Expression Methods of Superculture from Subculture in Contemporary Womenswear Collection

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Cultural diversity exists in this contemporary society. This diverse culture can be categorized in two: super culture which transcends national borders and spreads throughout the world, and subculture which stays within specific regions or communities. Super culture is often confused with mainstream or high culture. However, there is a notable conceptual difference between super culture and a mainstream or high culture. If the mainstream or high culture is non-mainstream relative concept, super culture is a concept that comprehensively including various cultures without colliding.

Historically the development of super culture built up from subculture through quite a long period of time; however, nowadays we often find that subculture developed into super culture in short term. Development of transportation, communication and media technologies accelerates this phenomenon. Fashion seems to be no exception to this phenomenon. World class major fashion collections used to be the exclusive property of so-called upper-classes, they now have come to be as powerful as it can affect anyone in any area, economic and cultural status. The Internet, SNS, and media play a pivotal role in this as well.

As a recent trends, renowned major fashion collections also have been successfully presenting subculture interpreted pieces. In other words, subculture styles which was non-mainstream cultures- limited to certain classes, groups or regions in the past- have become new high-end fashion. In this transformative process, their intrinsic symbolism, resistance and defiance against other cultures, has diminished and became a new fashion style. When this new fashion style that spreads out worldwide via various media sources such as SNS, and easily accessible to public, this can be considered as superculture.

The purpose of this research is to find out how this phenomenon has been emerging in fashion, and furthermore to suggest potential ways of diversifying fashion designing methods. This research is studied by analyzing selected four major contemporary womenswear collections, which consciously have reflected the subculture, in focused to how they apply and reinterpret them in terms of the design methods and features of the subcultures.

For the literature review, firstly, the research of the concepts, the trends, and the characteristics of subculture and superculture are implemented. Secondly, subculture styles are examined and analyzed. The analyzed data is based on the articles of the collections in fashion information websites and other fashion-related resources in the contemporary womenswear collections between 2006 S/S and 2015 F/W.

In these 20 seasons in total, subculture styles have been shown in 104 collections. The most frequently applied styles are Hippie, Punk, Glam, Goth, and Grunge style those have appeared 25, 22, 15, 12, and 7 times respectively. It could be said that these styles have been developed or developing into superculture. For this analysis, a total of 3,499 show pieces in 81 collections are reviewed. Meanwhile, there are some subculture styles shown less than five times for the last ten years in the collections. They seem to be disappeared because they are either just experimented works by designers or a lack of popularity.

Analyzing keywords from the reviews and articles including the concepts, designers' methods in Vogue US, Samsung Design Net, and Fashion Insight are as follows:

Combination, simplification, ornament, contrast, and reinterpretation are the main aspects of the design methods. Firstly, combination is shown in the styles which are manipulated and transformed from another style in a different time period or a different community, then applied into subculture styles. Or more than two subculture styles are combined together and each characteristics co-exist in a piece. Secondly, simplification refers to pieces which some aspects from subcultures are shown in a modernized way; minimal and sophisticated. Thirdly, ornament is used as highlighting or details of the typical features of subculture styles. This shows more vividly than the actual subculture styles. Fourthly, contrasting style is shown in the pieces which the styles in the current and the past co-exist or disparate materials are used in one piece. Moreover, despite of application of rough and defiant images, it implies feminine moods. Finally, reinterpretation of subculture styles is used through transformation, re-creation, re-mixture, and refinement. This method includes representation of the subculture with refined materials.

It took almost 100 years for blue jeans and T-shirts to be the representative items of superculture developed from subculture. Since the criteria of this research is limited to the last 10 years contemporary womenswear colletions, perhaps it is too early to conclude that the styles examined in this research are the very phenomenon of superculture styles even if those styles are in fashion over the world. However, this research would contribute to establish ways of creating superculture styles. In addition, if the five subculture styles addressed in this research are settled as popularized and universalized fashion styles and appear continuously in further collections, they would be certainly identified as supercultures. Therefore, this research aims to prove that subculture styles can be developed into super culture by application, reinterpretation, and transformation in high end fashion through the commercialization and popularization.

References

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