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THE ROLE OF ELITE SUBCULTURES IN THE PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND ART OF MEDIEVAL KOREA

This article, based on the philosophical-sociological approach to the consideration of traditional culture and on the theory of sociocultural stratification declares that a complex, multilayered structure of society provides an appropriate protection to the national culture and through it, to national art.

The Korean aristocratic society guided by Confucian standards and patterns since ancient times was predisposed to create the certain range of elite subcultures (*munin*, *hwawon*, neoconfucian philosophers and intellectuals), similar to each other, preset to reproduce and translate the values created in mainstream Chinese culture and to form its own specific directions, genres and styles through medieval times.

Modernization and westernization that began at the end of the 19th century with its new challenges and objectives contributed to the disintegration of syncretism, typical for the Far Eastern culture and art of Medieval Times, and, as a result, the disintegration of elite subcultures.

Ключевые слова: Medieval Korea, elite subcultures, Korean Wave, Hallyu, person of culture, *munin*, *wenren*, *bunjin*, *hwawon*, *maehyang*, Kanson Jeon Hyeongpil

Introduction

The culture of the Korean Peninsula is a very complicated system represented by the specific combination of traditional and modern components. This specificity is conditioned by internal and external circumstances, the key ones being the estrangement of ethnic groups living on the Northern and Southern part of the Peninsula, globalization, urbanization and the fast growth of mass culture, mostly represented by the Hallyu ("Korean Wave") phenomenon and provided by the flexibility of the minds of young people of South Korea and their too-much-open attitude to Western ideas and trends. On the other hand, the mass culture of South Korea sometimes helps to preserve cultural identity and takes an active part in the formation of national identity through the replication and translation of historical symbols and nationally significant ideas ¹.

Since ancient times Korean traditional culture was quite open to the penetration of different local cultures and religious beliefs, that was determined by ethnic consciousness and location of the Korean

¹ For ex. reflection of Confucian ideas in Korean dramas contributes to the consolidation of East Asian cultures.

Peninsula. Transparency and open-mindedness of Korean culture is reflected in the specific architecture of the Korean traditional house, traditional clothes, paintings, handicrafts, etc.

Since the Medieval times, two layers of traditional culture have implicitly existed on the Korean Peninsula. The first one was related to the Confucian heritage and Chinese traditions, while the second one was formed later and its appearance refers to the invention of the Korean alphabet Hangeul, that gave start to the writing tradition of Koreans and contributed to the strengthening and promotion of national identity and national spirit.

Moreover, so far, as usage of Hangeul allowed to express all the nuances of thoughts and feelings of Koreans it created specific freedom of their minds, that was fully used by people of Art and Literature in the process of creation of their own ideas, styles, techniques and genres through the 19th–first half of 20th century.

Methodological and theoretical approaches

This article is written within the philosophical-sociological approach to the consideration of traditional culture, that involves the isolation of its two aspects – the substantive (these are the elements of the sociocultural experience that are translated) and the functional (this is taking the “communication-translational-transmutational” way of “intra- and inter-generational interaction of people”). Traditional culture is defined here as a “mechanism for the reproduction of social institutions and norms, in which the maintenance of them is justified, legitimized by the fact of their existence in the past”. Traditional culture functions as a system that ensures the reproduction in systems of modern culture of those patterns of past activity that have stood the test of time and have been tested in similar sociocultural conditions ².

This culture is directly related to the tradition that characterizes such self-organizing and self-regulating systems of human activity and the associated socio-cultural experience, the functioning and development of which is not related to institutional forms of provision through a special apparatus of authority. The legality of these life patterns is determined by the very fact of their existence in the past, and their effectiveness is assessed through the accuracy of following the precedent pattern [Ibid.].

The author widely uses the theory of sociocultural stratification, developed by famous Russian philosopher Konstantin Sokolov. This concept declares that the phenomena of the sociocultural and the social are closely related, since in every person they give rise to a single picture of the world, which influences its relation to art.

This article is also based on the concept of “person of culture” in Korea and neighboring countries, formulated by the scientists of the Department of Oriental Studies with the participation of the author.

Main body

The inexhaustible richness of Korean traditional culture was the result of a multilayered society, the product of the diversity of traditional and newly emerging subcultures ³, that played the role of preserving both old and new values.

In Medieval Times, the appropriate balance between old and new subcultures on the Korean Peninsula provided protection for the core of traditional culture.

According to the idea of Russian philosopher Konstantin Sokolov, a normal functioning society requires an appropriate quantity of conservative and innovative subcultures. Conservative subcultures do not allow the overly-radical subcultures to destroy the basis of culture, which is important for the

² Kostina A. V. Traditional culture: to the Problem of Definition the Concept. URL: <http://www.zpu-journal.ru/e-zpu/2009/4/Kostina/> (дата обращения 09.09.2017).

³ In this article the term “subculture” is understood as the complex of world views, the cluster of norms, ideas, values and ideals in the general field of culture, to which individuals and entire groups that share these values are attracted [Sokolov, 1996. P. 25].

preservation of cultural continuity and cultural identity [Sokolov, 1996. P. 33–34]. But the issue is that Korea was the only country in East Asia, where the upper class not only covered a larger percentage of the population, but at the same time it was created not on a military, but on a purely civil basis. From the early Middle Ages the aristocratic character of Korean society was more pronounced [Volkov, 2005. P. 15, 21]. It means that the “social world” of newly emerging groups was rather homogenous.

According to ideas in the book “Subcultures and ethnoses in the artistic life”, written by Konstantin Sokolov, national (ethnic) differences are mainly socio-psychological divergences, embedded in the process of education and gaining life experience. Thus, the phenomenon of ethnocultural and social are closely related to each other, since inside of each person they give rise to the single picture of the world. Acquisition and consolidation of ethnic and social properties take place in early childhood and teenage years through the assimilation of national culture and social norms through the educational system [Sokolov, 1996. P. 9].

Korean society has always been guided by Confucian standards, which were combined with adherence to the original ideas and concepts emerging in different epochs of Korean history [Tikhonov, Kang, 2011. P. 184].

Korea of Medieval Times (Goryeo and Joseon periods) was the Confucian monarchy with the majority of the population having specific “Confucian ideological baggage” [Ibid. P. 234]. It means that the world view of elite subcultures⁴ arising within the aristocratic society of Korea, its preservation, maintenance and transfer to the next generation in the form of national tradition generally had the same basis.

Every subculture had been creating its own folklore, art, rituals, lifestyles and strategies mainly within the framework of those factors, that were formed largely within Confucian and Buddhist tradition.

From the period of Three Kingdoms (approximately 4th century A. D.) two previously mentioned teachings made an equal influence on Korean society. For some time, the Korean aristocracy, accustomed to Confucian ideas, refused the official recognition of Buddhist doctrines. However, subsequently the teaching was recognized in all the three states and was widely supported by Wang’s court.

The rise of the Buddhist sect *Chan* (*Zen*) in the later period of Silla contributed to the evolution of Buddhism as a philosophical doctrine that prevailed in the religious sphere until the end of the state’s existence.

The Goryeo era (918–1392) went down in history as the period when Buddhism flourished in Korea. During the period of the 10th–15th centuries, Buddhism turned into a national doctrine along with Confucianism and maintained its position as a state religion, developing among conditions of cooperation with the aristocratic elite.

The world of Korean traditional art mostly represented by art works and activities created by the subculture of *munin* (lit. “person of culture”) can be held as an example of a stabilizing subculture, that largely contributed to the preservation of Korean traditional culture. The study of the “person of culture” concept 文人 (Chin. *wenren*, Kor. *munin*, Jap. *bunjin*) gives plenty of data to study ethnic history, art and traditional games of the people of Far East, and makes it possible to reveal historical-cultural connections between countries, which constitute a single area of Far Eastern culture.

The *munin* subculture on the Korean Peninsula began to form in ancient times under the influence of Chinese arts, aesthetics and educational traditions, mostly represented by Confucianism.

Confucianism as a philosophical-ethnic teaching not only was a religion, but also a principle of living for the majority of the population in the Korean Peninsula. Confucian tradition not only aims to make people live in a well-organized world, but also continuously perfect themselves.

⁴ The term “elitist subculture” in this article is used to describe a group of individuals – carriers of “high culture”, which is applicable to aristocratic societies of the Far East determined by their adherence to Confucian traditions and artistic-aesthetic canons.

A qualitative transformation of Chinese heritage occurred in the Korean Peninsula under the influence of historical events. During the period of transformation, a new kind of man, “a person of culture”, appeared. “A person of culture” is attentive to reality, free from traditional Confucius dogmatism, and ready for courageous experiments and adaptation of new patterns.

In contemporary scholarship, the term “a person of culture” denotes an educated person who embodies the origins of culture.

This concept is closely related to the system represented by zither, board games, calligraphy, and painting. These four arts, though slightly changed, used to be the required skills of the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese scholars' leisure in the Middle Ages [Voytishek, 2011. P. 7].

Determining specific changes of the concept for Korea, it is necessary to mention that it includes the ancient string instrument *komungo* playing skills, *baduk* gaming skills, fluency of writing techniques, and pictorial art.

Korean cultural tradition was developing in such a way that the best achievements of Chinese culture soon became Korea's heritage. Therefore, main features of medieval Korea and China learned people's painting, calligraphy and literature are similar. However, there are important distinctions, which indicate qualitative transformation of certain aspects of these kinds of art in a Korean cultural background. The transformation promoted the formation of unique Korean genres and styles, emergence of professional calligraphers and painters, and shaped the theoretical base of art and cultural studies in 1930–1950 [Guksa..., 2008. P. 164].

In the 20th century when Korea was annexed by Japan a few remaining representatives of the *munin* subculture such as Jeon Hyeongpil (pen name Gansong, 1906–1962)⁵ contributed a lot to the preservation of tangible heritage, that was actively bought and sold through auctioning established by the Colonial government.

Another example of stabilizing subculture in Korean society is Buddhist subculture. Rituals and practices of Buddhist communities such as the *maehyang* ritual (incense burial ritual) might serve as the consolidating and social protecting mechanism and played a significant role in the crisis periods of Korean history such as the Imjin War, when Japanese pirates *wakou* conducted their raids on the Korean Peninsula.

Most South Korean scientists have linked the *maehyang* ritual with Buddhism, especially with the cult of Maitreya (Future Buddha). According to this theory, for Buddhists, the main purpose of the wood burial ritual can be regarded as the desire to speed up the arrival of Maitreya, consequently bringing about the epoch of universal love and prosperity [Voytishek, Shmakova, Bae, 2016. C. 47].

Elite subcultures of Medieval Korea providing the preservation of Korean traditional culture and art also included hwawons – members of Dohwaso (Royal Academy of Arts), Neo-Confucian philosophers and intellectuals.

Conclusions

The penetration of new Western trends into Korea at the end of the 19th century contributed to the profound transformations of the cultural core through a change in the self-consciousness of members of society. The emergence of various trends in the world of culture and art, the rapid expansion of the theoretical base required from Korea, the creation of its own adequate terminological apparatus and the development of specialization in relevant spheres. All of these contributed to the disintegration of

⁵ Gangson Jeon Hyeongpil (全鑒, 1906–1962) – collector of Korean artefacts. He is famous for his great achievement of collecting 12 national treasures, 10 treasures and 4 cultural assets designated by the Seoul metropolitan government. He strived to bring back Korean cultural assets and heritage from Japan since a great deal of Korean antiquities were taken by Japanese collectors during the colonial rule of Japan in the early 20th century. The first private art museum was built in 1938 named Bohwagak and later took care of most of the valuable Korean antiquities during the Korean War. After his death in 1962, the name Bohwagak was changed to the Gansong Art Museum which only opens twice in a year since 1971. The museum cherishes a great deal of the rarest cultural artifacts of Korean art [Jeon Hyeongpil // Wikipedia.URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeon_Hyeongpil (last access data 09.09.2017)].

syncretism, typical for the Far Eastern culture and art of Medieval Times, and, as a result, the disintegration of elite subcultures.

In such conditions, it was impossible for example to have an integrated personality like the medieval “person of culture” (*munin*), for whom art was the manifestation of the commitment of Confucian ideology and ways of conducting intellectual leisure. The main guide to painting and calligraphy for scholars of the scribes during the Joseon period was the works of famous predecessors and Chinese treatises, which, even with their outstanding significance for that time, cannot be compared with theoretical works in a modern sense.

Nowadays, said manifestations of traditional culture and art crisis are mainly connected with the problems of school and higher education in Korea. They demonstrate a distinct warp towards the priority to study Western art at the expense of traditional art. It can be traced through University schedules as the example of the organization of the educational process in South Korea. The crisis is also related to the new challenges and new answers that should be provided by any culture in the modern period of life. With the weakness of the traditional culture and the superiority of western models and ideals, it is difficult to self-identify Korean culture and art in the Far Eastern cultural environment, where there is an emerging threat of cultural complexes. The problem is complicated due to the presence of two independent contradictory regimes on the Korean Peninsula. It is necessary to mention that traditional Korean culture is one of the most important factors of national security that can have important meaning for the successful development of positive relationships between the South and North parts of the Peninsula.

It is necessary to note that significant efforts in order to solve the problems, connected with the support of projects that study traditional culture, are made by the Government of Korea, the Ministry of Education and Science Technology (MEST), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Korea Foundation. These efforts have been paying off, as students, post-graduate students and professors of foreign universities are deeply interested in ancient and medieval Korean culture [Kireeva, 2009. P. 190].

Nevertheless, it seems to be very useful to intensify the international exchange within the framework of preserving and promoting traditional culture. Conferences, seminars, and meetings initiated by the Korean Government should be held all over the world. South Korea has an incredibly rich experience in the development and application of preservation, renovation and protection of heritage, that should be known worldwide and used by the other countries.

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РОЛЬ ЭЛИТАРНЫХ СУБКУЛЬТУР В СОХРАНЕНИИ ТРАДИЦИОННОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ И ИСКУССТВА СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОЙ КОРЕИ

В средневековой Корее воспроизведение культурных и художественных ценностей, а также их защита обеспечивалась, главным образом, за счет деятельности консервативных элитарных субкультур, сформировавшихся в аристократической среде. При этом схожесть картин мира этих групп обуславливалась неуклонным следованием конфуцианским стандартам и образцам. Воспроизведение и трансляция конфуцианских ценностей представителями субкультур *мунин*,

хвавон, а также неоконфуцианских философов и интеллектуалов способствовали формированию в корейском средневековом искусстве оригинальных направлений, жанров и стилей. Сохранение буддийского пласта традиционной культуры поддерживали религиозные общины.

Модернизация и вестернизация в целом способствуют распаду синкретизма, типичного для средневековых обществ в странах Дальнего Востока, и, как следствие, приводят к исчезновению элитарных субкультур. Тем не менее, отдельные их представители вносят весомый вклад в сохранение культурного наследия и этнической идентичности корейцев. Реорганизация учебного процесса в южнокорейских школах и вузах, при которой особая роль отводится западным моделям и образцам в ущерб традиционным ценностям, угрожает формированием культурных комплексов и кризисом идентичности, являющейся одним из основных факторов национальной безопасности.

Ключевые слова: Средневековая Корея, элитарные субкультуры, Корейская волна, Халлю, человек культуры, мунин, вэньжень, бундзин, хвавон, мэхан, Кансон Чонхёнпхиль.

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