

## **The Oriental Mode Image in 1990's Fashion -Focused on the East Asian Mood-**

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### **I. Introduction**

The culture with polygenetic propensity acculturates when it is exposed to a very different culture, and finally accomplishes the dialectic evolution<sup>1)</sup> of the culture. Especially, the characteristics and elements of the eastern dressing style have been diffused to West via the cultural exchange of the East and West. Since it became an element of changes in western fashion, the oriental mode has been steadily influenced on images of the western fashion design as an element and it became a main issue of fashion design at the end of the 20th century. This phenomenon is appeared not only in art such as fashion, design, and architecture but also foods and commercial marketing.

A viewpoint that was focused on the western culture and biased to eastern culture has been changed since the end of the 20th century, and interests about East have been increased because of the postmodernism. As the eastern philosophy and culture are accepted as a solution of limited western culture, the interests about eastern culture become an issue not only in East but also in West.

This research intends to review how the oriental mode is accepted and expressed by analyzing figurative characteristics of the oriental mode<sup>2)</sup> in 1990's fashion design and analogizing the oriental philosophy as an image.

In order to achieve these, two research methods are used: practical research collecting and analyzing characteristics and elements in the 1990's female fashion, and documentary survey. This research will be a foundation data about new oriental mode in the future because the oriental mode will be continued as a fashion subject with the vitality and variation, not just a vogue.

## II. The Trend of the Oriental Mode in 1990's

All historical elements were compromised by fortuity in 1990's. As one phenomenon of the postmodernism that focused on humanity recovery that was unnoticed by the modernism, the border of the main stream and non-mainstream was broken, so all genres were broken and mixed. The coexistence of various cultures in 1990's represents "open culture for all values without any discrimination"<sup>3)</sup>, not "Western and other cultures"<sup>4)</sup>, a dichotomy of modernism. The influence of eclecticism that mixes and adopts styles and images from other culture and generation is shown as a Fusion and Zen style in fashion. While studying these two styles, the characteristics of oriental mode will be revealed.

### 1. Fusion Style

In 1990's, Fusion style, an eclecticism of eastern and western culture, appeared in fashion as well as other fields.

Fusion means "interbreeding, union, dissolution"<sup>5)</sup>; in other words, it can be interpreted as a phenomenon breaking borders or cross-fertilization of different fields or genres with different characteristics to make a new genre with unique mood. Usually Fusion fashion is explained as a syncretism.<sup>6)</sup> That is used to explain the third culture because eastern and western culture are mixed in fusion that usually adopts eclectic expression methods.

Fusion is a continuously generating mutation, so it has very various characteristics. It can be called as a possibility to create new style by mixing and reconciling things that are extremely different or stay at the stagnant and saturated status.<sup>7)</sup>

Therefore, the oriental mode coexisting the eastern and western characters in 1990's can be explained as a fusion style creating a new style by accepting and electing each other's culture. It constitutes a development and unification of each other by adapting functional appearance of the western dress and applying it to the eastern dress, or adopting a color, print, or accessory of eastern dress and applying it to western dress.

Among those fusion styles, the adoption of the eastern material and print is significant. A Jean, a symbol of western culture, got multinational characteristics by attaching colorful beads, embroidering eastern figures, or attaching pink silk at the jean cuff. <Fig. 1> Tries to share eastern philosophy and symbolism of the characteristic were found on a western dress by using an eastern letter such as "Chinese characters" to get eastern emotion and sentiment. <Fig. 2>

This phenomenon made it possible to find, realize and understand other cultures, which were treated as an non-mainstream culture out of eastern Europe. As a result, a

new aesthetic consciousness with unique mood was generated by mixing many different cultures.



<Fig. 1> Ji-won Park, There's  
(Bazaar Korea, No.43, Feb. 2000)



<Fig. 2> Dolce & Gabbana  
(Bazaar Korea, No.39, Oct. 1999)

## 2. Zen Style

Fusion style that was appeared by combining the eastern and western culture was converted to Zen style reflecting Zen philosophy because the eastern values and philosophy were focused on at the end of 1990's. Zen<sup>8)</sup> derived by Buddhism was accepted by the Western Europe first, and is spread to all over the world. It becomes a trend representing purity, nature and meditation in fashion, interior, music, food and so on. Its most important characteristics are contrast of monotone colors centering on black and white, and simplicity using minimum decoration. Zen can be called as a design pursuing eastern beauty values such as emotion or space<sup>9)</sup>.

The vogue of Zen is related to the ecological and environmental problems that have been issued since the end of the 20th century. Zen is also supported as a philosophy that helps people to find their identities that have been lost in the material society because of stress and consciousness of crisis caused by the rapidly changing society.

In fashion, the influence of Zen is so important that it cannot be ignored. The biggest issue in the Millano and Paris collection was Zen at the end of 1990s. Fashion designers who reflected this phenomenon expressed eastern philosophy with silhouette and shape made of extremely moderated lines, and calm contrast of monotone colors centering on black and white.

The minimal fashion connected to Zen philosophy is already widespread in the market. Fashion designers say, "they are more interested in the structure rather than shape of the dress". In other words, it means that they are trying to reach the

moderated mental status with simplicity or purity of the structure rather than colorful visual effects.

Their designs concern the status of wearers, so they are concentrated on the way of clothing in a different situation and how they can reflect the wearers beauty consciousness. As shown in <fig. 3>, the black long dress has a long scarf on the shoulder that can surround the body or can dangle naturally. This kind of design has a changeable characteristic because its appearance can be changed and decided by the wearer. In addition, it shows the philosophy of emptiness and Zen that pursuits courteous change with temperance.

The silk one-piece dress of Yves Saint Laurent shown in 99-00 A/W collection was a design with moderate silhouette and a thin black belt that captured viewer's eyes. Although its color was light, it was possible to feel the beauty of emptiness from its simple shape without accessories and a belt that occupied only minimum space. <Fig. 4>

In fashion, Zen is expressed by using natural fibers, moderate color contrast, and very simple silhouette that gives a comfortable space. It can be said that it is a try to accept not only eastern dress style but also eastern philosophy, and give a new value to their modern lives. Therefore, Zen fashion style has been raised as the most influential fashion that proceeds toward the 21st century beyond the end of the millennium.



<Fig. 3> Ku-Ho Jung  
(Vogue Korea, No.41, Dec. 1999)



<Fig. 4> Yves Saint Laurent, 99-00 A/W  
(Fashion Show, p.374)

### III. Formative Feature of Oriental Mode

In order to understand what formative features the oriental mode has, the

collection of oriental mode in 1990s fashion is analyzed below. Especially formative features such as shape & form, color, material, and pattern are reviewed.

## 1. Shape & Form

The design of the oriental mode in 1990s fashion tended to simplify wearing steps, but natural body shape was embossed because of influence of naturalism and minimalism; in addition, the transformed designs were appeared such as clothes with unique elements of traditional clothes and western elements to improve practicalness. As a result, unorganized design, a characteristic of eastern dress style was disappeared and only several expressions still remained such as tying, surrounding, throwing, layered, and plane designs.

In 1990s, Korean-style focused on reformation of Korean traditional beauty to a modern design, and used the structural characteristic and outline of the traditional skirt, or coat. The design of Claude Montana using the outline of traditional male trousers and shirt had a rhythm and variation with marginal silhouette; and coat string was dangling naturally. Especially the shoes design copying fore-straps of traditional Korean rubber shoes were sharp but humorous. John Roacha showed a design reminding Korean female skirt and vest: overlapped two skirts made of woven silk and chiffon, and a short vest consisting of feathers at the edge. It showed an elegant and natural Korean beauty. <Fig. 5>

The most popular Chinese styles were Chipao and Mandarin because they were simple but had urban polish. <Fig. 6>



<Fig. 5> Korean style  
Claude Montana, 94 S/S(left)  
John Roacha, 94-95 A/W(right)



<Fig. 6> Chinese style(Chipao)  
Jin Abe, 93 S/S

The Japanese style had a trend such as applying traditional Japanese dress style,

or using a belt, clothes, and strip derived by obi or obijime<sup>10)</sup> to tie the body around breasts or upper the waist for decoration. <Fig. 7>

The main features of Mongolia style was layered clothing, unsymmetrical oblique line, straight silhouette, and Trapeze line: there were also decoration of features such as long and thin braid hair style, feather trimming, and leather boots. <Fig. 8>



<Fig. 7> Japanese style  
Yohji Yamamoto, 94-95 A/W(left)  
Dolce & Gabbana, Vogue Korea, Apr. 1999(right)



<Fig. 8> Mongolia style  
Jean-paul Gaultier, 94-95 A/W

Another big feature of the oriental mode in 1990s was a reduced exposure. In the past orientalism, direct and opened exposure were significant; however, in 1990s, there was no exposure or partial exposure that reflected the oriental beauty of moderation philosophy. It was possible to see a try to eliminate erotic simulation and prevent from being degraded to a exotic taste.

Therefore, the oriental mode presents the beauty of lines with natural silhouette, and the simplicity by moderating expressions.

## 2. Color

In 1990s, interests about ecological problems as well as environmental problems were increased in fashion. This trend occurred ecology color boom, so neutral or block color were used less than before. However, a riot of primary colors and flamboyance were appeared since the middle of 1990s as fusion became popular.

In Korean style, there were several color patterns such as vivid colors with red, orange, blue, and green influenced by traditional stripes of many colors, achromatic colors including white, and natural colors generated by natural dyes. <Fig. 9> In Chinese style, flamboyant primary colors were used generally. <Fig. 6> In Japanese

style, strong colors such as black or red were combined courageously. In Mongolian style, magnificent colors such as red, green, gold and calm middle tone colors such as brown, khaki were used. <Fig. 8>

At the end of 1990s, because of the vogue of Zen, dark colors such as black, gray, dark brown became popular and neutral colors such as pale pink or pale blue were embossed and used with dark colors. This color combination reminded simple and classic image shown in Korean traditional clothes, and the world inside human being with abundance and harmony.

### 3. material

The oriental image came from the combination of silk materials such as Chinese and Japanese satin and brocade or Indian chiffon and other cotton fibers of Southeast Asia.

In Korean style, natural feelings that were not processed artificially were stressed with hemp cloth such as mud yellow ramie fabric to show simple and natural eastern beauty. <Fig. 9> In Chinese style, luxury and simplicity were coexisted by using sandoong silk, satin, cotton, or ramie fabric together. In Mongolian style, leather or fur, velvet was used. In Indian style, various materials were used: natural materials such as linen, cotton, silk and wool, smooth and transparent materials, and variously printed materials.

However, in 1990s, there was a trend dealing with two different styles or materials together out of stereotype such as using technical new fabric with traditional fabric or using luxurious silk with practical denim. For example, <fig. 10> is a design of Emanuel Ungaro. It produced new mood by attaching denim dyed in traditional Indian way to the edge of the lap skirt with fimbria.



<Fig. 9> Young-Hee Lee  
94 S/S(Fashion Show)



<Fig. 10> Emanuel Ungaro  
(Vogue USA, Feb. 2000)

#### 4. Pattern

The oriental elements are expressed with embroidery, decoration skills or dyeing traditional figure on the western dress. The traditional natures such as flower, bamboo or butterfly, which were commonly used in Korea, China and Japan, were printed or embroidered on the clothes. <Fig. 11> Also traditional dye technique such as Batik of Southeast Asia was used.

In Chinese style, items such as a dragon, cloud or flower used in Chinese painting were adopted. In Korean style, own natural pattern of the fabric showed the beauty from courteous variation. On the other hand, in Japanese style, there were more decorative and graphic elements such as geometrical pattern or the traditional drawing; therefore, sometimes conventionalized plants were strongly expressed and the screen was filled with bamboo prints with a traditional black-and-white drawing style. In Mongolian style, animals such as a bull or dragon appeared mainly. In Indian style, figures of conventionalized plants or animals, and symbols of them were embroidered with gold or silver color; in other words, it was decorated with an elephant, peacock, lotus flower, cow or tree. <Fig. 12> The motive of traditional prints was derived not only traditional clothes but also pottery, architecture and common daily products.

However, dressing influenced by Zen do not use those decorative prints, and some prints that do not disturb the mainstream of the dress are used selectively.



<Fig. 11> Yun-hyoung Sul  
(Vogue Korea, May.1999)



<Fig. 12> Matthew Williamson, 2000 S/S  
(Fashion Show, p.400)



&lt;Tab. 1&gt; formative features of Oriental Mode in 1990's

	The Trend of the Oriental Mode in 1990's	
	Fusion style	Zen style
<b>Shape &amp; Form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adopting a color, print or accessory of eastern dress and applying it to western dress</li> <li>• adapting functional appearance of the western dress and applying it to the eastern dress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• moderate line</li> <li>• beauty of line expression</li> <li>• simple shape</li> <li>• natural silhouette</li> </ul>
<b>Color</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using of traditional color</li> <li>• emphasize a riot of primary colors and magnificence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contrast of moderate color</li> <li>• dark colors such as black, gray, dark brown became popular</li> <li>• neutral colors such as pale pink or pale blue were embossed and used with dark colors</li> </ul>
<b>material</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compounding technical new fabric with traditional fabric</li> <li>• mixing luxurious silk with practical denim</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using natural fiber</li> </ul>
<b>pattern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embroidery, print or dyeing traditional figure on the western dress</li> <li>• decoration of handicraft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not use decorative prints</li> <li>• the beauty of emptiness</li> </ul>

## IV. Figurative Beauty of Oriental Mode

As a result of analyzing the oriental mode in a dressing figurative element point of view, it is shown that following four figurative beauty values are adopted in the oriental mode among many eastern emotion and philosophy.

### 1. Harmony

In eastern philosophy, human nature is not antagonistic or contradictory to the nature because human beings are parts of the grand nature, and the nature is a concept involving humans.<sup>11)</sup> Therefore, the dressing design also follows the mainstream of the nature by recreating natural object or forming the nature to the dressing.

This is a changeable and open style that provides figurative beauty with spaces between clothes and clothes or body and clothes, unfixed shape and unstructured plane appearance.

Moreover, figurative beauty comes from unsymmetrical adjust and irregular lines, and incompleteness and do not separate people from the nature. Because it does not intend to operate artificially, the discontinues oriental mode is more emotional and familiar. <Fig. 13>

## **2. Spirit-Harmony Through Life-Movement**

The spirit-harmony through life-movement intends to express figurative rhythm enthusiastically<sup>12)</sup>. It focuses on the variable active feelings caused by the curve lines of clothes by itself, crease, string, and fringe. As the body is moving, its vitality or own spirit-harmony is indirectly expressed to the dress.

In addition, because the spirit-harmony through life-movement is caused by the appropriate combination of primary colors, or decorations such as embroidery, print that gives more passionate feelings to the plane materials, wearers feel that these clothes are more comfortable and people who see them can feel sensuous fresh pleasures. Therefore, the image of the spirit-harmony through life-movement is a method that expresses existence and vitality deeply. <Fig. 14>

## **3. Metaphor**

Metaphor is a suggestive and indirect expression method that presents things with metaphorical, symbolic, implicative, and paradoxical method<sup>13)</sup>. In East, people give more meaning to the spirit rather than body, so body is recognized abstractly, and the shape of the clothes is preferred rather than body shape.

In other words, the body covered by the clothes is not shown in detail but it is shown metaphorically from its movement. In addition, the space out of print or decoration is a symbolic place of ones emotion or sentiment. <Fig. 15>

## **4. Dignity**

Dignity is an image of noble and thoughtful personality. The composure and abundant shape of the oriental mode improve the dignity and prestige of the wearer. The figurative beauty coming from metaphorical body shape has a dignity. In addition, the dignity is more emphasized with smooth materials such as silk, satin, or jersey and luxurious decorations with embroidery and gold print.

This dignity is also supported by colors. Because natural or pure colors are used, this oriental mode design is gorgeous and beautiful but not frivolous. <Fig. 16>



<Fig. 13> Harmony,  
Toroni (Vogue Italy,  
Sep. 1999)

<Fig. 14> spirit-  
harmony through life-  
movement, Issey  
Miyake (Fashion Today)

<Fig. 15> Metaphor,  
Young-Hee Lee  
(Vogue Korea, Feb.  
1999)

<Fig. 16> Dignity,  
Gianluca Gabrielli,  
91 S/S (Fashion  
Show)

## V. Conclusion

Oriental mode has an influence on fashion design of the West continuously and is appearing as the main subject of modern fashion design. So, this research intends to review how the oriental mode is accepted and expressed by analyzing figurative characteristics of the oriental mode in 1990's fashion design and analogizing the oriental philosophy as an image.

In order to achieve these, two research methods are used: practical research collecting and analyzing oriental characteristics and elements in the 1990's female fashion and documentary survey.

All historical elements were compromised by fortuity in 1990's. As one phenomenon of the postmodernism that focused on humanity recovery that was unnoticed by the modernism, the border of the main stream and non-mainstream was broken, so all genres were broken and mixed. This influence of eclecticism that mixes and adopts styles and images from other culture and generation is shown as a Fusion and Zen style in fashion.

In order to understand what formative features the oriental mode has, the collection of oriental mode in 1990s fashion is analyzed below.

As for shape & form, it represents natural linear beauty as exposure and expression decrease in the form to be convenient for activity which grafted the characteristic elements of tradition dress and its ornaments into Western clothing.

As for color, ecology color aroused boom in the early stage of 1990s. But, since

the beginning of end of 1990s, neutral color was embossed as the vogue of 'Zen', and gave point with vivid color.

As for materials, mixture phenomenon to coordinate silk and denim or to match new material textile and traditional handcraft textile is conspicuous.

Pattern are expressed with embroidery or print and the decoration of gold foil and silver foil add gorgeousness or the pattern of textile show dim taste.

As the result that analyzed the features of oriental mode with above figurative element, the oriental emotion or sense of value to form the inner basis was reflected with following 4 kinds of figurative beauty values. .

First, 'harmony' have the form of dress and its ornaments which are not against the flow of nature by formalizing nature into clothing or making the object of nature move to dress and its ornaments.

Second, 'spirit-harmony through life-movement' give rhythm and vividness to clothing with the life movement to be aroused by the decoration patterns such as pleats, string, tassel or embroidery and print as well as the curve of clothes, itself.

Third, as for 'metaphor', human body to wear dress and its ornaments is not revealed well, and it is recognized indirectly and abstractly by movement. Beside, a blank is the suggestive expression method to show possibility state.

Fourth, 'dignity' is shown with the image to express lofty and considerate personality beauty. And, as for the rich and leisurely form, high-class color and material use of Oriental dress and its ornaments, there seems to be grace, and the class which is not light is felt.

From the viewpoint of above findings, modern oriental mode that oriental features were reflected with inner and outer design elements enables one to feel natural beauty and comfortableness without separating not only human body and clothing but also clothing and nature. And it emphasizes femininity with drapery, pleats and string decoration etc. In addition, it shows mature beauty and trained beauty with metaphorical and indirect. And dignity is felt in the abstract expression, material and color.

This may be referred to as the expression method of higher dimension in trying to compare this with the fashion of West. Therefore, oriental mode which has the merit of the Orient and Occident is the direction of fashion and will be a new alternative proposal.

## Reference

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- 2) 'Oriental Mode' means a fashion phenomenon of modern fashion design to which ethnic or racial features and elements of Asia area in the east of Turkey are reflected as a outside and inside factor. This is a concept including not only visual expressions such as design, color, material or prints in modern fashion, but also meaning or values inside. A look or style based on eastern philosophy is also called an oriental mode.
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- 5) Lue, Ho-Chang (Feb. 2000). New Culture Code, *Fusion. Monthly Design*, No.260, p. 127.
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- 9) Lee, Joon-Ho (Feb. 8. 2000). *The Beauty of Zen-Zen Style*. Seoul: Chosun Daily Newspaper.
- 10) Obi (帯 : おび) : a thin string with both decorative and functional role.  
 Maruobi(丸帯 : まるおび): a kind of obi, the most elegant and formal one that is filled with prints.  
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