

Adoption of Western Achievements

Research into Design Culture of Contemporary Chinese Garment Enterprises

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Abstract—Contemporary Chinese garment enterprises are in great demand of building up a systematic and mature design culture for a sound operation. Based on the principle of adopting western achievements, this paper examines the development of some well-known western garment enterprises and elaborates the fashion design and culture in Chinese garment enterprises. It contributes to cultural management of contemporary Chinese garment enterprises.

Keywords—garment; fashion; art; culture; brand

I. A PRACTICAL INSIGHT INTO THE DESIGN CULTURE OF CHINESE GARMENT ENTERPRISES

Chinese garment enterprises are vital part of modern enterprise family. Since the carrying out of the reform and opening-up, Chinese garment enterprises are growing in a comprehensive way. A new pattern is formed with the mutual development of both brands and processing enterprises. And Chinese garment enterprises are increasingly changing with each passing day with the international status as “the largest producing and exporting country”. Currently, in Chinese garment enterprises, the need for cultural development and identity is increasingly intensified and the whole Chinese garment industry gradually realize the importance of cultural impact on fashion art and design.

According to my point of view, modern Chinese garment enterprises can be divided into three categories in terms of arts design and cultural construction: entrepreneur-type, designer-type and small or medium processing enterprises. As to the entrepreneur-type enterprises, they boast more capital and funds and led by entrepreneurs, promoting their culture via capital. Designer-type ones, led by designers, depend on the capability of designing as well as operation of the designers; they boast the advantage of designing and cultural trait, accumulating their capital by culture. On the other hand, those processing enterprises lack the advantage of capital like the entrepreneur-type and cultural advantage like designer-type; they are the survivor in crack which hold low status in Chinese clothes market.

Entrepreneur-type garment enterprises are the key part of Chinese garment enterprises like Shanshan, Youngor and Septwolves. The usual methods to promote corporate culture include massive advertisements, employing famous designers, etiquette training, and building relation network. Famous designers like Wang Xinyuan, Zhang Zhaoda, Wu Xuekai, Ji Wenbo are all employed in entrepreneur-type enterprises. In

addition, entrepreneur-type enterprises tend to cooperate with schools, scholars, unions and institutes upon cultural exchanges. For example, one of the brands--Seven, in cooperation with Academy of Arts and Design in Qinghua, built the Institute of researching and protection of the Immaterial Cultural Heritage; Septwolves, cooperating with China's Academy of Arts and Design, founds the Institute of Chinese Menswear Culture; Youngor and Donghua University establish Institute of Menswear; All-Green Group plans to establish Institute of creative garment industry of All-Green in Hangzhou. All these aim to the cultural exchanges, researches and applying culture by building the network and promoting their culture.

Designer-type is the leader in promoting the design culture of Chinese fashion industry. In such kind of enterprises, designers are tempting to increase the power of culture, focus on the enlargement of local culture, and strive for the international status of Chinese fashion industry. Good examples include Zhang Zhaoda's Mark Zhang, Liangzi's Fate, Ma Ke's Uselessness, Ji Wenbo's Lilang, Yang Ziming's Kabin, Zhang Zhifeng's Northeast Tiger and Wang Xiaolin's Muzhenliao, Chen Chunfang's Shanghai Xu, as well as Yang Chenggui and Cao Mingqiu's Favor of Yang Cao. All these designer-type ones prefer to the combination of local culture and international characteristics, or focus on the local favor, organizing small workshops and organizing cultural activities like design contests. Those enterprises take this as the beginning and gradually improve their cultural influence.

As to the small and medium-sized processing enterprises, they position in a lower status. Faced with the foreign boundaries, anti-dumping, European and American debt crisis, low profit in China, brain drain, capital shortage and high price of labor, Chinese processing enterprises in small and medium sizes have already had little influence or competitive ability. Governmental aid is of necessity to improve their production environment and help them transform from OEM (occupying merely 10% in global textile market) to OBM. Against the backdrop of integration of companies, it is of top priority for these processing enterprises to plan their stages, definite their position, build their culture, increase the cultural value and accumulate capital in order to realize strategic shift and focus on the design to gain brand profit.

II. SPECIFIC APPROACHES TO THE DESIGN CULTURE CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE GARMENT ENTERPRISES

The promotion of design culture is the specific way to realize a stable development for Chinese garment enterprises. They promote the culture of enterprises, contribute to the exporting of corporate culture, increase the sales of fashion clothes and also help the creation of more popular element.

It is the cultural context for Chinese fashion industry that garment enterprises with different cultural genes mutually intertwine and influence. Under such a kind of circumstance, Chinese garment enterprises need to learn from other success stories, based on their own cultural construction, in order to realize the sustainable development of their corporate culture. In the following part, the five parts of corporate culture and its effect on garment enterprises would be in discussion.

Corporate culture, strictly speaking, consists of environment, value, heroic character, cultural ceremony and cultural network. These five parts have mutual influences and can produce of strong improve effect of design culture. A profound research into the culture of garment enterprises based on five cases including Hermes, Zegna Balenciaga Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein surely contributes to the enrichment of the style of clothes and the promotion of competitive capability of garment companies as well as the sustainable development of fashion industry.

A. Corporate Environment

Take Hermes, a French enterprise in fashion industry, as a case in discussion. Hermes started in 1827 as the making of harness, and had become a big empire with more than ten series of products. Its products boast perfect and delicate traits with profound implication and changeable fashion tint. Hermes is the symbol which sustains for a longtime and enjoys great reputation in such a competitive market. It focuses on the building of top-class and luxurious design culture to accumulate its cultural base.

For instance, Hermes makes the couch as its logo to reveal its long history and high quality. It utilizes theme stories to present the culture of silk scarf, applies the dream of Morocco's princess to reveal the culture of Kelly bag, and makes use of the personality of Welsh prince to demonstrate the culture of Golf leather jacket. Even, many of its counters are made by French factories and then sent to the stores all over the world, in order to illustrate its specific corporate culture.

B. Values

Take Zegna, an Italian garment enterprise as an example. Zegna started its business as the making of flour and established an empire specialized in producing advanced suits for men in high status. Zegna takes the pursuit of high quality and excellence as its values and always refines its products with the best material. For example, a limited set of suit is made of advanced man-made cotton in 12-13 mini meters and its button in toughest conium of animals, so that the crinkles can disappear naturally within six days.

Zegna adheres to the principle of pragmatism and keeps a strict eye on making of material, buying, design, production,

operation and sales. Its products range from the advanced custom-made suits, sportswear, knits, etc. This company advocates the value of the combination of fashion and tradition, and the tendency of increasingly diverse male clothes. It keeps not being listed in market in order to keep its profit in a long-term and stable way. It is the value which affects its staff as well as its customers that keeps the company survives and sustains.

C. Heroic Figure

Take Balenciaga, the representative of French garment enterprise, as a case to study. This enterprise is named by Balenciaga, which shows the importance of him in this company. This Spanish Balenciaga is a master in fashion industry and he is good at the design of convenient, light and popular clothes, which boasts more creativity than Dior's retro style. "Modern women always wear Balenciaga in a certain way."¹

Balenciaga emphasizes on integrated design and innovates the structure of cloth; it is good at using oblique lines and spiral curves; he also focuses on the power of clothes as architecture. He can be crowned as the only master who can complete design, cutting out, basting and true joint all by himself. His works have unique design and traditional colors; so they have a striking contrast of colors. These clothes are all in elegant, noble and dramatic style, implying with classic and romantic Spanish style. His representative works contain waist type, balloon type, bag type, cocoon style, postman cap, etc. These provide great inspiration for his series of "New Outlook".

Several designers who contributed a lot to the development of simple, convenient, functional and anti-system clothes were all once the students of this hero in fashion industry. For instance, Hubert De Givenchy, the founder of Givenchy, Andre Courreges, the creator of mini-skirt and geometric shape, Paco Rabanne, the first master who makes material by metal in the style of futurism and also Emmanuel Ugare, crowned as "young terrorist" and preferring the hot and sexy Mediterranean style. Therefore, it is easy to find that Balenciaga has a great effect on clothes in the period of young torrents² and he has made great contributions to the design culture in this French garment enterprise.

D. Cultural Ceremony

Take Ralph Lauren, an American garment enterprise, as a case in study. Ralph Lauren, the founder of this enterprise, started his business by selling ties and achieved Lifetime Achievement Award of American Critics Associate and Coty Critic Award for six times. In his biography *The Real Life of Ralph Lauren*, Lauren clarified his success of making great profit by creating the lifestyle and pursuing the nature of

¹ Li, Dangqi, *History of Western Garment*, Beijing: High Education Press, 1995: 185.

² In the 1960s, "it is not exaggerating to say that clothes in this period have undertaken earth-breaking changes. Chanel and Dior were abandoned by young people since they represent elegance and high quality. Instead, the young were in pursuit of special and new design." (from Wang Shouzhi, *History of World's Garment*, Beijing: China's Youth Publishing House, 2002: 121)

fashion instead of using scales and scissors. Lauren's company integrates the elegant, healthy, free and leisured culture and concept of the upper class of the white, westward movement, Hollywood atmosphere and baseball game into the ceremony of its design culture.

Lauren's advanced exclusive stores are usually of delicate design. For example, some stores are like the study or living room of upper-class family in New England of America; some are like the resort beach with high vitality in Hawaii islands. Lauren, thus, puts the cultivation of culture among staff at the top priority, in order to make the staff wear and perform more properly and in line with the culture and atmosphere of these exclusive stores. David Lauren, the son of Ralph, also initiated "the media series of Ralph Lauren" and made Polo.com website, creating culture for its products on the internet with an access to experience more and promoting the etiquette of the staff by imperceptible influence.

Those famous European fashion enterprises tend to integrate design culture into their operation, while the American fashion enterprises like Lauren are trying to integrate their operation into design culture. The heterogeneity of culture is the fundamental reason for the fact that American advanced fashionable clothes are not be regarded as orthodox fashions. However, there is no denying that this operation model has great advantages of its cultural influence, pioneering spirit, expanded market and astonishing profit.

E. Cultural Network

This term refers to the connection of cultural exchanged in the process of operation for enterprises. It is the man-made network of relations in and out of the enterprises in order to convenient their cultural contacts. According to the definition by Allan Kennedy and Terence Deal, in American Corporate Culture, cultural network is merely referred to the inner part of enterprises. But, this paper holds that external cultural network is the extension of internal network of enterprises and also serves for the purpose of promoting corporate culture. So, it is also in the range of cultural network. Take Calvin Klein, an American garment enterprise, as an example.

The founder of CK is Calvin Klein, a well-known designer with the reputation as "prince of the seventh revenue in New York". He conducted himself in a low-profile but performed positive and bright in the building of the cultural network for the company. At the start of his business, he cooperated with his playmate Batty Schwartz and the latter provided him with capital and brain which made great contribution to the development of the enterprise.

Later, Klein acquired help from Lady Custin, the giant in fashion industry, via the reference by Donald, the vice president of the famous company Bonwit Teller. Klein then received his first order and free advertisements for one year. Thus, his company went on a bright path. He himself also gained Coty Critics Award for three years. Then, he promoted Calvin Klein Jeans with the traits as sexy and charming.

Since the 1980s, due to the economic recession, fashion industry was on the sluggish way; sexy clothes were no longer popular along with the end of the sex liberation. Given the

above reasons and the incorrect decisions as well as its debt crisis, Klein was on the edge of bankrupt. At this time, Klein promoted CK Calvin Klein as a second tier brand with the style of Minimalism. This helped the company expand the market again. The cultural network created by Klein has huge impact on its development and it is not without good reason that cultural network benefits the design culture and the change of popular style.

III. CONCLUSION

The design cultural construction of enterprises exerts significance upon the development of garment enterprises and the whole fashion industry. It is the prerequisite for the Chinese garment enterprises and fashion tendency that these enterprises should absorb excellent design culture while remain their core values, innovate traditional design culture and not limited to regulations, strive for stable development and long-term improvement. Learning western achievements in well-known western garment enterprises and applying appropriately into Chinese garment arts and culture as well as corporate management are very crucial for establishing contemporary Chinese garment design culture and improving Chinese design culture layout.

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