An Investigation of Korean Youth Subculture Styles
of the 2000s

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Abstract

Korea is a conservative Asian country with a Confucian background and strong groupist tendencies. However, it is also a very young and modern country that has achieved rapid modernization, industrialization, informatization and globalization in a short period of time. The development of the Internet in particular has opened doors for youths to interact with and experience youth subcultures of the west further, and for Korean youths to form their own unique subcultures, too. This study examines current Korean youth subcultures in terms of their social and cultural background, values, and especially focuses on the observation of subculture styles that express Korean society and the minds of youths in the 2000s.

Keywords: Korea; subculture; youths; style; 2000s.

1. Introduction

People are growing more and more globalized each day through elements such as learning about other cultures, interacting with people from different countries at work and in daily life, and traveling, leading to an increased interest in the various

subcultures of different countries that have unique identities which are particularly expressed through style. This article aims to examine contemporary South Korean (hereinafter: Korean) youth subculture values and styles, based on an understanding of traditional Korean culture and Korean youth culture. It provides an in-depth understanding of youth subculture as a medium of interpreting contemporary Korean society and fashion.

2. Material and Methods I: Traditional Korean Values and Culture

Documentary research was conducted based on books, studies and dissertations to examine traditional Korean culture and the characteristics of contemporary youth culture in Korea, in an effort to provide a theoretical background of Korean society today wherein Korean youth subcultures are established. Korea developed from an agricultural society to a technology-based society in a very short period of time. After it started export of textiles to Japan during the colonial period, Korea fundamentally focused on export of fabrics and clothing in the mid-1960s, exported steel and construction services in the 1970s, automobiles, computers and semi-conductor memory chips in the 1980s, and became a strong player of cutting-edge technology such as semi-conductors, IT and communication in the mid-1990s. Education and development of human resources are important in Korea in order to keep up with and maintain its rapid development, and Korean society is one of infinite competition and development (Chung, Jung& Lee 1997, 111).

The Confucian mind, including ideas of loyalty and filial piety, lies in the background of Korean history. Confucian ways define social status through occupation or education standard, and this Confucian background makes education an important part of Korean society. Prestigious education and school ties are an essential part of society and important enough to have an impact on selection of human resources (Kim & Song 2007, 70-71). Traditional ideas of marriage and family are also important and dominant, unlike other countries like the United States, for example, where same-sex marriages are permitted in some states and people are more open about non-traditional values. Traditionally having maintained large families where many generations live together under one roof, and having a history of clan-based hierarchy since the late Joseon Dynasty, Koreans have a very groupist culture. Not only families, but friendly clans, especially villages in rural areas, tend to stick together and get involved in each other's personal lives and issues.

However, modernization of Korean society has led to a new tendency of nuclear families. The strong hold of Confucianism has grown weaker over the years, and young men and women are not only leaving their parents to live as smaller two-generation families, but the average age of marriage is growing older, too. The average age of marriage for women in 1960 was 21.6, but 26.1 in 1995, indicating that the marriage and family culture of Koreans is changing (Kim & Song 2007, 147-148).

Korean culture has also been one of leisure and entertainment for a long time. Games, song and dance were always a part of daily life, whether they were enjoyed by people or simply watched by *yangban*, or Korean aristocrats. Traditional games, such as *nultwigi*, the Korean seesaw where people stand and jump instead of sit, and *yut*, a Korean board game, are still played on holidays like *Chusok*, or Korean Thanksgiving, and the Lunar New Year, and although people rarely sing and dance at mountains, fields or on buses these days, like they used to sing and dance to traditional songs in the aisles of buses when going somewhere in a group, they still like to sing at karaoke rooms, known as *noraebangs*. Karaoke rooms allow people of modern society to enjoy the traditional entertainment culture in private spaces, and are an example that shows the side of Koreans that enjoys song and dance, even today.

3. Material and Methods II: Characteristics of Contemporary

Korean Youth Culture

An examination of Korean youth culture today through documentary research found not only that Korean society has changed and developed dramatically in modern years, but that the mind and values of youths appear to be different from older generations, too. Korean youth culture in the 2000s maintained some of the traditional cultural aspects of Korea in its roots, but there are some significant differences that clearly differentiate it from the culture of older Korean generations. Korean youths are exposed to and experience a much wider variety of things from around the world, live in a different economy and political climate, and have very different values.

A major part of Korean youth culture is school and the pressure to pass university entrance exams. Although this is the focus of many other countries in the world, too, it is very much exaggerated and a dominant part of daily life for students in Korea. Parents and schools focus on university entrance from a very young age, and aim for good grades and test results rather than developing character or general skills. Children often even take private lessons on a variety of subjects such as English, math, physical education, art and music, even before they enter grade 1.

Pressure for good grades is a social element that has a large effect on Korean youths. Most students experience some kind of conflict with their parents, who are very passionate about child education from an early age. They receive a lot of academic stress including from a great number of hours of study, school grades, the need to enter a better school and future career issues, and even restrained hours of TV viewing, tutoring or the problem of selecting good books for studying. Korean teenagers spend most of their time at school or doing things related to school (Hyun, Lee & Lee 2003, 241-242).

The groupist characteristic of Koreans is reflected in the sports culture and club culture of youths. Sport is a part of everyday life for youths, and basketball is especially spreading as a popular sport among young men, along with soccer, through basketball competitions hosted by international sports companies like Nike, Adidas or

Reebok. Sport is also a way of escaping reality for Korean youths who have to spend most of their time studying. Going to *noraebangs* is another large part of popular Korean youth culture, where youths can shine like a star momentarily, but still be part of a group where each person gets their own turn to be the star.

Unlike the past when Koreans used to live in large extended families, people now live in smaller families and thus younger people tend to be more individualist compared to their elders. Korean youths spend 39.3% of their spare time on the computer on their own, 33.2% with their friends, and 10.3% on their own. Youths today only spend 15.2% of their spare time with their families, and 53.7% of Korean youths consider popularity amongst friends important while getting attention from adults is much less important (Kim 2007, 133).

Korean youths are more "westernized" than older generations, and youths today are thus growing more unique and better at expressing their honest views, instead of being passive, shy and afraid to express their own individuality, as was traditionally considered virtuous. Korean youths normally meet members of the opposite sex through "meetings" where two or three boys and girls go on a group blind date together. These days, youths are less shy than their parent generation, who grew up considering shyness a virtue, and literally point their finger directly to the person they are attracted to all at once after counting up to three, or say who they want to be coupled up with. Couples who point to one another leave together to go on a separate date after the meeting. "*Sogaetings*," or one-on-one blind dates, are also a good way of meeting members of the opposite sex in Korea. Korean youths today consider equality between men and women to be natural in all aspects of life. Therefore, they are very open about sex and claim there should be no sexual discrimination. Youths today find sex before marriage acceptable, unlike their parent generation, and believe sex can be a form of pleasure and socializing (Ryu 2003, 100-101).

Coffee shops are a culture introduced from the West and places where young people meet to drink tea of coffee and talk with each other. With more and more famous U.S. coffee shop chains entering Korea, increasingly more youths are going to coffee shops to enjoy the scent of foreign coffee, music and use wireless internet services. This is their way of sharing the international youth culture and showing off the expensive coffee they drink. Starbucks Coffee has especially become a symbol of status and taste thanks to pictures of famous Hollywood celebrities holding Starbucks coffee cups being published in international magazines and on the internet. A concept known as *dwaenjang-nyeo* or *dwaenjang-nam* surfaced in around 2007 to refer to people who are superficial, pursue western styles and expensive international designer brands, and place great importance on appearance and looking much wealthier than they are. *–nyeo* means girl and *–nam* means boy, and the terms are used respectively to refer to women or girls, or men or boys, who have this tendency. For example, a typical *dwaenjang-nyeo* would be a girl who wears designer clothes, carries a Chanel bag or a Gucci bag with logos printed on it, has a Ferragamo clip in her hair, wears Prada shoes, uses Chanel lipstick, drives a BMW, drinks coffee at Starbucks and takes a photo there to upload on her blog, only goes out with guys who make a high salary,

and perhaps does not come from a background as wealthy as one would expect judging by her appearance.

It has been revealed through extensive research on Korean youth culture that there are four major issues regarding Korean youths in the 2000s that could be considered negative characteristics.

First, loneliness is an issue for Korean youths. As examined above, Korean students spend most of their time alone. They spend an average of 1 hour and 54 minutes studying alone because of the pressure for good grades every day, even at a young age (Kim 2000, 133), and most of their remaining time is spent at school or education institutes after school.

In relation to the first problem, the second negative characteristic is that they spend too much time on the internet. Korean youths desire an active lifestyle like youths in other countries, but since they cannot find the time after their studies, they use the internet to connect to the world, and frequently go to internet cafés to play online games with friends or alone for hours on end. The fast internet connection speed and highly developed technology and websites of Korea partially contribute to the problem. Research results on youth internet use show that 66.4% of youths use the internet almost every day, and 30.8% use it 2 to 4 times a day (Chang & Kim 2005, 24).

The third negative characteristic of youths today, which results partially from too much internet use, is overconsumption. Korean youths shop on the internet and this has a direct relationship with overspending. The vast sea of information affects youths to gain an open attitude about imported products, and lead to blind loyalty and purchase of expensive brands (Chang & Kim 2004, 23-38). Youths also react well to advertisements and are more prone to impulsive purchases than older generations because of a lack of understanding of money.

Fourth, Korean youths place more importance on external appearance than internal values, and this is leading to a problem with cosmetic surgery. The supply of cosmetic surgeons increased 42.1 times as much in 25 years between 1979 and 2004, and the field is expanding faster than any other medical field. The increase of cosmetic surgeons and popularization of cosmetic surgery is frequently featured in foreign press and books on Korean culture, and Japanese tourists even take cosmetic surgery package trips to Korea for the high reliability, good technology and low cost in the country (Seo 2004, 129-137).

4. Material and Methods III: Korean Youth Subcultures and Youth

Subculture Styles of the 2000s

Subculture is the culture of a minority, specific social class or group that is not a part of mainstream popular culture. Youth subculture is a subculture specifically of youths. There is a strong sense of homogeneity in youth subcultures because youths want to walk, talk, act and look like others their age to feel like they belong to a group. At the same time, youths also have a strong sense of identity different from

older generations which they express through clothes and actions, and most youth subcultures have a sense of resistance either against society or the older generation. It is through this common frame of mind and interaction that members of youth subcultures come together.

Youth subcultures gradually started to appear in Korea in the 1960s and started to expand and establish in the 1990s. Most Korean youth subcultures are cultures introduced from foreign countries, but include a combined effort of Korean youths to establish their own identity. The military regime of former President Park Jung-hee started with the military coup d'état in 1961. The President Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo administrations followed and approximately thirty years of military rule ended in 1992, when the civilian administration of President Kim Young-sam entered office. The desires and wants Korean people were unable express for thirty years because of strict social circumstances exploded in the 1990s.

Studies, books and the internet were researched to find the most recent Korean youth subcultures. First, keywords related to subculture and subculture style, based on research on subculture – subculture, youths, similarity, youth styles, student culture, resistance of youths - were selected and entered for a search. The results were narrowed based on subculture and subculture style experts' analyses and standards of youth subcultures extracted by the researchers, which included a sense of identity and a mind of resistance.

The final five Korean youth subcultures found were c*lubbers, nightclubbers, hip hoppers, riders,* and *skateboarders.*

In order to understand the values and styles the subcultures aimed to express, a sample group of each of the subcultures was extracted and interviewed, and a simple survey was executed with questions based on existing research (Chung 2004, 23-35) on appearance management and clothing actions. The interviews and surveys took place at the main spots where each of the subcultures gathered to meet each other and enjoy their activities together, such as the park in Dongdaemun where skateboarders skate together, and Namsan Baekbum Park where internet rider clubs tend to have their weekly meetings. The questions asked about the values of each culture, the style they pursued, what factors they considered when choosing clothes to wear, social views or views of older generations on their subculture, and demographical questions.

5. Results

The characteristics of Korean culture and Korean youth culture and problems of Korean youths that have an effect on Korean youth subcultures can be shown as in Figure 1. The figure shows that Korean youth cultures are affected by Korean popular youth culture and the effects are expressed through subculture styles and values. The social importance of education leads to stress for youths and they choose subcultures through which they can relieve the stress. The tendency towards nuclear families weakens traditional family and gender values in youths and they therefore choose gender equality in subcultures, too. The traditional leisure culture has changed mostly to online internet clubs, through which they gain information on and join new

subcultures. Meanwhile, the traditional entertainment culture of Korea has developed into karaoke rooms, which are an integral part of the nightclubbing subculture. Lastly, youths resist against the strong traditional groupist culture of Korea and seek subcultures such as riders and skateboarders, where they can be independent, even though it may be within a group. Differences also exist between Korean youth subculture and Korean popular youth subculture, as shown in Table 1. In short, Korean youth subcultures have opposite values from popular culture or pursue similar values in a more exaggerated way. For example, the popular online game culture is enjoyed by people who want to break away from the pressures of academics and work, but subcultures like rider and skateboarder cultures aim to break away from such pressures through physical activities and resist against the typical lifestyle of Korean students who have to focus solely on studies. In addition, the popular blind dates in Korea are a formal and passive method of meeting people of the opposite sex, but subcultures like clubbing and nightclubbing cultures aim to actively meet and pursue the type of person they want or to meet several people of the opposite sex. The following field research results show attitudes and clothing styles of Korean subculture youths in detail, and photographs taken in the process visually support analyses of their styles and values.
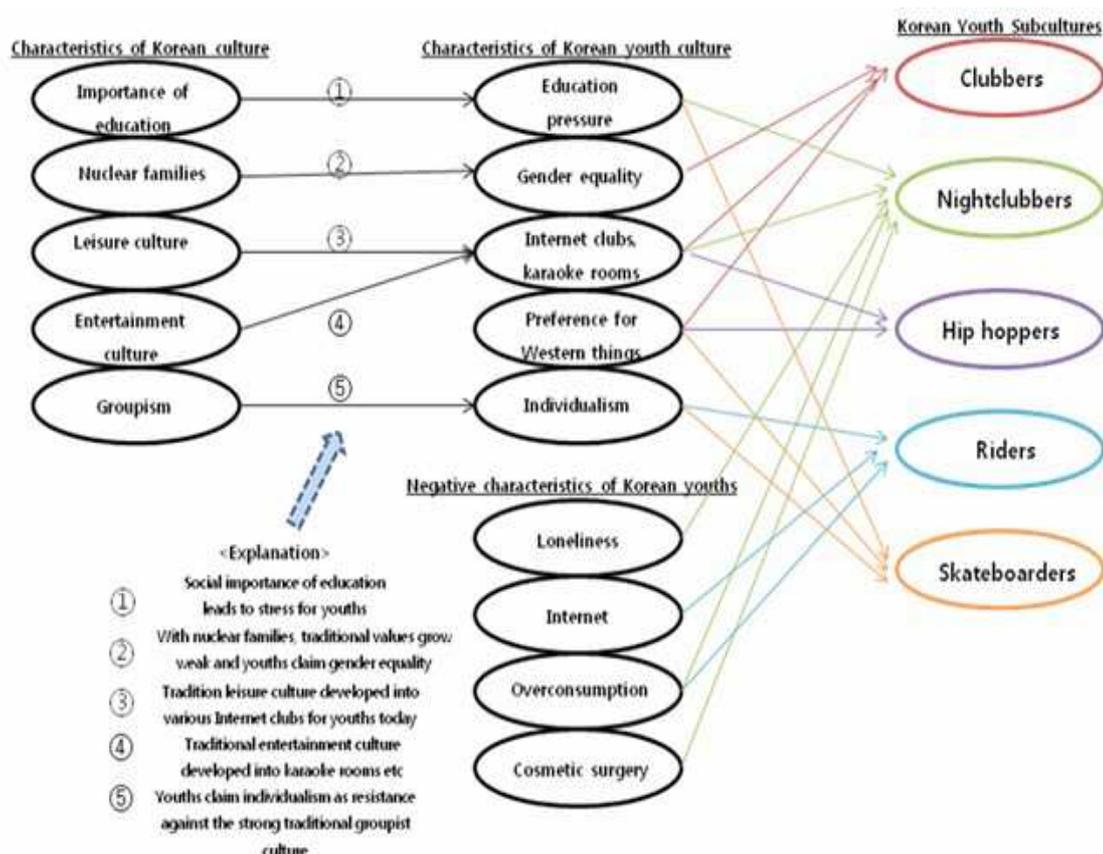

Figure 1. Characteristics of Korean culture, Korean youth culture and problems of Korean youths that affect Korean youth subcultures.

Table 1. Differences between Korean popular youth culture and Korean youth subcultures

Korean Popular Youth Culture		Korean Youth Subculture	
Popular culture	Values	Values	Subculture
-Karaoke	Relieve stress through singing	Relieve stress by meeting new people, drinking and dancing, and showing off oneself	-Clubbers -Nightclubbers
-Online games -Games room	Escape from pressures of academic/success through games	Escape from pressures of academics/success through physical activity and resist against a lifestyle that focuses only on studies	-Riders -Skateboarders
-Blind dates	Meet and build relationships with people through a passive and formal method	Actively meet and pursue people of the opposite sex	-Clubbers -Nighclubbers
-Sports (soccer, baseball etc.)	Feel a sense of belonging and recognition by participating in popular sports	Feel special and enjoy attention by doing a sport most people do not do	-Riders -Skateboarders
-Coffee shops	Meet friends during the day and enjoy the same Western culture as other youths around the world	Enjoy Western night culture and pursue a connection with subculture youths around the world	-Clubbers

5.1 Results (1): Clubbers

Young people have such a large interest in dancing that there is even a term, *momchi*, to refer to someone who cannot dance to a rhythm (Kim & Won 2000, 106). A *momchi* is a subject of ridicule. Since Korean youths spend most of their time studying, they pursue a culture where they can express themselves and communicate through dance (Kim & Won 2000, 106-110).

Some youths sneak into clubs during their teenage years, but most Koreans become clubbers after they enter university and become legal adults, which is at 19 years of age in Korea. Clubs are places where young people listen to music, dance, and drink, and clubbers refers to the people who go to clubs. DJs play music such as techno, trance, house or electronic at clubs. The current electronic music trend is music with a mechanical sound that uses various applications using technology.

20 Korean clubbers were interviewed at the most popular club in Seoul in January, 2009. 60% of those interviewed frequented clubs 1 to 3 times per month, and 20% said they went to clubs 4 times per month or more. All were youths in their twenties - 7 women and 13 young men. 50% worked a desk job at an office, and other occupation categories included actors, musicians and students.

65% said they went to clubs "to listen to music." 50% said "to dance," and 30% said "to hang out with friends" or "to talk to new people." 50% said they liked "trance music" and 45% said they liked "house music," confirming the great trend of electronic music. 60% said they thought they had something in common with other

clubbers, confirming it was a culture where similarity with peers is important. The following is a sample answer from the interview.

   "I don't go to clubs to meet people of the opposite sex. I really just go because I like the music. When I go to a club, I go straight to the speaker, put my ear against the speaker and dance…… Electronic music is the trend these days…… I don't go to hip hop clubs because the people there are too young."

   Ten people said they wore their usual style to clubs, and ten people said they did not. 30% of those who said they dressed differently said they did because "I want to wear something that looks like it's for a club." The points they considered when choosing something to wear to a club were "expressing individuality (55%)," "sexy style (25%)," and "a style that will make me stand out to the opposite sex (20%)." Most of the interviewees said they preferred "my own style (65%)."

   When asked if they thought there was something older generations or society did not understand about them, 65% said "yes," and 40% said they did not understand their "partying culture."

Figure 2. Korean clubber, photographed at Hongik University, Seoul, February, 2009

5.2 Results (2): Nightclubbers

Nightclubs are similar to clubs in many ways, but they are a clearly different night culture space, especially in Korea. Youths, dance, drink, express their own styles and do "booking" at nightclubs (Chang 2004, 10). Booking is a characteristic of nightclubs and only exists in Korea, or Korean nightclubs overseas. Usually men get a room or booth at the nightclub, and women sit at tables. Nightclub waiters take the women customers by the hand and escort them to rooms or booths so they can sit with and talk to men. Booking is a way to meet new people without needing the courage to

go up and talk to someone. The women may get up right away if they do not like who they are sitting with, but they may also sit for a long time a talk, drink and even dance with their new partner. Another characteristic of nightclubs is that they have rooms, and karaoke machines in the rooms. Thus, people can sing in the rooms, and also control the lighting or temperature in a room to enjoy their own space. The reason why generally men sit at rooms and women sit at tables is because it is important for men to appear to have money. Rooms are much more expensive and customers who get rooms have to order expensive alcohol and food to sit in rooms.

A total of 11 Korean nightclubbers were interviewed and surveyed at the most popular nightclub in Seoul in January, 2009. 36% said they went to nightclubs 1 to 3 times per month, and 27% said they went 1 to 3 times every three months. All were youths under the age of 27, and 3 women and 8 men were subjects of the interviews. 81% were university students.

35% of subjects said they go to nightclubs "for the booking," and 27% each said "to dance," "to drink," "to hang out with friends," and "to relieve stress." Most men said they get rooms and most women said they get tables, and 45% of those who get rooms said they prefer rooms "because it is quiet (45%)." 9% said they prefer rooms because "the booking is better" and "to show off to other people" and 18% said "because I want good service." 10 out of the 11 who were interviewed said they do booking and the reasons were "because all my friends do (54%)" and "because I want to meet someone new (45%)." 7 people said they have something in common with people they meet at nightclubs, and 45% said they had "similar values" in common.

54% of the people who said they wear a style different from their normal style when going to nightclubs said it was because "I want to dress up more than usual," confirming that dressing up and looking good is important at nightclubs. Points considered when choosing what to wear to a nightclub were, "expressing individuality (36%)," "a style that looks like I have a lot of money (27%)," "sexy style (18%)," and "trendy style (9%)."

"Of course you have to dress to stand out when you go to a nightclub. You have to stand out if you want the waiters to book you a lot, and the men like it too……. I think style is very important for men, too. I like men who look like they have a lot of money or are wearing expensive clothes, and I don't like men who just threw something on. These days men know what women want and some deliberately leave expensive foreign car keys on the table. I don't mind because you can quickly figure out what kind of guy he is……."

5.3 Results (3): Hip hoppers

Hip hop culture is known to have started in the early 1970s in the Bronx, in New York City, New York. In the beginning, it was music that young working class black people listened to, and it is now a culture that includes various factors such as break dance, rap, graffiti and DJing (Chung, Kim & Park 2001, 748). Hip hop culture has now spread worldwide, including to Korea. Korean hip hoppers are defined as Korean

youths who are in hip hop professionally or live absorbed in hip hop culture are the definition of Korean hip hoppers.

15 Korean hip hoppers were interviewed in the Hongik University area where there are many hip hop clubs and dance studios in February, 2009. All of the subjects said they enjoyed hip hop culture, and 33.3% had jobs in or related to the hip hop field, such as rappers, song writers or musicians.

The hip hop cultural activity people most liked to watch was "b-boying/dancing (73.3%)," and the following, in order, were "rapping (46.7%)," DJing (36.7%)" and "graffiti (6.7%)." The activity they most liked to participate in was also "b-boying/dancing (53.3%)," confirming the fact that Korean youths are especially interested in b-boys and hip hop dance. Being a culture that focuses on music, dance is an important element of hip hop, and thus hip hoppers dress in comfortable styles. 100% of interview subjects said they go to hip hop clubs, and 86.7% said they had things in common with other hip hoppers, such as "similar musical taste (66.7%)" or "similar values (46.7%)."

In relation to style, 93.3% of hip hoppers said style was an important part of hip hop, and although 60% said they wore a "hip hop style" to hip hop events or clubs, 73.3% said they wore a "casual style" most of the time. They said they did not wear baggy "hip hop styles" like they used to anymore, but incorporate hip hop elements like a baseball hat or bright colors to casual styles. The element they considered the most when wearing hip hop style clothes was "expressing individuality (73.3%)," and they said wearing styles similar to other people was important before, but now, expressing one's own style was more important.

"I wore a very baggy hip hop style around ten years ago, but I don't anymore. I wear a hip hop hat or hoodie together with a casual style. When I go to a hip hop event or b-boy competition, I'll wear baggy pants or a headscarf for a more hip hop-style look."

Figure 3. Korean hip hopper, photographed at Hongik University, Seoul, February, 2009

5.4 Results (4): Riders

High school students who ride scooters or motorcycles at a fast speed when they are not supposed to are called "*pokjujok*," and are known for violating the law and resisting against society. When these youths grow a little older they continue to ride, not out of a sense of resistance but more to enjoy a sense of speed and freedom. Those who are in their twenties or above and have the ability to buy and ride motorcycles properly are called "riders." Some riders start riding at a late age, even though they did not ride during their teenage years. Riders ride better motorcycles with proper equipment and meet through Internet clubs to ride together with other people with similar motorcycles. They usually ride at night, when there is less traffic (Batume 2009).

14 riders were interviewed at Namsan Baekbum Park, where internet rider clubs hold their weekly meetings, in February, 2009. All of the subjects were youths between the ages of 18 and 30 and members of rider clubs. 57.1% said they rode 5 or more times per week, and 28.6% said they rode 1 to 4 times per week. All of the riders were male, and had various occupations such as university students and self-employed, but most had a desk job at an office (50%).

57.1% said they rode "between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m.," 28.6% said they rode "between 12 p.m. and 6 p.m." and 21.4% said they rode "between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m." Most of the people rode a Honda CBR (35.7%) or Yamaha Replica (35.7%), but there were also riders of Daerim Naked, and scooters and racing motorcycles. Most people said they chose motorcycles based on the "good design (64.3%)" and next was "fast speed (42.9%)." They said design was important because they would be seen. Riders were aware of the negative way people looked upon them and thought it was because they "violate the law (92.9%)," but 42.9% said they "feel good" when people watch them ride.

"Riders usually get together to ride at night, and I think people do not think positively of us because we ride fast and sometimes don't abide by traffic laws. However, I secretly like it that people watch. It feels great to ride fast when there are no cars at night……. You don't think of anything, it feels like the world is yours, and it's just great. I once broke up with a girlfriend because I never answered my phone because I was always riding."

64.3% said the people they ride with are not their best friends, but all said they thought riding was part of their life and an important hobby. 42.9% said they thought older generations did not understand their riding. Riders had a surprisingly high awareness of safety.

Most people answered that they wore a "simple casual style (50%)" when riding.

5.5 Results (5): Skateboarders

Korean skateboarding is similar to skateboarding in the United States, where the culture originated. Skateboarding actually started with surfing, but as it spread to other areas of the United States, it developed a young and urban rebel image unrelated

to surfing in the 1990s (Naver 2009). The strong rebel image has now largely disappeared and a sports image is being developed, but it is still closer to a hobby and youth culture than a sport, and older generations are against construction of facilities for skateboarding because they think it is dangerous.

12 skateboarders were interviewed at popular skateboarding spots in Seoul in February, 2009. All were young men between the ages of 13 and 25. 50% of those interviewed said they skateboarded 1 to 4 times a week, and 25% said they skateboarded 5 or more times per week.

The places where they usually skateboarded were so-called "spots" like Dongdaemun Park or Suwon Mansuk Park, or on school campus. They said they gained information on good places to skateboard or good equipment through "internet clubs/communities (66.7%)" or "skateboard shops (25%)." Subjects especially answered that internet clubs are a good way to gain information because they are highly developed and active. They said "hip hop image (33.3%)," "cool image (33.3%)." "tough image (25%)" and "healthy image (25%)" were the main images they associated with skateboarding, and most subjects said they skateboarded because they "think it is cool (33.3%)." When asked what it felt like when people watched them skateboard, 41.7% said it "feels good," and 25% each said "I feel nothing" and "I feel proud." Generally skateboarders had high satisfaction and pride. However 58.3% thought older generations did not understand them.

"My parents don't understand why I skateboard, and most adults don't either. I just like to skateboard and want to learn the skills properly. I don't see why everyone frowns upon it. Maybe it's just a generation gap and that's why they don't understand……. I wish they would just leave me alone……."

Skateboarders had a diverse range of musical taste, including hip hop (66.7%), Korean pop (50%), techno (16.7%) and reggae (16.7%). 50% said they preferred a simple casual style, but some preferred hip hop style (25%), skinny jeans or slim fit pants.

Figure 4. Korean skateboarder, photographed at Dongdaemun, Seoul, February, 2009

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Every subculture has an important style code. Clubbing is a club culture introduced from the United States and Europe, and a dancing culture where young men and women dance together without booking. It is also a reflection of the traditional singing and dancing culture of Korea. Sleeveless tops and jeans that show off the figure are important style codes and a method of sex appeal for clubbers.

Nightclubbers are mostly university students who want to escape from stresses of academics. They have a groupist culture and go to nightclubs in groups to enjoy dancing and music, but also do booking and spend more money than other subcultures on nights out. Spending a lot of money is a way of establishing status and identity inside the nightclub, and a method of resisting against the conservative and humble social atmosphere of older generations. Most nightclubbers undergo cosmetic surgery because appearance is very important. Nightclubbers dress up a little bit more, and tight dresses are an important style code for women.

Hip hoppers simultaneously experience the singing and dancing culture of Korea and the music of black Americans. Hip hoppers are largely influenced by the styles and music of Western countries reflected through the media. The groupist tendency of Koreans is also strong, especially among b-boys who form groups to dance, and Korean b-boys are so passionate that they have won many awards and have established an international status. The main style code of hip hoppers is a baseball cap that is worn to the side or backwards, which is similar to the style code of American hip hoppers, but there is a difference of significance. Early American hip hoppers wore caps backwards as a way of rebelling against society, which did not treat black people the same as white people, and now rich popular American hip hoppers wear famous brand caps with expensive accessories and suits as a method of showing off their wealth. However, Korean hip hoppers wear baseball caps, not as a method of intentional rebellion, but as an expression of style, individuality and a sense of membership to a group.

Riders have both strong groupist and individualist tendencies. They ride in groups but are individualist because they like to be seen and stand out. Riders gain motorcycle and riding related information through the highly developed internet in Korea, and buy expensive motorcycles as a way of rebelling against old-fashioned frugal ways of older generations. The major style code of riders is the rider jacket. Rider jackets are a way of looking cool, but are also an item that is worn for safety, and the symbolism is maintained.

Skateboarders are mostly middle school and high school students who want to escape from the pressures of school. They start skateboarding because of the cool image, and just like riders, they like to stand out but also seek stability by being a member of a group. The major style code of skateboarders is a colorful t-shirt. Skateboarders like to wear elaborate colors and decorate their skateboards in bright colors, too, to add to the visual effect of their moves. When skateboards were first introduced in Korea it was considered a subculture with a strong rebellious spirit, but

it has not changed to a hobby of Korean youths. Nevertheless, the elaborate t-shirt remains an important style code.

Major youth subcultures in history expressed their subcultural identity clearly through a clothing fashion different from popular fashion. For example, the psychedelic style of the 1960s was a style selected and worn by youths who enjoyed the psychedelic culture, including Jimi Hendrix music and drugs like LSD. However, in an age where so many different styles co-exist, youths today rarely wear completely different styles from other people, but add a symbolic meaning to items worn or style their clothes in a certain way for added personal expression and statements. Most early subcultures, such as skinheads or Mods of the 1960s, also resisted against society, but Korean youths in the 2000s tend not to resist against society, the government or political situations, but against the older generation or social restraints that directly affect them personally. They enjoy many pleasures people did not in the twentieth century, and are more focused on living freer and more fun lives rather than fighting for jobs and good social treatment.

Korean youth subcultures resist against society for personal satisfaction instead of for the greater good of a certain group largely because Korean students have more pressures to do well in school and excel intellectually in work. Even after they pass through the long tunnel of university entrance, they have difficulty standing on their own like youths of other countries (Park & Woo 2007, 40). The current Korean economic system is a "survival of the fittest" system, where only the best survive. Therefore, only the upper minority can enjoy economic stability and most teenagers or youths in their twenties cannot live like independent adults even if they want to (Park & Woo 2007, 62). The older generation is the generation that created such a society for Korean youths, but they do not understand the actions and minds of youths because they have not lived through a life where the game of survival of the fittest is played in every aspect of daily life. This leads to economic and cultural conflicts between generations, which are expressed through unique youth subculture styles.

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