

Searching for Disappeared Ming Dynasty Costume in South Korea Reflection on the Creative Application of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Based on the research on the diplomatic history of costume between China and South Korea in Ming Dynasty, this paper firstly summarizes the protective policies offered by central and local governments of Korea for projects of intangible cultural heritage in category of traditional dyeing and weaving. Then taking Hansan ramie as example, this thesis sums up different methods of activation and innovative design again for intangible culture of traditional dyeing and weaving in Korea. Finally, thesis concludes the tangible value of intangible heritage in Korea and example value for China, give a suggestion to hope that this feasible method can be used in China.

Keywords: Ming dynasty costume, intangible cultural heritage, South Korea

1. Introduction

South Korea and China are separated only by the ocean, their cultures influenced mutually since ancient time, especially in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) of China, the two countries conducted frequent trading activities of textiles and garments. In 1368, when Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang just established Ming dynasty, he informed neighboring countries of sharing the peace through establishing “principal and subordinate” relationships. At that time, South Korea was named as KORYO, the King Wang Xu responded to the call of the emperor of China proactively. In 1369, he accepted imperial edict (note: imperial letters and seals) issued by the government of Ming dynasty, and asked envoy to send local products (note: local specialty) to express his congratulations to Emperor Zhu Yuanzhan and asked for a title. Afterwards, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhan sent envoy with imperial edict and golden seal to KORYO, appointed Wang Xu as the king of KORYO, and gave high-class garment and textiles, to establish “principal and subordinate relationships. In 1392, KORYO changed its name to JOSEON after obtaining the permission of the government of Ming dynasty. In the subsequent two hundred years, JOSEON paid tributes to Ming dynasty and maintained good relationships, JOSEON asked for the granting of garments for many times, Ming dynasty gave JOSEON preferential treatment, frequently rewarding it with garment to show great courtesy. According to the Ming Shi-lu compiled by the government of Ming dynasty, the granting of garment and textiles was up to over five hundred times. In the 276th year under the reign of Ming dynasty, JOSEON adopted the dressing style and rules of China, following Chinese customs and advocating Chinese garments. Qin Baozhong, an envoy of Ming dynasty, highly praised JOSEON as its “cultures and etiquette was almost same with that of China”.

Unfortunately, Ming dynasty was overthrown by Qing dynasty in 1644, the Manchu ruler carried out the policy of “shaving hair and changing garment” to consolidate his regime, the garments of Ming dynasty were prohibited to dress, many technologies and customs related to making garment disappeared completely in China. But fortunately, JOSEON (1392-1910) survived for another three hundred years after Ming dynasty perished, and its garment still kept same style, pattern and dressing methods as that of Ming dynasty. At present, people of South Korea still wear the garment with the same style as Ming dynasty in folk activities, such as temple worshipping, puberty rite of boys and girls, traditional mask dances, etc. In addition, South Korea vigorously protects the intangible cultural heritage in cultural creative industry, and proactively advances the innovation on the design of traditional textile and apparel, to make intangible cultural heritage create “tangible” value.



Figure 1. Korean intangible cultural heritage of Incheon Airport Center

2. Overview of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Korean Cultural Industry

“Culture Heritage” refers to the heritage of national culture possessing existence value. “Intangible Cultural Heritage” refers to the outcomes from intangible cultures of drama, music, dance, craftsmanship and skill, and folk game which are handed down from traditional lives. However, “Cultural Industry” refers to an emerging industry which produces tangible or intangible artistic and creative product (or service) by ways of developing and utilizing cultural content and intellectual property. Cultural industries in Korea are called “Content Industries”, which is the “Resource Transformation” for “Cultural Heritage” especially for “Intangible Cultural Heritage”. That is to say, between “Cultural Heritage” and “Cultural Industry”, there is a relationship which is co-existence, common prosperity, and as exterior and interior for each other.

Korean economy suffered grave recession from the financial crisis across East Asia in 1997. To get rid of economic plight and seek new industry growth, Korea actively adjusted its industrial structure and started to march into cultural industry in large scale according to developing changes of both domestic and overseas markets. In 1998, Korea officially raised the strategy of “Culture Orientated National Development”. After taking office of President Kim Dae-Jung, he announced that “the foundations for developing Korea in the 21st century were industries of advanced technologies and cultures”. In 2000, the “Revitalization Committee for Korean Cultural Industry” was founded. Until 2002, the Korean cultural industry yielded unusually brilliant results with 17.46 billion dollars market size occupying 2.89% of Gross National Product in that year. Korean economic aggregate has ascended to one of the five strongest countries of cultural industry in the world.



Figure 2. Korea Television Drama “The Moon Embracing the Sun” by MBC

In policy aspect of protecting intangible cultural heritage, since the Protection Act of Cultural Property legislated in 1962, Korea has gradually constructed relative protecting systems for intangible cultural properties, of which core specifically embodies in following aspects: “designation and identification” for digging out intangible cultural heritage and making national directory, “inheritance and learning education” for ensuring passing intangible cultural heritage from generation to generation, “public support” for assisting protection and cultivation of intangible cultural heritage, and relative investigation, research and documentary production, etc.

In addition, Korea actively responds to externally international policies, which for instance, are the “Convention on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage” instituted in 2003 by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and the “Convention on the Protection of Cultural Diversity” in 2005. Korea actively propels to institute a new law called Relative Law and Regulation of Protection and Revitalization for Intangible Cultural Heritage so as to adapt to requirements of pluralistic times nowadays.

Hence we can see that in Korea, “Protecting Cultural Heritage” and “Revitalizing Traditional Culture” are almost going on synchronously. Though they are in the charge of “Department of Cultural Property” and “Department of Cultural Tour and Sports” separately, this boundary tends to disappear gradually. In other words, relative policies of intangible cultural heritage are directing to “Activation” from previous “Preservation”, while policies of traditional culture are turning to “Industrialization” and “Globalization” from “National Sharing”.

3. Applications for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Traditional Dyeing and Weaving in Korean Cultural Industry

Cultural industry includes two relative scopes. One is “Culture” and the other is “Industry”. Development of Korean cultural industry relies heavily on traditional culture of Korea. Taking film and TV industry which is subordinate to cultural industry as an example, multiple movies and TV plays themed in ancient costumes of Korea are on hot broadcast globally, such as Midget Crabapple, Dae Jang-geum, The Moon Embracing the Sun, King and His Men and My Love From the Stars, etc. Besides for star effect and commercial promotion as reasons for successful spread of these films and TV plays, the help of a great quantity of magnificently ancient costumes in these plays cannot be ignored. And behind achievement of these gorgeous costumes, the resource regeneration and industrialization of traditional weaving culture in Korea are fully embodied so as to make the intangible cultural heritage of traditional dyeing and weaving brings both social effect and economic benefit by chain effort of “Protection, Heritage and Application”.

Protection and heritage of intangible cultural heritage has always been regarded as a global difficulty especially that the craftsmanship of traditional dyeing and weaving is one of the fiercest project impacted by modernization in modern times. But Korean practices have played very well. There are many highlights in their each link of identification, project approval, protection, education and heritage for intangible cultural heritage of traditional dyeing and weaving, which deserve to learn and use for reference for other countries. As below, let’s take traditional craftsmanship of Hansan Ramie as an example to elaborate.

Hansan is located in the west of Korea, which has a long history in production of ramie cloth. Now the traditional technology of ramie weaving in Hansan has been listed into intangible cultural heritage at national level in Korea and there are still several inheritors mastering this skill. Though the craftsmanship of ramie weaving in Hansan is facing the crisis that is about to vanish soon just like many other traditional craftsmanship, Korean government is investigating the unique natural attributes and irreplaceable features of Hansan Ramie-Koreans have shown special preferences to products made of ramie cloth which can be used to make dresses and decorate houses in all four seasons. And ramie cloth in Hansan is different from other ordinary ramie cloth due to its fine silk and soft hand feel. Hence, the government specially established a “Globalization Industry Group for Hansan Ramie” aiming for moving aggressively to make Hansan ramie as a well-known brand and globalized. Main methods to reach this goal are as below:



Figure 3. One of process of Hanshan Ramine Weaving

1) Popularization of Traditional Culture Deposits. Under the lead of governmental department, ramie culture is integrated into current lives and popularized with the goal to spread traditional culture in the direction of popularization. Here are specific embodiments which are organizing cultural festival of Hansan ramie once a year under the lead of government and launching various reliable folk popularizations. There are mainly traditional folk activities like the sacrificial ceremony to celebrate harvest of ramie, ramie twisting competition and traditional weaving demonstration of ramie cloth. Plus, there are some programs of interactive experience, like activities of creative weaving of ramie cloth, vegetation dyeing of ramie cloth, ramie game, rubbing book of ramie and so on. All these practices stimulate national interests and care for traditional culture and activate their participations, thus making the class which has alienation sense to this is able to increase personal experience in traditional culture.

2) Innovate and make flexible use of tradition so as to promote domestic demands. By cooperating with ramie culture and other industries, more added values are created. Take application scope of expanding ramie as an example, it makes people's cognition of ramie not only limited to garment cloth, but also more scopes are extended to. For instance, the diet extension develops ramie into healthy food like ramie tea, ramie wine, ramie cakes, etc. There is another example. By deeply researching and utilizing, ramie cloth can be designed into ramie clothing which has natural functions and highly aesthetic looks. Meanwhile, the fashion show of ramie is held to promote its added values of product culture.

3) Cultural Inheritance and Spread. Korean government established "Inheritance and Learning Hall of Hansan Ramie", which exhibits: ramie documents, relative reference books, numerous files of local culture, processing tools of ramie, ramie specimen and procedure recovery of weaving ramie cloth, etc. Moreover, protection for ramie craftsmanship also embodies in identification and assistance for inheritors. Korean government organizes professional evaluation group to implement pre-examination, investigation, appraisal and confirmation on inheritors about their craftsmanship of "Ramie Cloth Weaving of Hansan", and then awards them with the title of "No.** of Important Intangible Cultural Property in Korea" and offer oriented supports by government as well, like support on site of inheritance and learning, capital support, product promotion and support, etc. At present, in Hansan region, Ms. Fang Lianyu is the No. 14 inheritor of important intangible cultural property at national level.



Figure 4. Hansan ramie inheritance venue

By way of above "Multiple Purposes for One Source" of ramie and under active support of Korean government, there has formed a series of effective protective measures for "Hansan Ramie" including tradition ramie planting, weaving of ramie cloth, product research and development, holiday promotion and so on. With such efforts, the intangible cultural heritage has connected with current life, industry has been developed and satisfactory economic benefit has been created. Except for Hansan ramie, there are some other intangible cultural heritages of traditional dyeing and weaving which also shine brightly, such as Andong-si hemp, spring cloth of Cheongyang-gun, blue dyeing of Naju, and traditional dressmaking, etc.....These products have become optimized categories of content development in Korean cultural industry. And they've made an important step for technological application and innovation of intangible cultural heritage.

4. Resource Regeneration of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Korean Traditional Dyeing and Weaving as Enlightenment to China

Korea had similar experiences as China. Both countries belong to the circle of Confucius culture and have many similar historical attributes and future topics. For example, both countries possess unique intangible cultural heritages of traditional dyeing and weaving and capacities of deep processing and creative design for products. During the transition period towards to modern times, cultures of both countries suffered great destructions due to external aggressions and internal wars. A large number of intangible cultural heritages lost their original hometowns. However, during a period time after that, citizens of these two countries blindly accept foreign cultures which led to quite low evaluation on their own traditional cultural values and even taking them as objects to make liquidations. Under such a cultural atmosphere, it was once very difficult to preserve and inherit cultural heritages. Intangible cultural heritages were in an endangered situation. It is widely believed by experts from different countries that the economy of cultural industry in 21st century will be on the basis of intellectual property. Cultural content will become the core power for development of information society. A country with powerful culture is able to become a country with powerful economy. China is a great country of cultural heritage with time-honored civilization, which has connaturally potential advantages in aspect of developing cultural industry. Most of all, glorious and splendid skills of Chinese traditional dyeing and weaving and diversified products of dyeing and weaving in various regions all can become dominant projects for promoting cultural consumption.

For recent years, Korean cultural industry has developed rapidly which has not only stimulated the domestic demands of national economy, but has also tremendously promoted the international influence of Korean culture. It can be said that its social and economic benefits “are both gained as fame and wealth”. However compared with China, there are more advantages of protective policies and inheritance ways for intangible culture of traditional dyeing and weaving in Korea.

China is paying more and more attention to cultural construction every year. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized about importance of “Traditional Culture” in his speeches for many times. He said that Chinese traditional culture was the “Root” and “Soul” of our nation. We should insist making the past serve the present and bringing forth the fresh by getting rid of the old theories. And the relationship between inheriting natural culture and creative development should be handled well. The key points are creative transformation and innovative development. In particular, the connotations which still have reference values now and obsolete representation forms should be reformed according to era features and requirements. New representation forms should be endowed and their vitalities should be activated. And meanwhile, there have emerged a lot of national enterprises which reply on traditional craftsmanship of dyeing and weaving, and take creative technologies and original capabilities as their core competitiveness, for example, Excepation, Useless and Zuczug, etc. Many academies also set up relative courses and majors to train new talents. For instance, in 2014, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology established “Inheritance and Innovation of Chinese National Dresses” as a major direction.

Ming dynasty is the peak time of traditional Chinese garment, not only textile technology such as dyeing, weaving, embroidery, but also the dressing rules and customs are worthy of our attention. Drawing lessons from South Korea’s research on the garment of Ming dynasty, and learning its experience in culture creative industry to develop innovation design of the garment of Ming dynasty is one of the feasible method to integrate Chinese traditional and current garment technology. The successful experience of cultural industry developed by Korea indicates that it is entirely possible for a country with time-honored and rich traditional cultural heritage to achieve a “leap-type” development of cultural industry on platforms of open international market and technology. Now China is in a big environment with “Good Timing, Geographical Convenience and Good Human Relations”. Countless beautiful craftsmanship of Chinese dyeing and weaving is waiting for us to protect, inherit, develop, expand and innovate.

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