

Korea's "Clothing Culture" –The Hanbok

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Every country has its own traditional costumes, Korea has the hanbok, Japan the kimono and China the qipao (Chinese dress). If you are Korean, you will want at least one hanbok during your lifetime.

However, why is it recently, the hanbok seems so distant even for a Korean like me? Although this is not so for modern society in general, people of my generation feel detached from the hanbok.

When do Koreans wear their first hanbok? The first time is at one year of age when the dol bok is worn. In Korea, the dol janchi celebrates a child's first birthday one year to the day after birth. The hanbok worn for that occasion is called a "dol bok." Parents dress the child in beautiful clothes and celebrate dol janchi together with close family and relatives to wish for a happy future. The dol bok has accoutrements that wish for longevity, wealth and honor. The next time the hanbok is worn is for a birthday party in kindergarten. After that, it is pulled out and worn for seasonal festivals (Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn festival), and other big events. Then, the most ornately beautiful hanbok is worn when greeting elders at the close of a formal wedding ceremony.

Nonetheless, demand for the hanbok has been declining recently as increasingly more people reserve it for just seasonal events. Alongside of that, the hanbok has been transformed in various ways to keep abreast of the changing times. Improved hanboks have even been made for busy modern-day people who pursue fun. These improved hanboks are much more practical as they allow freedom of movement, dirty little and are made of strong material that can stand up to washing. And, they adopt the traditional color schemes and designs of Korea. They are compatible with real lifestyles without losing the essence of the hanbok. Designs have also been improved in response to the recognition and growing demand for the familiar hanbok.

Recently, the hanboks worn by actors on TV and in the movies in Korea have become readily available and affordable to general consumers. So, even the traditional hanbok has become trendy. One example is a hanbok that creates an air of elegance for women,

which was made popular by the TV drama “Dae Jang Geum.” Hanbok designs became very elaborate when “Hwang Jini” was a movie and a TV series. The hanboks in Hwang Jini were for wedding ceremonies and special occasions with lots of people, and were more beautiful than dresses. For those reasons, their popularity spread to young people as well.

In the TV drama “Kun (Love in Palace)” that was taken from a comic book, the new word “fusion hanbok” was born from the wonderfully fused hanbok and dress. The beautiful and traditional hanbok design of Korea was very popular with students and was the talk of society.

As such, though the hanbok has become familiar, it is still hard to discard the idea that this attire must be worn for formal occasions. I have worn hanbok three times: the dol bok, my birthday party in kindergarten and on new year’s when I was twenty. However, I have not had the opportunity to wear it over these past ten years. But, in order to free myself from the fixed conception of the hanbok as ambiguous complicated attire, I plan to buy a beautiful one this year.

For the Setsubun (the day celebrating the coming of spring) this year, I want to wear a jeogori with the colors of warm spring flowers and a chima colored like a deep blue autumn sky. Finally, it would be great if the hanbok would be a more familiar.