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**NEW GENERATION CULTURE AS SPECIFIC SOUTH KOREAN
YOUTH SUBCULTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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Summary. The future development of each culture in the latent form is in its present state. From this perspective, of a significant interest are those ideological paradigms, with which the youth connects its existence. This article examines the specificity of the formation and development of South Korean youth subcultures. It singles out four streams of the new generation culture: club culture, hip-hop, assimilation of the Japanese culture and N generation. Each stream contributed a lot to the creation of new cultural forms many of which were adopted by the dominant Korean culture of the twentieth century. The results of this investigation can promote a better understanding of South Korean culture's current state.

Keywords: dominant culture; youth subculture; new generation.

Considering the conditions of subcultural formations' appearance and development in South Korea, one should note that the power of the dominant national culture has long been an authoritarian integrating beginning of the society. The historical experience of South Korea (a position of Japan's colony, division of the country into North and South, military dictatorship, rapid industrialization, and etc.) defined the origination of a common social and cultural space with specific geographic and demographic conditions. At the same time a unique system of education, the possibility of entering a prestigious university, the current legal basis for conscription allowed authorities to recognize the existence of the society's cultural unity.

In the South Korean society, mass communication media has long been under the control of the power of the dominant culture and has been used as political, social and cultural levers of uniting people (military diktat from 1963 to 1993). Therefore it was difficult for subculture groups to realize themselves in society. According to Lee Jae-Hyun [5], "the dominant culture in South Korea, on the one hand, controlled the youth leisure-time space through the

media, and on the other it widened the gap between subculture and basic culture." The young people suffered from the impossibility to get a prestigious education, joined the criminal youth gangs, created anti-culture, directed against the norms and values contained in the dominant culture.

Professor Kim Soohan [4] thinks "movement against the regime during the 70s, 80s, and 90s can be explained as subculture that embodied generational conflict and identified new social identity." But Korean subculture was mainly evaluated as limited as it had a lot of entertaining factors that reflected young people's consumerist behavior. It should be added that it was the mass media that had strong influence in creating a symbolic image of Korean youth culture.

The youth subculture of the 1970s was an escape from the corrupt reality into elitism by distinguishing themselves not only from the older generation but also from the youth laborers, who were deprived of materialistic privileges. The youth subculture of the 80s redirected its energies into creating their positive personalities and taking responsibility for the assumed freedoms. The youth subculture of the 1990s



represented the new generation culture which emphasized the individuality and free spirit of the youth.

One stream of the new generation culture was club culture which was music and entertainment at its core as it included regularly held thematically-oriented events. Club culture was determined by the leisure space where young people danced; the cultural and entertainment space where rock concerts in the style of the underground took place; the social and cultural space where the youth listened to music and talked about rock music; the closed space where homosexual young people gathered [1]. Club culture was a means of gaining independence: it helped young people join adult forms of active leisure practices. In most cases the interest in the club lifestyle was driven by a process of alienation of young people from the parental home. In the space of club culture the youth avoided family control, felt freedom. It offered them not only entertainment from “another world”, but also a cultural space for creative development and self-realization.

In the early 1990s, there emerged experimental underground rock bands “Sinawe”, “Boowhal”, “Baekdoosan”, “Next” and others. They performed their songs in night-clubs, concerts and venues of the city, though they didn’t have a commercial success, they gained popularity among the club youth, as their songs were critical of society and the state. In the mid-1990s, the commercialization of the music industry affected the popularity of rock music in the youth subcultures. The most known are such commercial rock bands as “Jaurim”, “Huckleberry Finn” (indy rock), “Novasonik” (progressive rock), “Crying Nut” and “No Brain” (chosun punk), “Rux” and “The Geeks” (straight edge).

Another stream of the new generation culture was hip-hop. Together with rappers, in the mid-1990s on the stage appeared break-dancers, which eventually caused a growing interest among young people as they showed the bearing and pat-

terns of famous American stars. But soon South Korean rap found its own specifics because the rappers began to recite texts of the problems familiar to Korean teenagers in the language they understood. The early hip-hop groups included “Seo Taiji and Boys”, “Deux”, and “DJ DOC”, the first hip-hop song was “Gim-sat-gat”. Soon hip-hop became not only a youth subculture but popular Korean music; as such it caused many disputes between mainstream and underground young people. At the same time a part of South Korean young people began to learn and practice graffiti. The first South Korean writers were engaged in the application of graffiti only on the walls of the music club, but since the mid-1990s, they began to show their art on the walls of buildings, fences, vehicles and other surfaces. Over time, the style of graffiti incorporated itself in the structure of pop culture, transformed the computer design, became widely used on the Internet and advertising.

The third stream of the new generation culture was assimilation of the Japanese culture, namely otaku, which became possible due to the fact that in 1998, the South Korean government lifted the ban on the sale of Japanese publications and video products as part of a gradual opening of the domestic market for Japanese goods [3]. Otaku represented fans of Japanese animation and comics, most of whom were high school and undergraduate students. Otaku lived in their world, which was far from reality: they are closed and unsociable; they care only about their hobbies with all other aspects of life fading into the background. The otaku were addicted to artistic creativity: drew manga (comics with a specific storyline and style); made anime (animated productions); wrote stories; organized “Cosplay” (costume play) festivals, created web pages dedicated to the Japanese mass culture, and so on. The first cosplay festival – The Seoul International Cartoon and Animation Festival – was organized in 1995. In cosplay festival and in everyday life otaku sought to mimic



the appearance of the anime and manga's characters: clothing, hairstyle, makeup, accessories, and others. They included in their speech the words borrowed from Japanese and listened to j-rock (Japanese rock).

The last stream that symbolized new generation culture was the network generation (N generation), the generation that grew up with a developing digital and computer technology and, consequently, formed a new reality [6] and a new subculture suitable for it. The young people learnt much faster than their parents and introduced new methods of communication. They met in the network, on the forums of like-minded people, discussed what they cared about. They liked to use digital ways of expressing themselves: for instance, shooting a video instead of writing an essay.

Thus, youth subculture in South Korea arose because young people had different values and norms which, accumulated, created a new subculture deviating somehow from the dominant culture. That, nevertheless, does not imply that youth subculture is inferior to main culture. We consider that "the mainstream has lost its centrality: in fact, there is no main stream, there are many streams [2]". The single South Korean culture of the twentieth century was made up of some dissimilar subcultures that obviously contributed to it. The youth subcultures perceived the concepts that were transmitted to them via the media, took them over through a creative process and generated a new product. And vice versa, the dominant culture adopted some peculiar features of youth subcultures (for example music and clothing) for using them in commercial purposes. So, cultural diversity was indispensable for the development of a well-functioning modern society.

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