

# The Flexible Inheritance of Traditional Chinese Costume Culture

## A Case Study of “New Chinese-style Outfits”

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**Abstract**—Based on the characteristic of duality of traditional Chinese costume, we have pointed out the necessity for flexible inheritance of costume culture and also have stressed on the analysis of features on the innovation and inheritance of traditional Chinese costume culture by “New Chinese-Style Outfits” from APEC. We have realized that the key points for its success are as follow: creative application of design, color and traditional fabric, internationalization of design theory, optimization of manufacturing technique, expression of traditional graphics, consideration on the way to dress and integration of diversity in aesthetics. And in this case, we have put forward the factors for the innovation and inheritance of it. The guarantee of this inheritance is cultural consciousness, the key step is to keep its original style and make development appropriately, the trend is to set up its own brand and the way to spread it is to make use of multi-channel platforms. What’s more, we hope to help the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese costume.

**Keywords**—“New Chinese-style Outfits”; inheritance of costume culture; cultural consciousness; flexible inheritance

### I. CHARACTERISTIC OF DUALITY AND FLEXIBLE INHERITANCE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE COSTUME.

With its distinctive design and gorgeous technique, traditional Chinese costume has already shown us the extensive and profound Chinese culture and Chinese civilization. The costume can not only serve as a thing for people to wear, preserve and appreciate, it can also help the spread of traditional skills and serve as a presentation of aesthetic consciousness, ecological civilization and people’s feeling at that time. In this case, costume has the characteristic of duality both of materiality and immateriality [1]. The costume itself is a kind of material which represents the social, cultural and aesthetic factors that are immaterial. Moreover, the immateriality of costume can help shape its materiality.

As people are concentrating on the revitalization and protect of traditional culture, the inheritance of traditional costume culture has also been taken seriously. While during this inheritance, the eagerness for quick success and instant benefit

and fickleness resulted by the fast-paced modern society make it lacking real understanding of cultural meaning and essence of skills. Just as Professor Cui Rongrong once put it, during the dynamic cultural revitalization, those who only pursue superficial things may go in the opposite way from the real revitalization [2]. Costume culture is a comprehensive thing co-exists with nature, people’s life, producing activity, custom and religion, instead of exists on its own. It develops along with the development of people and society, so it is not a still and closed thing.

The duality characteristics of traditional Chinese costume and its formation make it necessary for us to know the cultural origin and continuity, in order to activate and regenerate it, instead of just collect those costumes and call on the public to do this. In this way, flexible inheritance of costume culture can be realized.

### II. THE INNOVATION AND INHERITANCE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE COSTUME CULTURE BY “NEW CHINESE-STYLE OUTFITS” FROM APEC.

It is an unwritten rule for The APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting holding country to provide costumes with its national characteristics for leaders to take photos together after batik Indonesia shirt with different patterns were offered by Indonesia in 1994. If the dress of “New Tang suit” in 2001 APEC meeting was an attempt in creative application of Chinese traditional factors, then the “New Chinese-Style Outfits” in 2014 would be the innovation that was advanced with the times, because it helped to present the new image of Chinese people to the world. “The origin of it is China, its soul is courtesy, and the appearance of it is new; the combination of these three points is what we called ‘New Chinese-Style Outfits’.” [3] What’s more, New Chinese-Style Outfits explain the factors of traditional Chinese costume in a brightly new way, it is an inheritance of the essence in traditional costume culture.

#### A. Breakthrough in Style and Color and Innovation on Design Theory

“New Chinese-Style Outfits” from APEC have extracted Chinese factors. They still have factors in traditional Chinese costume, such as raglan sleeve, front opening, stand up collar and frog (a traditional Chinese circled button in for decoration). And the design of them is in line with the international fashion that the combination of front opening and placket for men’s wear and cheongsam skirt for women’s dress. What’s more, embroidery in the same color has also been applied, which is



Fig. 1. Shape of “New Chinese Costume”

It is a bright new interpretation of oriental esthetics and innovation on design theory to apply traditional Chinese factors and weaving skills and combine international fashion and Chinese characteristics.

#### B. Development Application of Fabric and Optimization of Manufacturing Technology

Fabric of “New Chinese-Style Outfits” from APEC this time is Song Brocade and Zhangzhou Velvet Satin. Song Brocade known as the “Greatest in Brocade” is famous for its soft texture, fluffy hand feeling and graduated changing color. And Zhangzhou Velvet Satin, representative of velvet fabrics is well-acknowledged for its luxurious and elegant appearance, gentle gloss and exquisite velvet flowers. These two kinds of fabrics are state-level intangible cultural heritage and province-level intangible cultural heritage respectively, which are treasured by Chinese. The reason why they are not put into massive production is that the procedure to make them is really complex and they are nearly dying out. What’s more, because of the limitation in color, pattern and texture, the Song Brocade is mainly used in the mounting of calligraphy and painting, instead of the manufacturing of costumes. While, based on the creative application of real silk and wool, “the New Chinese-Style Outfits” has both the same look as Song Brocade and improves the heat insulating ability. Under the research and integration of modern jacquard rapier loom and digital pattern weaving system, the fabric supplier—Dingsheng Silk in Suzhou province has developed rapier Song

brocade brief and full of connotation and reflect the containment for somatotype and aesthetic habits. In this way, it helps break up the traditional thinking that Chinese costume is hidebound. In the selection of color, it mainly uses Palace red, indigo blue, dark reddish purple and peacock blue which are calm colors, instead of bright colors such as bright red, bright green and pure blue that are used in Tang suits. With the utilization of several yarns in similar colors, it presents double-colored effect which is the characteristic of song brocade. Then, people who see it will have the feeling of elegance, quiet and diversification “Fig. 1”.

Brocade loom[4]. In this case, there is a great improvement on fabric and pattern width, productivity and efficiency. And then this traditional skill has been saved from dying out and the fabrics can be produced in a large scale. That is the true flexible inheritance.

#### C. Inheritance of Traditional Patterns and Expression of Cultural Meaning

Traditional patterns are closely related to the society and our lives, because they have been the representatives of folklore since ancient times. Thanks to the traditional Chinese patterns, “New Chinese-Style Outfits” can express the feeling of gorgeous oriental beauty. With the combination of mountain, sea and cloud, the sea and mountain pattern means that 21 economies help one another in defense work; under the skills of jacquard and Suzhou embroidery, the swastika decoration pattern shows meaning of bless, auspicious and long-live; for the meaning of grandeur and dignity, the pattern of composite flowers and entangled peony has been used in the costume of leaders’ spouses. Because of the implication of peace and auspicious omen, peony, vase and Ruyi patterns have been embroidered in night-gowns “Fig. 2”. “What we need to focus on is the implication of patterns” [5]. With time going on, traditional Chinese patterns have combined with modern technology and Suzhou embroidery. It can fully help the spread of Chinese history and culture.



Fig. 2. The Sea and Mountain Pattern

A good design is based on the consideration of the way to dress. Design of “New Chinese-Style Outfits” has not only helped express the beauty, gorgeousness and Chinese national spirit, but also has shown respect and concern to members of all economies. For instance, the design of shawl and scarf is based on the consideration of the weather during the period of meetings. Women dress is formed with Cheongsam skirt and coat. They can dress in the way they are favored to. This kind of design shows the generosity of Chinese nation – “Appreciate the cultures of others as do to one’s own, and the world will become a harmonious whole.”[6]

### III. THE INSPIRATION ON INNOVATION AND FLEXIBLE INHERITANCE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE COSTUME CULTURE.

The inheritance means that we need to protect it and make innovation on this basis of inheriting the tradition. In this way, the traditional Chinese costume culture can stay active. “The New Chinese-Style Outfits” from APEC is a good example for the revitalization and flexible inheritance of traditional Chinese costume.

#### A. Guarantee of Flexible Inheritance: Cultural Self-Consciousness

Though the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage has been called up for years, there are some achievements; however, it is still difficult to carry on. While because of the great costume culture provided by “New Chinese-Style Outfits”, people begin to pay attention to traditional Chinese costume factors culture with unprecedented enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Chinese native brand has also begun to know by the world, which is no doubt a remarkable achievement on inheriting traditional Chinese culture.

In fact, cultural heritage in the museum is only for appreciating, while inheritance of culture means the spread of social value, national spirit and the acceptance of people’s aesthetic theories. That is to say in order to increase people’s cultural consciousness, we need to let them practice and think about traditional Chinese culture and make innovations [7]. If they are willing to do this by themselves, the inheritance and

innovation of traditional culture can be carried out easily and smoothly. In this case, the productivity protection on traditional costume skills can not only bring economic benefits, it can also help the development and inheritance of itself. It can encourage people to become in favor of traditional culture and build cultural confidence, and then to make china a powerful country in culture.

#### B. The Key for Flexible Inheritance: Suitable Development

Obviously, we have stressed on innovation during flexible inheritance, but innovation does not mean to change. The reason that “New Chinese-Style outfits” turn out to be successful is that they have figured out the points of traditional Chinese costume in a modern way, and at the same time, keep it still of Chinese factors, skills and appearance. So during flexible inheritance, the key step is to keep its original style and make development appropriately. There is no doubt that we need to develop new products by using modern technology, but traditional factors should be retained. Things like quoting a remark out of its context and leaving out the main point should be avoided in traditional costume culture. And we should not just pursue the sense of form, but the real meaning of flexible inheritance.

#### C. The Trend of Flexible Inheritance: Set Up Its Own Brand

As there is Chinese-style costume in APEC, it is a good opportunity for the revitalization of traditional Chinese costume culture. But we need to think about how to spread and promote it to the public. From my point of view, people’s cultural self-consciousness should be improved, and at the same time brand with regional characteristics and cultural and time features should be built through the combination of market and traditional costume culture. What’s more, we should make the traditional costume culture close to people’s lives and enhance their recognition of traditional cultural theory, instead of just promote it at a certain time to a certain group of people.

Dingsheng Silk—Song Brocade supplier of “New Chinese-Style Outfits” in APEC has already tried to develop new brand. The bag, tie, costume and home textile products made up of Song Brocade are becoming well-known. “Saintjoy” a brand name of leather bags subordinated by Dingsheng Silk has successfully combined Italian design with traditional Chinese characteristics. We believe that traditional Chinese costume culture will become famous, with the establishment of brand, the combination of modern design theory and the quintessence of traditional culture, and the application of proper market strategies.

#### D. The Way to Carry out Flexible Inheritance: Put Up Multi-Channel Platforms

APEC meeting has provided an international promoting platform for traditional Chinese costume. Meanwhile, it helps to make people more confident in costume designing and to give out the way for developing Chinese costume industry. Besides the protection by government, museums and inheritors which is advocated by most scholars, we need to increase the persistence and influence of inheritance by setting up effective platform with a changing point of view. There are many things

we can do. For example, we can make advertisement of traditional culture and skills by using modern media; encourage people to hold traditional activities and wear national costumes during traditional festivals; promote traditional costume culture by doing design competition and fashion weeks. What's more, famous people in both political and entertainment field should wear traditional Chinese costumes in public no matter in China or overseas. Last but not least, education about traditional Chinese culture should be carried out to train the students' inheritance consciousness through the form of performance, competition and societies' activity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The emergence of "New Chinese-Style Outfits" means a great improvement and the starting point of the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese costume culture. The sound development of it relies on the improvement of public cultural consciousness and national confidence and the flexible inheritance of traditional costume culture. We need to carry out costume cultural development which enjoys the combination of tradition and modern with Chinese characteristics by setting up effective platforms and strengthening the development of traditional costume brands.

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