

New Trend of Evolution in Modern Mongolian Costume Art

Hongyan He

Hefei University of Technology
Hefei, China 230009

Abstract—With the acceleration of urbanization in our country, Mongolians who live in prairie pastoral area pour in cities. The transformation of pace and style of life makes the clothing, food, housing and transportation in 80 percent of towns in Inner Mongolia have urbanization tendency. The urbanization tendency of traditional Mongolian costumes, the cultural appeal of modern Mongolian people and their cultural self-consciousness in urban environment are analyzed. The evolution of traditional Mongolian costumes to urbanization is discussed.

Keywords—modern Mongolian costume art; evolution; new trend

I. INTRODUCTION

Mongolian costumes with time-honored history and profound tradition encounter unprecedented challenges in modernization. Traditional costumes dressed in daily life fade out gradually. In cities, traditional costumes have transformed into “formal dress”, which is dressed by some people symbolically in ceremonious occasions; the phenomenon has gone with the wind in villages with weak traditional awareness. In recent several decades, traditional costumes are sharply out of people’s sight. For example, in prairie pastoral area that still continues traditional lifestyles, except for the aged, other people seldom wear Mongolian robes. With the popularization of industrial products and commercialization, shepherds have more alternatives. Compared with time-consuming and labor-consuming traditional costumes, clothing and shoes as mass consumer products are convenient and practical as well as obvious price advantage. Besides, because Chinese social culture tends to urbanization, the urban fashionable dressing style imperceptibly changes dressing habits of shepherds. Traditional Mongolian costumes have closer relationship with urban life instead of village life.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MONGOLIAN TRIBES’ TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

In history, traditional Mongolian costumes mainly inherit the clothing traditions of hordes in the north such as Xiongnu and Qidan, ancient nationalities in China, and integrate elements of clothes from the Western Regions. In Yuan Dynasty, people dress robes with right lapel, crossed collar, narrow cuff and wide lower hem and girdle, put on leather boots and wear hat that reaches shoulders (Qi Ying Guan) and high hat (Gu Gu). It establishes the most basic features of Mongolian costumes. However, different from the right lapel

of Xiongnu and Qidan, the Mongolian costumes are right lapel. It transforms the tradition that northern nationalities wear clothes with “left lapel” and inherits the characteristic.

In Yuan Dynasty, the development form of Mongolian costumes is confluent; vast territory, numerous nationalities and diversified cultures fail to impede the unification of costumes. *The Jami’al --- Tarikh* written by Rashid in the west depicts the scene that celebrities of Ilkhanate deeply influenced by Islamic culture hold sacrificial activity and costumes of people appearing in funerals. It is not greatly different from costumes of emperor and empress depicted in aulic portraiture of Yuan Dynasty. Painters of these paintings are distributed in east and west of the empire. Although we cannot say they have no opportunity to refer to each other, generally speaking, the distance, the high degree of autonomy of Mongolian nation and distinct forms and styles of these works are enough to make people believe they are created by different nationalities in different areas.

Nowadays, although the so-called traditional Mongolian costumes comprehensively inherit the tradition of Mongolian costumes after Yuan Dynasty, its characteristics show it belongs to Mongolian costumes in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. Its forms become divided. Mongolian tribes such as Erdos, Chahar, Khorchin, Guerross, Bargut, Buryat have different costume traditions. Its style is primitive and simple (Bargut, Buryat), exquisite and luxury (Erdos, Chahar), dignified and elegant (Khorchin and Guerross). The systems of Mongolian tribes from Yuan Dynasty and policies of the government of Qing Dynasty that block the borders and forbid the interaction of Mongolian tribes promote the diversification of Mongolian culture.

Plekhanov once said, “Nature is the original force to promote the development of social productivity, which greatly depends on geographical environment”. [1] The economic basis determines superstructure. “Nature” plays a dominant role in social development of the Mongolian nationality. The rise of Mongolia Empire in the 13th century benefits from the unique nature (nature gathers hordes on Eurasian Steppes and contributes to the grand unification).^① The collapse of the empire and the formation of cultural characteristics of different tribes are also restricted by nature to a large extent. It is subject

^① The historical play directed by nature once repeatedly performed on Eurasian Steppes, such as Hun Empire, Khitai Empire and Mongolia Empire.

to regional conditions including natural environment and geographical location as well as different cultures around.

Observe Mongolian costumes in the sense of tribal culture, you will find the differences of Mongolian costumes that always show common features (wear robes, fasten girdle and put on boots) are beyond expectation. Located in the west of Inner Mongolia, Alashan is a tribe deeply influenced by Islamic culture, so its costumes tend to be Islamized "Fig. 1". Although the style is not greatly different from Mongolian robes, the color is blue-black or black, especially costumes of women. The black costumes (black gauze kerchief, black waistcoat and black robe) are different from the colorful costumes of Mongolian women. Only the coral pendants and colorized edging remember us it belongs to Mongolian costumes.



Fig. 1. Women's dress in Alashan. picture source: www.mzb .com.cn

The simple costumes of women in Alashan and the elegant and poised costumes of women in Erdos are in stark contrast. As the tribe that guards the spirit of the esteemed Genghis Khan, Erdos is enshrined and worshiped by Mongolian tribes and has accumulated enormous wealth to make costumes and accessories. It contributes to the splendid costumes especially women's headwear in Erdos. Obviously, according to the tradition of nomadic culture, Scythians and Hun always make accessories through precious metals.

In eastern Inner Mongolia, Khorchin is greatly influenced by foreign (Han, Manchu) culture. Its costumes are reserved and delicate "Fig. 2". Women's robes with waistcoat are figure-flattering. Besides, wide lace of multiple layers decorating the collar and the cuff is embroidered with flowers and plants, similar to cheongsam of ethnic Han and Manchu; the headwear of women in Khorchin furthest embodies the characteristic. The zonal headwear has got rid of the traditional heavy and complicated forms. They tie up them on the forehead like browband and bead band of ethnic Han women. Hairpin even appears on their hairdo. The customs of bounding up hair and inserting hairpin are unprecedented in the Mongol nationalities.



Fig. 2. Full-dress women in Khorchin. picture source: baidu.

III. THE EVOLUTION OF MONGOLIAN TRADITIONAL COSTUME

Traditional Mongolian costumes are open and diversified and the forms have diversified evolution. However, no matter in history and the modern and contemporary age, Mongolian costumes leave us an impression that it is more uniform than different. Except for the long-term backward research on ethnic culture, another important reason is that the diversified Mongolian costumes with complicated or simple style get fantastic unification in migratory life. In other words, although the costumes seem strikingly different, they have no difference fundamentally, so they belong to traditional Mongolian culture "Fig. 3".



Fig. 3. Traditional Mongolian costume.

In modern times, with social and cultural development in China, the relatively fixed tradition of Mongolian costumes faces new crisis. In real sense, it is the reform and opening up of Chinese society in the 1980s that begins to shake and eliminate the tradition. Traditional and modern problems become the focus of social development again. Although in broad sense, the problems can be concluded as the impact of globalization based on industrial and information revolution on ancient traditional Chinese culture including Mongolian

culture, in narrow sense, it transforms urban and rural status and increasingly intensifies urbanization. Cities become irresistible for Mongolian, so like other tremendous inland farmers, they give up traditional means of livelihood and rush from prairie pastoral area to cities and integrate in city life that is unfamiliar to them.

Modern urbanization changes daily life of Mongolian at the meantime influences the traditional culture of them, so people's traditional costumes alter obviously. If the diversified differentiation of Mongolian (tribal) costumes previously is called the homogenization of tradition, the present changes can be called the heterogeneity of tradition and have integrated with numerous urban fashionable factors.

The traditional Mongolian costumes go through different periods of "lost" and "awakening". At initial stages for reform and opening-up, "fashion" appears now and then on urban street of Inner Mongolia. Too fashionable even crappy young people appear in streets and lanes as if there is no one else present. We can judge they make nothing of fashion and philosophy of urban life. In reality, it is not fashion but newness that is important for Mongolian. The modern dressing meets the demands of Mongolian to seek freshness and stimulation. New things are always attractive for Mongolian because of their open culture. Therefore, people accept all so-called new things without hesitation, no matter they are proper or not.

The "fashion" created by simple motivation is not fashion. However, the "peculiar" dressing at least reflects Mongolian's self-lost under the impact of urban culture, the disappearance of traditional costumes and their attempt to urgently adapt to the new environment.

Compared with the blind formalistic impulsion, the modified Mongolian robes popular among urban Mongolian can better reflect their inner needs. Although it has no big difference from the traditional Mongolian robes in forms, it "simplifies by cutting out the superfluous" in clipping. It removes the wide and cumbersome traditional lower hem, the complicated edging and the heavy loincloth and absorbs tailoring technique of modern clothing like narrowing waist and sleeve joining to make it figure-flattering and concise. Except that they are bright-colored, the forms have been in harmony with urban environment.

Common people think it is not special except that the forms are simpler, but the change has extraordinary significance on the evolution of Mongolian costumes, because the style of Mongolian costumes has utility function in real life. Narrow sleeve and wide lower hem are convenient for riding; the edging makes clothes more hard-wearing and resistant to dragging; the wide and thick loincloth protects spinal column at the meantime keeps warm. The practical features derived from nomadic life are out of accord with the times in urban environment. In relatively narrow space and meticulous urban life, the "rough" dressing and make-up is in a hindrance. The superiority convenient for nomadic life becomes burdensome.

The appearance of modified Mongolian robes improves the condition. Although it strikes an average between traditional Mongolian robes and ordinary clothes, it is not confined to

practicability. Besides, it changes the trend of traditional Mongolian costumes. The simple and rough Mongolian robes become elegant not only in styles but also in connotation. Originally, it only belongs to prairie but now the boundary becomes indistinct. The cultural implication becomes diversified. On one hand, it connects Mongolian far from prairie with prairie; on the other hand, it connects Mongolian far from cities with cities. Although the connection is restricted to costumes, it is cultural symbol and its function cannot be underestimated.

Moreover, the evolution of costumes with introverted adjustment because of life changes accidentally coincides with modern costume designing so it has modern style. Interestingly, the acquisition of modern style is purely by accident, maybe it is the brainstorm of some Mongolian aunt (living in the city). However, chance is always contained in necessity. In modern metropolis, the necessity can be understood by people who are not cultural philosophers.

IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MONGOLIAN COSTUME IN THE BACKGROUND OF URBANIZATION

Folk costume is the most significant symbol created by human. Mongolian costumes resemble the calling card or identity card of the Mongol nationality. Containing cultural memories and traditions of the Mongol nationality, it is the most intuitive material symbol of national spirit. Although modern city absorbs cultural traditions of different nationalities, essentially, it resembles a big melting pot that continuously makes boundaries of ethnic groups indistinct and eliminates cultural differences. Nevertheless, traditional ethnic culture driven by living experience will show strong vitality in cultural fusion and then embody its value and significance.

Let's return to Mongolian costumes. In the first twenty years after the reform and opening-up, Mongolian just entering cities went with the stream. In the 21st century, numerous Mongolian gradually settle down and seek self-positioning and self-value. The awakening of self-consciousness comes from rethinking and spiritual return of urban Mongolian on ethnic culture in the new life condition. Specifically, the most obvious and intuitive expression is the changes of costumes. Instead of following blindly and improving among the people, it has obvious cultural intention and "official" color and plays a leading role.

Under normal conditions, Mongolians living in the city seldom wear Mongolian robes, but it doesn't mean they deny the ethnic tradition. They just fail to find costumes that keep pace with the times, meet personalized self-demands and conform to the traditional experience in dressing and the aesthetic taste.

The deadlock is broken in real sense because in recent years, people intensify the inheritance and protection of ethnic culture and improve consciousness of ethnic culture and all sectors of society support and participate in the development of Mongolian costumes. Mongolian costumes become new favorite of culture and new economic growth point; factories and workshops spread all over big streets and small alleys like mushrooms after rain.

Costumes have close relationship with people's life and feelings. Therefore, as the core of fashion, costumes with profound connotation are accepted by the mass most easily in forms; the forms of costumes are intuitive manifestation of national spirit, so it is advantaged to promote the development of ethnic culture. Obviously, Mongolians realize it and by all means design new-style Mongolian costumes that are more novel and keep pace with the times. Unconsciously, people find TV presenters on channels of Mongol in the autonomous region wear concise and fashionable new-style Mongolian robes. Cultural celebrities are unwilling to lag behind and wear similar costumes to make a stage pose and present in important occasions. It is far beyond the meaning of costumes and becomes a "symbol" for Mongolians to show identity. So far, Mongolians once at sea in urban life have finally occupied a position and declared their real existence in cities as nomadic people that are not agreeable with cities historically.

"New-style Mongolian robes" is a brand new costume concept. In general, it is different from the Mongolian costumes appearing in the past, such as the natural and simple traditional Mongolian robes and the gorgeous and exaggerated Mongolian robe for stage performance. The styles press close to modern urban life, display personalized fashion and have concise and intellectual characteristics with extensive application. Elements of costumes deconstruct traditional meaning and seek modernized construction through "make hard things simple". Furthermore, it integrates elements of traditional Mongolian costumes in modern concise apparel modeling and creates new meanings according to the new constitution. Besides, when discussing the new development trend of Mongolian costumes, we cannot ignore the trend completely opposite to the modern urbanization tendency. It realizes the development of tradition through recovering the classical appearance (Mongolian costumes in Yuan Dynasty). Visually, costumes of Yuan Dynasty seem simpler and more elegant than the traditional costumes defined by us now. It is simple but not brief. Although it is classical, it resonates with modern forms and presents some "new" meaning. However, its development tendency is not as strong as the former, because it depends on the strength to deeply research history, literature and folk custom, which cannot be done by common people.

It is well-known that modern popular clothes enter the time of seeking personality and fashion "Fig. 4" "Fig. 5". It contains humanistic consciousness like scientific spirit and equality and freedom in the information age and stresses the uniform, concise and harmonious forms as well as the free and open design consciousness. However, in recent years, it tends to be "organic", namely return of nature and humanistic spirit. [2] We think Mongolian costumes with urban style appear when modern costumes increasingly highlight personalized design, especially clothing elements with ethnic features or reminiscence become increasingly popular. Compared with pure modern style, it is modern and "organic", indicating the appearance of modern design has full-bodied ethnic features and traditional colors. Therefore, it naturally is responsible for the continuation of tradition through modernization.

At present, the modernized Mongolian costumes develop rapidly. It is not exclusive for TV presenters or cultural celebrities, weddings and festivals. Increasing numbers of

common people wear the new-style fashionable Mongolian robes that embody ethnic charm in daily life. The appearance of urbanized and fashionable Mongolian robes meets cultural and psychological needs of urban Mongolians and enriches their tradition, at the meantime represents a new development trend of Mongolian costumes.



Fig. 4. Modern Mongolian costume.



Fig. 5. Modern Mongolian costume.

V. CONCLUSION

Herbert Marcuse addresses the world is not motionless but mobile and often new, develops into other things with unending changes. [3] According to the history of Mongolian costumes, although it develops dynamically all the way and has distinct openness, nowadays, with the expansion of modern urban culture, it becomes "past tense" of culture because its cultural function rapidly reduces even disappears. Simple duplication of tradition can only make tradition become cultural "sample" and enter museum. On the contrary,

letting tradition return to life will make for cultural development and make it everlasting.

The modern attempt of Mongolian costumes is far from mature and problems are more than achievements, obviously, it tends to modern urbanization, which has important significance on the development of Mongolian costumes even its culture. Therefore, we should pay high attention to it and observe, think and research deeply.

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