

Emergence of Chinese Han Retro Wedding Dress

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Abstract

Social changes led to the gradual disappearance of traditional Han costume. While in the context of national cultural revival, the "Chinese Hanfu movement" has given rise to the appearance and commercialization of Han Retro Wedding Dress, which including "Zhou style", "Han style", "Tang style", "Song Style" and "Ming style." Chinese history and culture, social democratic environment, economical market promotion and diverse aesthetic needs give the soil for these dresses. While contemporary wedding dresses in China are mostly westernized, and these retro dresses bring certain "reverse cultural shock" to Chinese marriage custom. The key of dealing with the "reverse cultural shock" and reviving Chinese costume culture should be following the market rules with sufficient cultural consciousness of the whole Chinese nation.

Keywords: Han retro wedding dress, Hanfu movement, reverse cultural shock, cultural consciousness

Since Chinese Modern Times, the traditional wedding dress of Han race had gradually faded under the impact of western wedding suit, and correspondingly, Chinese old-fashioned wedding ceremony had been substituted by western one as well. In recent years, however, under the influence of "Hanfu movement", the new emerging Han retro wedding dress has been increasingly appearing in urban wedding ceremonies or wedding photography. This kind of Chinese-style classical wedding dress has drawn not only the attention of city newlyweds but also the curiosity of news media and scholars of certain fields. Professor ZHOU Xin, PhD supervisor of Peking University as well as a professor of Aichi University, has done lots of research on contemporary Chinese national costumes and relevant activities or movements, such as the Zhongshan-suit, cheongsam (Qipao), new Tang-suit, and especially made an over ten years follow-up study on modern Hanfu and Hanfu movement. He made the academic comments on "Hanfu movement" that, as a sub-culture phenomenon of Internet age, the nature of Chinese Hanfu movement has a tendency of essentialism in their ideological advocacy, but with a characteristic of constructivism in their practical performance. The "retro wedding dress", as a great innovation in their practical construction, has been gradually commercialized in developing process. While considering the western dress has almost totally take place of Chinese native one, this "new style" wedding dress, which using Chinese ancient costume forms is definitely not the mainstream in nowadays. And consequently, it brings a certain level "reverse cultural shock" to contemporary Chinese Wedding customs both in comments and practice.

1. Han Retro Wedding Dress and Hanfu Movement

In current China, the Han retro wedding dress, which combines the ancient costumes of Han race with modern aesthetic and design methods is also known as "Hanfu wedding dress", "ancient wedding costume", "Chinese classical wedding dress", etc. The dress style begins with "Hanfu movement", which devoted to Chinese Han culture revival by primarily advocating their ancient costumes before Qing dynasty, which they called "Hanfu". When promoting Hanfu, they attempted to combine with traditional rituals of ethnic Han, by which the Han retro wedding dress produced. The pioneers of Han wedding dress practitioner were mostly "Hanfu advocates" or "Hanfu enthusiasts", as what they called themselves. The "Hanfu sports memorabilia (2013)", which edited by certain Hanfu enthusiasts, records that the first newlywed who adopt Han retro wedding dress are "GongGongTaoTian(groom)" and "BiaoYouMei(brid)", whose Zhou-style wedding was hold in Shanghai in November 12, 2006. The organizers and most participants of their wedding, especially the newlywed themselves, were almost seasoned in Hanfu movement, except some relatives. The shapes, patterns, textiles of their dresses, and relating items were all delicately designed, and the ritual was aided by Hanfu enthusiasts, which subsequently became the model of later Han-style wedding.

Whenever possible, these types of wedding dress will be designed in the form of formal ancient Chinese costumes of upper-class, and they are constantly pursuing of "Chinese classical beauty" in all aspects like fabrics, colors, accessories and dress etiquettes. According to Chinese costume history and the former practices adopted in Hanfu movement, these wedding dresses can be divided typically into Zhou-style, Han-style, Tang-style, Song Style and Ming style, as well as some types of costumes populated in other transitional period in ancient China except Yuan and Qing dynasty for they were not ruled by ethnic Han. Their original designers were focusing on the clothing history and culture, which links these wedding dresses much with cultural features. For example, the Zhou-style wedding dress adopts the ancient color set as "XuanXun(玄纁)". The "Xuan" means a reddish black, which stands for the sky (of mystery night), and the "Xun" means the color of orange, which stands for the soil and ground. This original color adoration reflects Chinese ancient thoughts of respecting nature. In Zhou style, the groom wears loose robe with right-leaning overlapping front placket and wide sleeves, with "JueBian(爵弁)" crown on the head, decorative long rectangle loincloth "BiXi(弊膝)" tied around the waist and hanging in front. "BiXi" is an ancient accessory representing for social status in the past. The Zhou-style bride robe is called "QuJu(曲裾)", which is characterized by a curved hemline surrounding from ankle till hip when clad. And their hair will be settled by the ancient hair clasp called "Ji(笄)". In Zhou dynasty, "JueBian" and "Ji" were commonly used in puberty rite as a symbol of adulthood for newly grown-ups. The Zhou-style wedding dresses are bestowed with an atmosphere of elegance and solemn. The most remarkable feature of Tang-style wedding dress is the special color, which makes "crimson groom and green bride". Besides, the groom wears ancient crown called "Liang Guan", to symbolize their knowledge and talents. Besides, multilayered bride wedding dress is quite complicated, as well as the various beautiful decorated hair clasps on head, proving the prosperous of Tang dynasty. Song-style wedding dresses are similar to the Tang-style, but much more concise. Typical Ming-style wedding dress of the groom are made up of the floral official hat "FuTou(幞头)", round-collared robe taking costume example of the best scholar called Zhuangyuan(状元), which produced in Chinese old KeJu examination. While the bride wears in red silk robe, with phoenix coronet on head but covered by red silk veil to conceal face, and a very important accessory called "XiaPei(霞帔)" on shoulder, which is a cape or shawl with colorful embroidery to decorate this wonderful attire.

When spreading the classical clothing culture, the opinion leaders of Hanfu movement lay more emphasis on renaissance of Chinese ritual culture. To match the Han retro dress and create a more classical cultural atmosphere, the wedding will have a set of corresponding classical decorum of old times. "Three Books and Six Etiquettes" is the traditional set of Chinese marriage customs. "Three books" means three formal evidentiary writs used in the wedding process, including the appointment book, gifts index book and welcome book, "Six Etiquettes" refers to the six step of marriage ritual, contains proposal and sending betrothal gifts, asking name, divination, sending appointment book and gifts index book, choosing auspicious date, and at last holding wedding. What is more, there was a Han retro wedding hold in Changchun in September 29, 2014, containing 11 rites, which were "thousands families blessing", "reporting to ancestors", "sending presents to children", "mutual bowing", "changing appellation", "cross-cup drinking", "same piece meat eating", "hair knotting", "saluting to new families", "hand in hand", and "thank guests". The solemnly Chinese ancient ritual had impressively shocked most guests and onlookers. We can easily find that, by combining with ancient or traditional rituals, the Han retro dress shows an air of unique Chinese elegance and aesthetic beauty, which has become one of the main attractiveness.

Similar to Hanfu movement, there are a variety of historical types of retro wedding dresses as well as all kinds of wedding ceremonies refer to different dynasties coexist today, and situation like costumes of different historical background mixed in one wedding is very common and can be hardly regulated. Professor Zhou Xing once said, "relying on such a huge and complex cultural history of Chinese clothing, and lacking of 'authoritative guidance', the new 'invention' of Hanfu will naturally develop to different styles and forms". In spite of the guide and interference of some academics and experts involved in the Hanfu movement as time goes by, these academic rhetoric get no power in reality applications, and it is still the individual aesthetic preferences and market demand that determines the reconstruction form of classical wedding dress and ritual. To say the least, whether it be necessary to unified these costumes, and subsequently how to do that, are controversial both in theory and practice.

2. The Promoting Powers and "Reverse Cultural Shock"

There is certain occasionality in the emergence of Han retro wedding dress in consideration of "Hanfu movement". Industrial modern society determines the popularity of contemporary concise-shaped daily wear and the disappearance of those wide-sleeved costumes. To certain lever, it is impossible for these original Hanfu style getting back to daily life again. After meeting the bottleneck in promotion, the enthusiasts advocated Hanfu as

instead of daily wear but formal attire of Han race, which can be used in certain occasions, such as the puberty rite and wedding, connecting with certain etiquettes. Till then, these Hanfu got excellent performance platform, and were spreading rapidly.

While as cultural heritage carrier of Chinese Han race, there is some inevitabilities in the rejuvenation of these retro dress. In the study of Hanfu movement, Professor Zhou Xing stated that "Hanfu movement" has rediscovered and reconstructed of Hanfu's "Beauty", and to some extent, it also shows a full return towards the Chinese traditional aesthetic consciousness. When Chinese Westernization "overkill" the national traditions, searching of the nation's own unique culture will be a new historical subject. Especially in the urban living space where the Han national costumes have almost entirely lost or disappeared, part of Han people with certain national conscience are trying to find their own elegant style, and the Han retro wedding dress has become an attempt to regain the "dress with etiquette" aesthetics. The double hundred cultural campaign, "Letting hundreds Flowers blossom and hundreds of schools of thoughts contend", creates a suitable environment for the development and revival of traditional culture. Democratic society with rule of law provides protection for the free options of wedding dress, as well the openness, freedom and personalization of wedding custom. Contrary to the past, Han retro wedding dress of today functions not for maintaining feudal ethical order, but for pursuing gorgeous wearing effect which produced by costumes of old upper class system, even of emperor's, and the so-called crime of "transgression" has already become forgotten history with no scruples. For the individuals, material wealth makes people focused more on the pursuit of spiritual life, fast-paced and stylized modern society drives people into the hunger for their own national refinement and romance. Besides, aesthetic interpretation of classical costumes provide by historical movies and TV series creates a unique imagination of the splendid old-fashioned wedding scenes. Meanwhile, the publicity activities of Hanfu enthusiasts, appearance of Hanfu merchants, timely involvement of wedding companies, have all given people more opportunities to contact Han retro wedding dress, which develop and spread quickly in this context.

Han retro wedding dress draws not only frequent attention of Chinese society, but also brings "reverse cultural shock" to Chinese contemporary Marriage custom. Reverse cultural shock, a theory originally quotes from the cross-cultural research field, refers to the emotions of anxiety, confusion, inadaptation and even rejection to their own national culture one got when returned from another cultures. This concept is corresponding to the embarrassment Hanfu encounters, that the strangeness and resentment of Han national clothing culture, either ancient or traditional, after a purely Westernization of ethnic Han. Since Chinese Modern Times, most of the reforms and movements, including Constitutional Reform and Modernization (WeiXin Reform), New Culture Movement, or several political and economic campaigns after Liberation, were all regarded that "tradition" is against to "modern", and set the China's cultural tradition as enemy of modernization, under the slogan of "destroy the old and establish the new." During this period, traditional Han dress had been gotten rid of as old feudal things. After the reform and opening up policy, the traditional marriage customs even get no time to pick up, while the western wedding suits have rapidly gained the popularity and formed a new westernized wedding custom. Today, the environment Change inevitably makes history-repeated wide-sleeved Han retro wedding dress seems accidental and abrupt, giving general sense of artificial unreality. The outfits, costumes of participants and ceremonial occasions are all difficult to correspond harmoniously, and the pursuit of overall co-ordination needs high time, effort and money costs. Thus for the general public, newlyweds who have the courage or willing to choose the Han retro wedding dress actually belongs to minority. In addition, fans of Han retro wedding dress is closely related to the Hanfu movement. When these Hanfu enthusiasts transmit the classical costume culture, they deliberately exclude the Han costumes of Yuan and Qing dynasty, increasing their rationality and persuasiveness by certain historical examples of exploitation and oppression treated with Han people, like changing the clothing costumes and hairstyle of Han, when the minorities like Mongolian and Manchu were ruling China. And these deeds have created some resentful feelings between Han and other minorities and impacted the national relationship to certain extent. And in network debates, prejudice, partiality or ignorance of facts often exists, leading disputes into meaningless abuse and personal attacks. These bestowed the classical dresses, originally without offensiveness, with unwarranted features like "rebellious" and "aggressive". Thus they attract scholars and official concerns about ethnic relations, reduce the public opinion support for Hanfu and Han retro wedding dress and increase the difficulty of Han retro wedding dress going back nationalization.

3. Dealing "Reverse Cultural Shock" with Cultural Consciousness

Whether the Han retro wedding dress can become an official symbol of Chinese marriage customs and achieve real renaissance of Han costume culture, culture consciousness of whole Chinese nation is a prerequisite. Based on the speculation of national cultural heritage, Mr. Fei Xiaotong proposed that the "cultural consciousness"

concept, which means "that people living in a certain culture should get full 'self-knowledge' of its cultural origin, formation, characteristics and development trend. Sufficient self-knowledge contributes to strengthen the autonomy of cultural transformation, and then achieve the decisiveness in choosing and adapting traditions to the new environment or cultural era." Once the national consciousness awakening, the deeper levels of social Westernization the fiercer impulsion of lacking cultural identity will be perceived by the nation. That will stimulate the people forming a more positive attitude in dating back national culture, doing more research and adapting it to new environment. Since the historical heritage can hardly be directly copied, it is very important to find a proper platform for developing, and the national cultural self-confidence would be reconstructed through these works.

For contemporary life, Chinese classical costumes may not suit for daily wear, but just appropriate as wedding dress, and the Han retro wedding dress is such an attempt. Considering the hundreds years cutting-off of Han classical costumes, earnestly research on costume cultural heritage including literature and antique items is necessary. In addition to academic research institutions such as the Art Studies Institutes, universities, there are also some individual researchers and civil organizations involving Hanfu enthusiasts that dedicated to academic costume research. It is "Chinese Traditional costumes • etiquette • festival revival plan", which edited by opinion leaders of Hanfu enthusiasts under sufficient knowledge of costume history, that positions contemporary Hanfu as wedding dress and endows it with ritual solemn and cultural connotation.

Cultural consciousness concerning national culture renaissance requires also a rational awareness of dealing with history and ethnic relationships, and comprehensive attitude towards the culture of other ethnic groups within China. It should recognize that the ethnic and cultural integration is a normal state in Chinese nation development, and the absorption of minority costumes is also a normal state in Han costume development. Chinese nation is an aggregate of Han nationality and 55 minorities, and Han Chinese accounted for an absolute main proportion in numbers. In the revival practices of classical costume culture, it is necessary for the Han people taking the feelings of our minority compatriots into account and avoiding big-nationality chauvinism of Han race. Only by searching support and understanding of minority compatriots, maintaining unity and friendship within Chinese nation, and forming positive cultural attitude with each other, can we achieve a common prosperity and healthy development of the Chinese culture.

Cultural consciousness in inheriting national culture refers to adapt traditions to new cultural space. Especially in market economy context, aesthetization of national culture should run parallel with commercialization. Han retro wedding dress has commercialized under the promotion by Hanfu movement and the inclusiveness of market and personalization of consumption have provided it with a broader development platform. Since the first Han retro wedding spontaneously organized by Hanfu enthusiasts in 2006, Chinese wedding market witness the rapid growing of dress design, production, marketing, photography and wedding planning relating to Han retro wedding dress. When searching keyword "Han retro wedding dress" or "Hanfu wedding dress" in China's largest e-commerce platform Taobao website, 146 stores will be found. Change keyword into "Hanfu", 7863 stores will be searchable, and most of which also sell Han retro wedding dresses. Besides, these Han retro wedding dresses are commonly seen in some physical stores, and they are available in Huqiu wedding dress street, which is located in Suzhou and famous in China. In addition, most Chinese newlyweds never buy but rent wedding dress through their wedding planning company or wedding photo shops, where the Han retro one is a common option. Market diversification determines these wedding dresses can hardly be unified as in ancient Ceremonial norm, and the unprofessional consumers care more about their own aesthetics rather than historical norms. Multiple levels of consumption and cost control of production determine that most commercial Han retro wedding dresses must meet the technical characteristics of modern mass production. And very few of that can be customized and hand-embroidered as the in old times. Thus today's classical wedding dresses must follow market rules, combining traditional elements and contemporary ideas, so as to rebuild the external appearance and internal etiquettes.

4. Conclusion

Han retro wedding dress was born of "Hanfu movement" and continually developing by network advocates and commercial promotion. In the background of hundreds years national costumes cutting-off and wedding custom generally westernized, Han people get "reverse cultural shock" to the these retro wedding dress. Whether it can these classics develop into a stable symbol of Han wedding customs needs test of the market economy. Mr. Fei advocates "First localization, and then globalization". Similarly in the ethnic cultural infusion, one culture must firstly be generated by one nation and then absorbed by others or even accepted by the whole Chinese nation. Traditions is an important carrier of ethnic identity, and the cultural freedom and cultural develop opportunity of all ethnic groups including Han, Manchu, Mongolian and all the other ethnic minorities should be fully respected.

Only by these will the Han race deal well with the "reverse culture shock" caused whether by Han retro wedding dress or other classical arts.

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