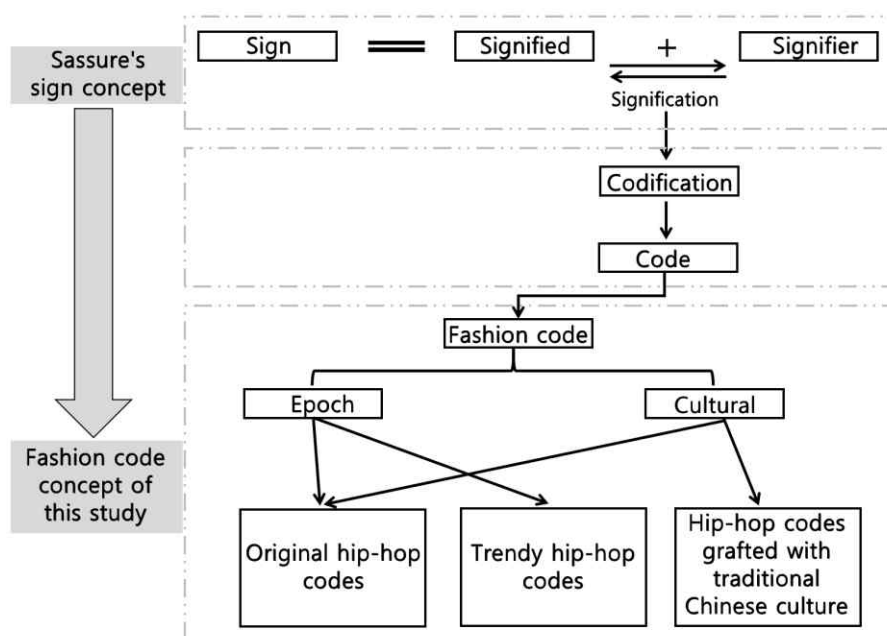

Figure 3. *Fashion Code Concept and Classification*
(drawn by authors)

studies focused on the image of hip-hop fashion brands, this study tried to analyze the fashion codes through the aesthetic modifiers that introduce each design published on the internet home-pages of "CLOT" and "HIPANDA". In addition, considering the main target of hip-hop fashion, this study targeted adult men's wear, adult women's wear, and accessories, and excluded children's wear.

This study was conducted with the most basic text mining in big data analysis. In an era of the explosive growth of information, analyzing large-scale text data using big data analysis methods can quickly and accurately extract the necessary information. In addition, compared to images, the text has the benefit of more accurately expressing the designer's design intent and design characteristics. The method of research is divided into the method of data collection and the method of data analysis.

The data was centered on the text and the images were collected as an auxiliary. Data collection was conducted on December 5-6, 2020. As shown in Figure 4, images of hip-hop designs posted on the website and expressions that modify them were extracted. Thus, the final 2,314 images and 47,204 modified expressions were collected.

The data were analyzed as follows. First, Python was used in the study as an analysis tool to perform text mining analysis. Second, prior to text analysis, data preprocessing of text data was performed to remove stop-words such as punctuation marks, and spaces. Third, the overall frequency extraction and schematic process of hip-hop fashion codes used "term frequency[TF] analysis" and "word cloud analysis" according to the contents of Young and Lee(2018) and Ran, Gao and Li(2018). Word frequency analysis is the most basic analysis method of text mining achieved by extracting keywords and then analyzing the frequency of words appearing in the text(Young & Lee, 2018). In addition, word cloud analysis is a way of expressing words in different sizes depending on the frequency of appearance in the text so that you can see at a glance which words appear more and which words appear less(Young & Lee, 2018; Park, 2019). Fourth, in order to gain a deeper understanding of fashion codes related to Chinese hip-hop fashion, an analysis of fashion codes by type was conducted. In this course, word embedding, a method of text mining was performed. Word embedding refers to a method of expressing a word as a vector and converting the word into a dense representation(You, 2019).

The contents discussed above are summarized in Figure 5 below.

Figure 4. *Examples of Data Collection Methods*
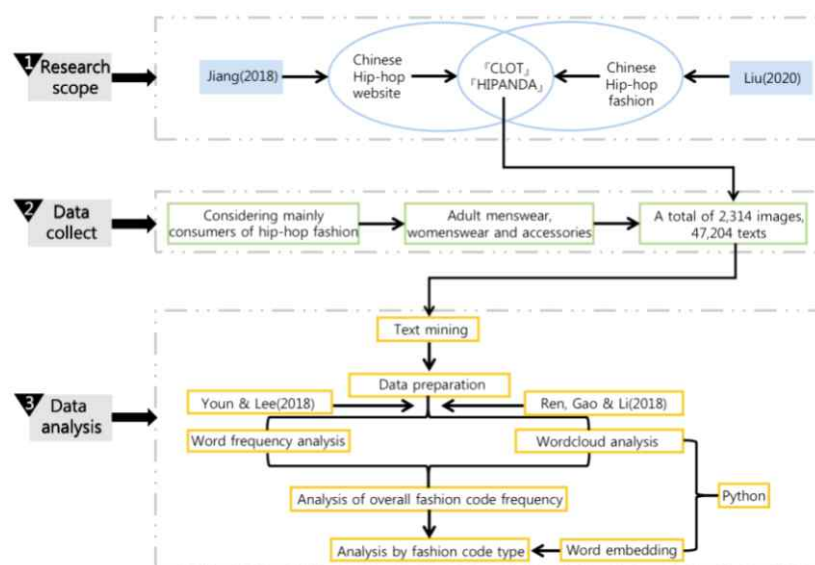(clot.world.tmall.com)

Figure 5. *Method and Flow of Research*
(drawn by authors)

IV. Results and Discussion

1. Frequency Analysis of Fashion Code

In this study, up to 50 words with the highest frequency of appearance were extracted and analyzed to understand the characteristics of Chinese hip-hop fashion. After that, 100 words with a high frequency of appearance were schematized to reliably contrast of the size the frequency of each word(Figure 6).

As a result of analyzing the frequency of fashion codes, fashion codes such as animal "panda(熊猫)" 2,847 times(Figure 7), brand names "HIPANDA" 2,175 times, "hi(你好)" 2,114 times, "street fashion(潮牌)" 2,106 times, "design(设计)" 2,091 times, and "national tide(国潮)" 1,455 times showed relatively high frequency(Table 1). These fashion codes were also large in the word cloud analysis. Among them, the reason why "panda" appeared much more frequently is the influence of the brand name "Hipanda".

It is noteworthy that hip-hop fashion combined with traditional Chinese culture has not only expressed original hip-hop fashion codes such as "street fashion",

"print(印花)" 412 times(Figure 8), "camouflage(迷彩)" 89 times(Figure 9), and "sports(运动)" 72 times, but also combined with Chinese elements such as "national tide", "embroidery(刺绣)" 45 times and "Chinese(华人)" 77 times(Figure 10), which generally represents the culture of the people of the People's Republic of China. In other words, it can be seen that Chinese hip-hop fashion focuses on Chinese consumers and actively uses Chinese images in design(Table 2).

While summarizing the contents of the Chinese hip-hop fashion codes, we should pay attention to the fashion code called "national tide". As shown in Table 1, the frequency of "national tide" was 1,455 times, ranking sixth among the 50 words.

The meaning of "national" in "national tide" is "Chinese", and "tide" means "trend(潮流)"(Xie, 2020). According to Lui(2020), "national tide" is a concept that has recently emerged in China and refers to a fashion trend derived from combining Chinese culture and tradition with the latest fashion trends. Due to this influence, a similar concept called "trendy Chinese style (潮范中国风)" appeared in China. And Xie(2020) has defined this trend as "new China style(新中国风)".

Table 1. *The Frequency of Fashion Codes*

Ranking	Fashion Codes	TF	Ranking	Fashion Codes	TF
1	熊猫/Panda	2847	26	口袋/Pocket	89
2	HIPANDA	2175	27	迷彩/Camouflage	89
3	你好/Hi	2114	28	梭织/Woven	84
4	潮牌/Street fashion	2106	29	元素/Element	79
5	设计/Design	2091	30	华人/Chineses	77
6	国潮/National tide	1455	31	经典/Classic	75
7	女款/Woman's dress	801	32	运动/Sport	72
8	男款/Men's dress	703	33	黑色/Black	68
9	T恤/T-shirt	528	34	基本/Basic	67
10	印花/Printing	412	35	外套/Coat	63
11	卫衣/Hooded sweatshirt	396	36	夹克/Jacket	59
12	连帽/Hooded	196	37	圆领/Round neck	58
13	针织/Knitting	191	38	棉服/Padded outwear	56
14	长裤/Trousers	153	39	羽绒服/Down jacket	55
15	系列/Series	149	40	长袖/Long sleeve	52
16	棒球/Baseball	148	41	熊头/Bear head	51
17	陈冠希/Chen Guanxi	145	42	牛仔/Jeans	46
18	主理/Principal	143	43	刺绣/Embroidery	45
19	短裤/Shorts	134	44	基础/Foundation	43
20	拼接/Splicing	130	45	星星/Star	42
21	字母/Alphabet	128	46	字体/Typeface	42
22	拉链/Zipper	112	47	第五/Fifth	42
23	短袖/Short sleeve	111	48	冲锋衣/wind breaker	40
24	织带/Webbing	99	49	衬衫/Shirt	37
25	长款/Long	90	50	男女/Men and women	35

Figure 6. *Word Cloud Analysis*
(drawn by authors)

Table 2. *Images of the Fashion Codes*

Example Image of the Fashion Codes

Figure 7.
Panda
(hipanda.world.tmall.com)

Figure 8.
Chineses Printing
(clot.world.tmall.com)

Figure 9.
Camouflage
(clot.world.tmall.com)

Figure 10.
Chineses
(clot.world.tmall.com)

2. Analysis of Fashion Code by Types

In this section, through word embedding analysis, fashion codes were divided into types of "original hip-hop codes", "trendy hip-hop codes", and "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture". The word embedding analysis mainly focused on the items shown in the frequency analysis mentioned above. These are the eight items, namely "t-shirt", "hooded sweatshirt", "padded outwear", "jacket", "down jacket", "coat", "wind breaker", and "shirt". As a result of deriving up to 20 codes with the highest relevance for each item, a total of 160 codes(repeatable) were obtained. Next, a total of 51 fashion codes(repeatable) were extracted by checking codes that reflect the formative characteristics of hip-hop fashion or design, and Chinese culture. Finally, fashion codes reflected by each type of fashion code were investigated, and the results were summarized as shown in Figure 11.

First is the "original hip-hop codes". Hip-hop is an American culture formed in the early 1970s around resistance groups of black Americans. The characteristics of hip-hop fashion remained the same even after its introduction to China; "military(军事)", "air force(空军)",

"anti-war(反战)", "peace", "army", "graffiti(涂鸦)", "skull (骷髅头)", "looseness(宽松)", "gold chain(金链)", "gothic (哥特)", and "hole(破洞)" are relatively related(Figure 11). According to Figure 11, this is mainly based on items such as hooded sweatshirt, down jacket, and wind breaker that are used in the military. And by introducing loose silhouettes and artistic designs such as graffiti and skull, it expresses not only the functionality of clothing but also the opposition to war and military style. In addition, the combination of a shirt with holes, jacket, and gold chain accessories expresses the characteristics of street style. Among them, Xu(2019) said that "hip-hop military styles" that appeared in the late 1980s and "hip-hop sports and street styles" that appeared after the 2000s have formed the mainstream.

Second is the "trendy hip-hop codes". It clearly showed the characteristics of unisex. An example is fashion codes such as "men and women(男女)", "couple (情侣)", and "unisex(中性)" are relatively related, as shown in Figure 11. And according to Figure 11 it is mainly the used in items such as T-shirts, jackets, and down jackets that are difficult to distinguish between genders. In other words, it is the most basic and simple design items, applicable to both men, and women and
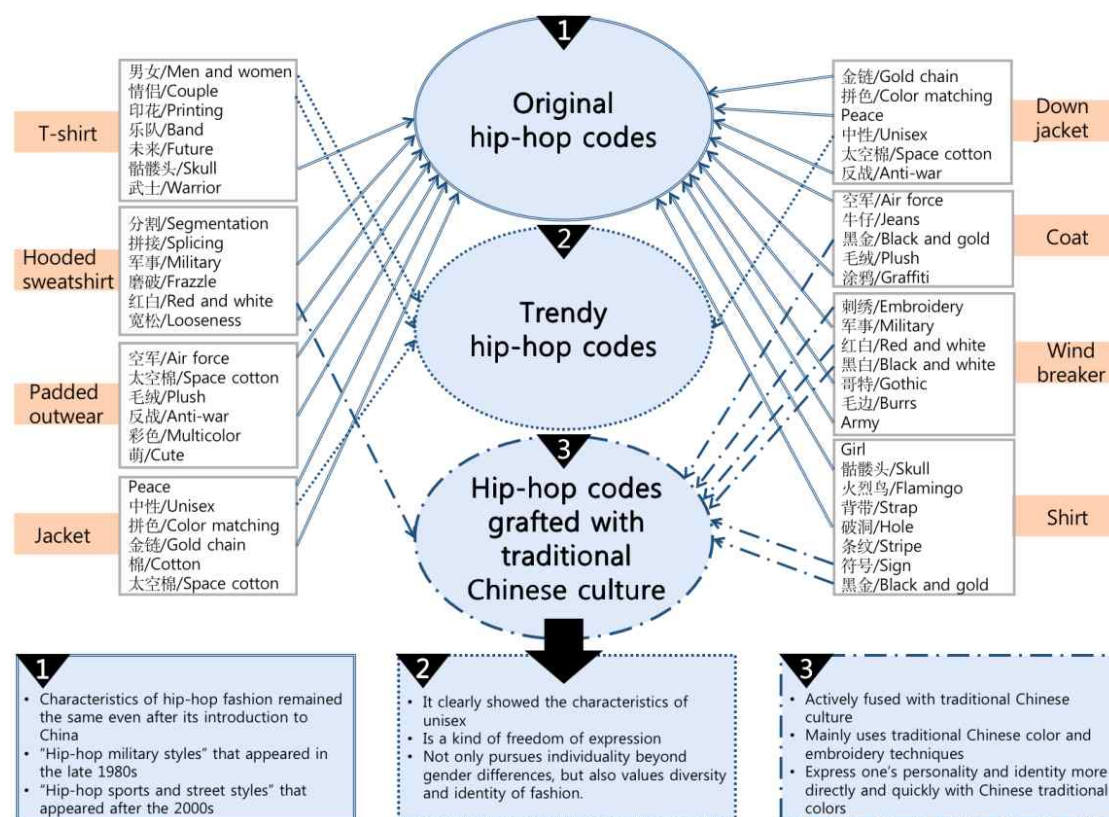
Figure 11. *Analysis of Each Fashion Code Type*
(drawn by authors)

expresses the versatility of Chinese hip-hop fashion. As Chen Guanxi(陈冠希), founder of the Chinese hip-hop fashion brand "CLOT", defined that "the cause of the development of Chinese hip-hop fashion is a kind of freedom of expression"(Jiang, 2018), it can be seen that Chinese hip-hop fashion not only pursues individuality beyond gender differences, but also values diversity and identity of fashion.

The third is the "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture". This code means that hip-hop fashion, introduced from America to China is actively fused with traditional Chinese culture according to Chinese society and consumers' tastes. As shown in Figure 11, fashion codes such as "red and white(红白)", "black and gold(黑金)", "embroidery(刺绣)", "black and

white(黑白)", and "symbol(符号)" are relatively related. These results show that hip-hop fashion in China mainly uses traditional Chinese colors for items such as a hooded sweatshirt, coat, and wind breaker. Since color is the first prominent element in clothing design, it can express one's personality and identity more directly and quickly with Chinese traditional colors. Since "gold" represents a unique personality and wealth in China, "gold" is higher than "red" and "black". In addition, based on items such as wind breaker and shirt, Chinese embroidery techniques and traditional symbol designs are used to express Chinese culture. It may be that in order to cater to the Chinese domestic consumer market, Chinese hip-hop fashion adds unique Chinese cultural elements to the design as high-value addition.

Ⅴ. Conclusion

In this study, text mining, the most basic of big data analysis, was used as the research method, and the data from the Internet home-pages of Chinese hip-hop fashion brands "CLOT" and "HIPANDA" were mainly analyzed. This study investigated the frequency of the fashion codes for Chinese hip-hop fashion, and the characteristics of each type of fashion code. Specific results were as follows.

First, hip-hop initially entered China in the late 1970s. The most historic turning point was the American film "Breakin". The younger generation in China wanted to know "who I am" and "how I am different from you", and with that background, they put more importance on their individuality and identity.

Second, frequency and word cloud analysis results showed that the "national tide" fashion code was the most notable code. The "national tide" is a concept that has recently emerged in China, and refers to a fashion trend with Chinese cultural characteristics derived by combining Chinese culture and tradition with the latest fashion trends.

Third, the results of the fashion code analysis by type through word embedding analysis were as follows. First, in the "original hip-hop codes", there are relatively high-level fashion codes such as "military(军事)", "air force(空军)", "anti-war(反战)", "peace", "army", "graffiti (涂鸦)", "skull(骷髅头)", "looseness(宽松)", "gold chain(金链)", "gothic(哥特)" and "hole(破洞)". Through this, it was found that the characteristics of hip-hop fashion remained the same even after its introduction to China. Next, in the "trendy hip-hop codes", fashion codes such as "men and women(男女)", "couple(情侣)", and "unisex (中性)" are relatively highly related. It can be seen that Chinese hip-hop fashion not only pursues. Individuality, beyond gender differences, but also values fashion diversity and identity. Finally, in the "hip-hop codes grafted with traditional Chinese culture", fashion codes such as "red and white(红白)", "black and gold(黑金)", "embroidery(刺绣)", "black and white(黑白)", and "symbol(符号)" are relatively related. These results showed that hip-hop fashion in China mainly uses traditional Chinese color and embroidery techniques.

This study's results add diversity to clothing studies through text mining, and access to hip-hop fashion, and provides practical data on Chinese hip-hop fashion. However, this study has several limitations. First, only the contents of the Chinese hip-hop fashion brands "CLOT" and "HIPANDA", websites homepages were collected and analyzed. Therefore, extensive and in-depth research could not be achieved. Second, since it data was mechanically analyzed using a text mining analysis method, there is a possibility that an error occurred in the analysis process or when translating Chinese into English. Accordingly, follow-up studies should be conducted for a detailed examination of the characteristics of Chinese hip-hop fashion through comparative studies with hip-hop fashion in East Asian countries such as Korea and Japan.

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