

A Study on the Characteristics of the Crossover Expressed in Modern Fashion – Focused on Sub – Cultures

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Abstract

The crossover in fashion refers to the coordination of different items, each with a different atmosphere. In a broad sense, it is the mutual exchange across the existing areas, that is, the creation of a new style by disparate and opposite elements coexisting in a look.

This paper studies typical features of the crossover shown in modern fashion based on sub-cultures by examining the concept and formation factors of the crossover through social aspects rather than particular art modes to predict the current of fashion and suggest a new direction.

Crossover fashion appeared in social and cultural environments, has four characteristics : the visual discordance of sexes, the appearance of the lingerie look, the mixture of folk styles, and the appearance of the reactionary mode.

The crossover, appeared in sub-cultures and diffused into the public, may be considered the creation of a new sense of beauty and a possibility for the future. It is expected to keep expanding its range in fashion, since it is an expression of human will to restore liberal sensibility not confined to formality.

Key words: crossover, visual discordance of sexes, lingerie look, mixture of folk styles, reactionary mode.

I. Introduction

Culture, in general, consists of expressed culture and inherent culture, and fashion among various cultural factors is considered a system of expressed culture. Fashion as a concretely expressed culture also symbolizes the features of inherent ideas. Therefore, a cultural style as the subject of fashion provides us with a new and fresh inspiration and image.¹⁾ Culture refers to the behavior pattern and lifestyle of human society as well as the characteristic modes mani-

fested in thought. And many separate factors of culture form their own subcultural groups. Sub-cultures accompany a great deal of conflict and strife to be legalized as a culture, since they reflect norms or standards of lifestyle, and acts of the mother culture led by the ruling majority in society differently.

Today we know that the word "culture" does not refer to only classical music, traditional art in exhibitions or galleries, ballet, or cultivated modern and Western classical literatures any more. The traditional term of culture has become to mean almost every area of human

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¹ Moon-Ja Kan, "A study on the transferal phenomenon of anti-fashion into mother-fashion". (Ph. D. diss., KonKuk University, 1995), 1.

actions casting off its restrictive meaning of refinement or high-class culture. The culture in a broad sense is a feature and an accelerating factor of the Postmodern Age.²⁾

As many have already pointed out, the features of the Postmodern Age are summed up into the dismantlement of genres and the collapse of the walls among them, which assume the form of the blend of high and popular cultures, or their harmonious coexistence.

Such phenomena are inherent and shown in fashion as well. The pursuit of personal freedom, and various aspects of changes in opposite areas like sexes, the times, regions and uses, are possible due to the changes of sexual roles, the free pursuit of sensibility and individuality, and the beginning of the globalization and pluralism age in today's social and cultural environment. This study examines interchanges between different areas and the dismantlement of genres under the name of "crossover", an aspect of postmodernism.

This paper studies typical features of the crossover shown in modern fashion based on sub-cultures by examining the concept and formation factors of the crossover through social aspects rather than particular art modes to predict the current of fashion and suggest a new direction.

For the purpose, typical features of the crossover are examined and analyzed through literature based on the social and artistic factors found in fashion, and the concept of sub-cultures in the general trends of society, culture and art in the late 20th century. Various data related to the crossover are used including books, theses, domestic and international fashion magazines, and collection journals.

II. Theoretical Background of the Crossover based on Sub-Cultures

1. Sub-Cultures

All members of a society do not always share the same cultural value. In other words, part of them can have their own values, behavioral norms or customs that are different from those of others. It means there are various sub-cultural groups like students, entertainers, city-dwellers and Christians within the whole society. Sub-cultures can be defined according to age, region or tribe among various dimensions.³⁾

1) The Mother Culture and Sub-Cultures

Sub-cultures are defined as the culture reflecting unique identities of various small groups, who belong to big categories of classes, genders or generations, and are distinguished by their own attributes.⁴⁾ The higher concept of sub-cultures is the mother culture. Sub-cultures have been considered mainly the working class culture, a subordinate category the mother culture in the tradition of subcultural studies in the West. The mother culture, however, is not always related to classes. And the conceptual core of sub-cultures lies in cultural differences presented by various groups in sub-cultures.

Therefore, sub-cultures have their own symbolic meaning, as they differ from the mother culture in terms of their homogeneous and distinctive structures and forms : behavior, way of thinking, use of artificial material and regional space. Subcultural members are distinguished from the ruling culture by the way they walk, talk, act, and see. And those in the same group display their identity through the same cultural responses and symbolic solutions in their lifestyle including work, costume, behavior and enjoying leisure.

2) Subcultural Innovation Theory

A sub-culture can become a fashion leader with its capability to develop a new style, and the unique style, emerged from its subcultural

² Jeong-ho Lee, *Reading Postmodern Culture*, (Seoul National University Press, 1995), 21.

³ Dong-geun Yu, *Consumer Behavior Theory*, (Future Management, 1992), 387.

⁴ Hartley et al., *Key Concepts in Communication*, (London & N.Y.: Meuthen, 1984), 229-231.

origin, can diffuse into the larger population. This diffuse occurs by a trickle-down process. The style skips from the originating sub-culture to the upper class and then trickles down again. Or marketers may rule as the style is sold in the whole market through mass production.⁵⁾

According to Troxell and Judelle (1971),⁶⁾ gapbridgers play a role in spreading styles by connecting subcultural groups with the public. As the groups can not become a leader acknowledged by the public, gapbridgers of other social structures justify and introduce the styles to people.

Some features of modern society promote the leadership of sub-cultures. The most distinctive feature may be the visibility of both minor groups and teenage subcultural groups, and the increase in their influence. Many of their ideals have been diffused into the public : social equality, anti-materialism, environmental awareness, and the pursuit of practicality rather than the symbol of social standing. The increasing visibility of sub-cultures facilitates the imitation of subcultural lifestyle by people.⁷⁾

2. Concept of the Crossover and its Formation Background

1) Concept of the Crossover

The term "crossover", originated from music, refers to the interchange between classical and pop musics, and is often used together with "fusion music", which refers to a music genre difficult to define as a particular category.

Interchanges among different areas and the dismantlement of boundaries occur in the whole art field including music in the late 20th century. The process is under way in fashion as well in the name of "crossover".

The crossover in fashion refers to the coordination of different items, each with a different atmosphere. In a broad sense, it is the mutual

exchange across the existing areas, that is, the creation of a new style by disparate and opposite elements coexisting in a look.

2) Background of the Crossover Formation

The costume trends of a particular age are both personal expressions and social products. They are related to social and cultural elements having both faces of succession and repulsion, and reflect the social aspects, and cultural modes and art modes formed in them. This research attempts to reveal the correlation of the crossover in the contemporary culture focusing on various social and artistic factors in its formation.

(1) Social Factors

Globalization was brought by the following elements : politics in the Post-Cold War era, economic trends with the arrival of borderless society and unlimited competition resulting from the launch of the WTO, growing awareness of environmental crisis, and the diversification of mass media by highly advanced science. Globalization plays a role in generalizing the world's culture as well as spreading exotic cultures into the West with the influx of information on other cultures.

(2) Artistic Factors

Pluralism is the most important trend appeared in art after the 1980s. The classic aesthetic sense or value system collapse, and cultural areas infiltrate into each other, while varied subjects, modes and media along with traditional subjects and methods are accepted. Such characteristics of pluralism are present even more clearly in the 1990s art.

In political and economic areas, social strata and boundaries collapse, so that the public become equal in their mutual relations. Similarly, different cultural areas infiltrate into each other

⁵ B. S. George and D. D. Ledlie, *Changing Appearances*, (N.Y.: Fairchild Publications, 1994), 124.

⁶ M. D. Troxell and J. Beatrice, *Fashion Merchandising*, (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1971).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

rather than defending their own uniqueness, as diversification and variability are accepted instead of the traditional value system pursuing truth or beauty.⁸⁾

In the name of postmodernism, the following aspects of pluralism recently appeared in art are discussed : the coexistence of various regional and individual styles, the borrowing and transformation of the existing art, and the acceptance of forms and methods of mass media. The reason for it is that they are regarded as the alternative to modernism.

Also pluralism is generally considered more comprehensive than postmodernism, because it opens a scope of artistic categories in all areas including exclusive modernism.⁹⁾

In the late 20th century, rebellious and recurring movements started to appear in fashion too due to the skepticism and reaction against modernism. And experiments were tried related to the postmodernism debate raised in culture on the whole.

Dick Hebdige (1979) gives some examples of bricolage: plagiarism and treacheries of the Edwardian look by teddy boys in the 1960s ; imitation and suggestive conveyance of traditional costume by modes in the 1960s ; reuse of fragments of safety pin-like life by punks in the 1970s.¹⁰⁾

The crossover between areas, found only in subcultural groups, appears and spreads in high fashion as well, and it is not unrelated to general social trends. Environmental issues, raised since the late 20th century, have spreaded a gale of ecology throughout the whole art world including fashion. As a result, traditional costumes of regions which were excluded by the West-centered idea, appear as main fashion themes and blend with Western items leading to the globalization through costume.

The changes of social and structural paradigms caused by the increase of women's social participation and the spread of the feminist movement resulted in the changes of sexual roles requiring a shift in a sense of values about sexes through fashion. Therefore, an attempt to share both sexes has spreaded adding decorative aspects on men's wear, which focused only on function, and functional aspects on women's wear, confined to a passive sexual role since the 19th century.¹¹⁾

III. Features of the Crossover in Modern Fashion

Crossover fashion appeared in social and cultural environments, has four characteristics : the visual discordance of sexes, the appearance of the lingerie look, the mixture of folk styles, and the appearance of the reactionary mode.

1. Visual Discordance of Sexes

Crossover fashion, first appeared in the 20th century, is now establishing itself as the unisex style, started in the 1960s, and the androgynus style, appeared in the mid-1980s. While the former is sexless without a feeling of men or women, the latter is bisexual with the natures of both sexes by combining their features together.

The sexual crossover in fashion is characterized by the pursuit of personal freedom and a bisexual tendency demanding the features of both sexes in one person which are resulted from the changes of sexual roles, the free pursuit of sensibility and individuality, and the beginning of the globalization and pluralism age in today's social and cultural environment. The crossover attempts to access to one perfectly integrated being by sharing both sexes beyond masculinity or femininity. The wearing of women's clothes

⁸ Nan-Ji Yun, "Pluralism of the World Art Since the 1980s", *Misulsegae* 2 (1993): 64.

⁹ I. Sandler, "Modernism, Revisionism, Pluralism and Postmodernism.", *Art Journal*. (1993): 1-4.

¹⁰ D. Hebdige, *The Meaning of Style*. (London: Meuthuen. 1979), 46-71.

¹¹ Min-Jeong Kim, "A Study on the Crossover Appeared in Fashion of the Late 20th century" (Master's thesis., Hong-Ik University, 1996), 8.

on men's bodies and men's on women's, reflects human desire to become a perfect being above one's sexual identity.

Such effects are created using men's items like shirts, suits, jackets or trousers that were exclusively for men, trifling articles like felt hats, ties or military shoes, or masculine designs expressed by straight lines, rough material or achromatic colors. Moreover, images of opposite sexes are expressed by makeup and hairstyling, as well as the coordination of unisex fashion.

In fact, bisexuality in fashion was started not by high fashion but mainly by the street fashion of teenage subcultural groups such as Teddy boys, Mods and Punks in the 1950s and 1960s.¹²⁾ <Fig. 1> and <Fig. 2> present a dual image of both man and woman with man's suits transformed into feminine lines plus a tie or a felt hat.

2. Appearance of the Lingerie Look

Expressing methods in costume design are



<Fig. 1> Alberto Biani.
(196 S/S Milan/Madrid Collections)



<Fig. 2> Dolce and Gabbana.
(196 S/S Milan/Madrid Collections).

presented in various aspects by transposition and changes in appearance. One of them is a crossover expression by the changes of each fashion item's position and use creating a shocking and fantastic atmosphere. Some of the typical examples in modern fashion are the substitution between underwear and outer wear, and the appearance of the lingerie look.¹³⁾ That is, the crossover between underwear and outer wear is the invasion of outer wear by underwear.

Since Poiret successfully abolished the corset in the early 20th century, underwear has degenerated into obscurity. It, however, was given a new place by progressive designers who promoted it to the outer wear rank in the late 20th century.

The lingerie look transforms underwear like corsets and petticoats including lingerie like brassieres, slips and garter belts, into outer wear attempting the crossover between different costume areas.¹⁴⁾ The attempt has been tried by many designers since Chantal Thomas presented

¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³ Keum-Seok Chae, "French Expressionism in Modern Fashion". (Ph. D. diss., Sook Myung Women's University, 1994), 84.



<Fig. 3> John Galliano.
(’96 S/S Paris/London Collections).



<Fig. 4> Thierry Mugler.
(’98 S/S Collezioni Haute Couture).

the Camisole look in 1973.¹⁵⁾

The ways of the crossover between under-

wear and outer wear are : wearing underwear itself as an outer garment(Fig. 3), revealing underwear by opening the outer garment on purpose, and matching underwear with outer wear by changing the material or shape of underwear. (Fig. 4)

3. Mixture of Folk Styles

Fashion in the late 20th century displays the trend of pluralism. And scientific development and post-ideology cause the variation of fashion modes in many parts of the world. Folk styles appeared in modern fashion is a fashion theme adequate to the information age in the late industrial age, which was influenced by costume cultures of Asia, Africa and South America, creating a new way of thinking in the Western costume culture. The mixture of practical and functional costume of the West and innocent and decorative folk costume can be considered a crossover that overcomes differences between regions.

Modern folk styles started with the Oriental look by Poiret in 1910, and African and hippy styles were fashionable in the 1960s and '70s. And folk styles of the '80s from various cultural regions combined with the ecology of the 90s, and therefore, crossover fashions, each with unique individuality were created and coexisted.¹⁶⁾

The fashion themes created by the crossover between Western and exotic costumes are in large primitivism, ethnicism, orientalism and exoticism. Primitivism in general displays a strong folk atmosphere. Ethnicism refers to folk styles other than those of the West, and has been widely used as a fashion term since it first appeared in *Premiere Vision* in the spring of 1989. In addition to ethnicism, the term "folklore" is also commonly used to indicate European

¹⁴ Hyeon-Ju Kim, "A Study on the Symbolistic Characteristics of Costume", (Ph. D. diss., Seoul Women's University, 2000), 82.

¹⁵ Jeong-Hwa Kang, "A Study on Feminism Expressed in Modern Fashion", (Master's thesis, Hong-Ik University, 1993), 42.

¹⁶ Jeong-A Lee, et al., "A Study on Ethnic Fashion in the 20th Century Women's Costume", *The Korean Society of Costume* 27, (1996): 215.



<Fig. 5> Emanuel Ungaro.
(2000. 2, Vogue).



<Fig. 6> Jean-Paul Gaultier.
('96 S/S Paris/London Collections).

folkways. Orientalism mainly refers to the highly stylized courtly culture of Asia, while exoti-

cism means exotic taste from the viewpoint of the West.¹⁷⁾

Exotic factors are applied to Western costume by a crossover between Western and other cultures adopting shapes, colors, materials and patterns, and accessories. The work of fashion designer Emanuel Ungaro in <Fig. 5> is interpreted in modern sense by introducing exotic patterns.<Fig. 6> adapting African costume and design, displays the patterns and accessories of native African atmosphere harmonizing with the refined image of Western costume.

4. Appearance of Reactionary Mode

Behind the richness brought by the material-oriented industrial society of the 20th century, our longing for the forgotten past gave rise to the reactionary mode corresponding to reactionism and folkways of postmodernism following naturalism. It is not only the birth of a new mode but also a crossover between the past and present narrowing the time gap.

The repetitive reactionary mode is characterized by its unlimited scope ranging from Victorian and Edwardian styles to the distinctive styles of Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

Also the crossover between the past and present may be considered an expression of reactive and eclectic features of postmodernism, born as the skepticism and reaction against modernism.

The reactionary mode appears in various fields like architecture, literature and art including fashion. The reactionary mode in fashion is expressed in the term "retro-look", a short form of "retrospective look", or "fashion- revival", meaning "going back to the past". The compromise between the past and present has been a strong trend and a feature of fashion since the 1980s.¹⁸⁾

The work of fashion designer Vivienne West-

¹⁷ Yun-Jeong, Yang, "A Study on Naturalism in Modern Fashion", (Master's thesis, Hong-Ik University, 1993), 72.

¹⁸ Sook-Hee Ryu, and Jong-Hee Bak, "A Survey on the Reactionary Mode of Fashion in the 1990s" *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, 4, no.2. (1996), 249.



<Fig. 7> John Galliano.
(95-96 A/W Paris/London Collections).



<Fig. 8> Claude Montana.
(96 S/S Paris/London Collections).

wood in <Fig. 7> adapted the rococo robe for the modern costume of a unique image using rococo decoration. In <Fig. 8>, Claude Montana combined luxurious decorative factors of the 19th-century Victorian age with a modern image.

IV. Conclusion

So far this study examined the most distinc-

tive features of the crossover fashion based on sub-cultures in the general background of society, culture and art. The result may be summed up to the following :

First, in terms of the visual discordance of sexes, various expressing methods are tried using costume and design factors of the opposite sexes' images, influenced by the changes of gender roles, the free pursuit of sensibility and individuality, and the start of globalization and pluralism age in social and cultural environment.

Second, the lingerie look appeared in an attempt of a crossover between different costume areas by transforming underwear into outer wear. The methods include : wearing underwear itself as an outer garment, revealing underwear by opening the outer garment on purpose, and matching underwear with outer wear by changing the material or shape of underwear.

Third, the mixture of folk styles appeared out of the reaction against modern culture and as an alternative to modern conveniences through the blend of practical and functional costume of the West and innocent and decorative folk costume. It characteristically assumes the forms of primitivism, ethnicism, orientalism, and exoticism, applying shapes, materials, colors, patterns and details of exotic costume or wearing accessories.

Fourth, the reactionary mode, the longing for the past, harmonizes the past and present by applying a wide range of age factors to modern costume based on the tendencies of anti-modernism and postmodernism. Recently, it is noticeable that reactionary modes from several different times are presented simultaneously in one season.

The characteristics mentioned above display the features of modern fashion, and at the same time, reflect the times. The crossover, appeared in sub-cultures and diffused into the public, may be considered the creation of a new sense of beauty and a possibility for the future. It is expected to keep expanding its range in fashion, since it is an expression of human will to restore liberal sensibility not confined to formality.

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