

# THE WEDDING ATTIRE CULTURE OF ETHNIC KOREANS IN CHINA: CHANGE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROWTH

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*Teng Weiming<sup>1</sup>, Pensiri Chartniyom<sup>2</sup>*

*E-mail: teng\_w2@su.ac.th, chariniyom\_p@su.ac.th*

<sup>1</sup> *Ph.D Candidate in Design, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University.*

<sup>2</sup> *Asst. Prof. Dr., Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University.*

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## ABSTRACT

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The Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, specifically in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province, features distinctive design elements embodying profound cultural heritage and unique aesthetic value. However, accelerated globalization, evolving aesthetic preferences among younger generations, and lifestyle changes pose significant challenges to the preservation of traditional cultural heritage. Therefore, innovative design strategies for traditional wedding attire are urgently needed to adapt to contemporary societal demands. This study has two primary objectives: to analyze the artistic design elements (patterns, colors, and styles) of Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, and to propose innovative strategies that transform change into an opportunity for growth, ensuring the preservation and development of cultural heritage. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was employed, deeply examining the traditional patterns, colors, and styles of the Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, while also summarizing historical and contemporary changes in people's choices regarding this attire. Case studies were analyzed to summarize innovative approaches for integrating traditional artistic design elements into contemporary wedding attire. The findings indicate that the Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China possesses unique artistic design elements. Furthermore, contemporary design methods effectively transform these elements into modern designs aligned with current aesthetic standards, thus promoting the preservation and innovation of Ethnic Korean attire culture. This research establishes a theoretical foundation for innovating Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China and provides new methods for preserving traditional culture.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Koreans in China, Traditional Wedding Attire, Design Elements, Innovative Design Strategies, Cultural Transformation

## Introduction

The Ethnic Koreans in China are officially recognized as one of the country's minority groups. From the late 19th to early 20th centuries, due to wars, famines, and political instability on the Korean Peninsula, large numbers of Koreans migrated to Northeast China, where they gradually developed a unique culture integrated with Chinese characteristics (Choi, 2001; Zhuo et al., 2024). In 2008, the Chinese government officially included the "Traditional Wedding of Ethnic Koreans in China" in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list, highlighting the profound historical, cultural, and aesthetic values of their traditional wedding attire (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** The traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China

Source: The Researcher, 2024

However, with the acceleration of globalization, evolving fashion trends, and shifting aesthetic preferences among younger generations, the preservation of Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China faces significant challenges. This issue is particularly evident in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province, home to the largest population of Ethnic Koreans in China, where traditional wedding attire is increasingly influenced by contemporary fashion, reflecting trends toward diversity and modernization (Kuhn-Osius, 2013).

Although previous studies have explored innovative designs for Ethnic Korean attire, such as the fashion design graduation exhibition at Northeast Electric Power University (Figure 2), which creatively reinterpreted traditional clothing elements through modern perspectives and diverse approaches—effectively resonating with younger audiences by simplifying patterns and employing modern color schemes—systematic research specifically addressing strategies for the cultural preservation and innovative design of Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China remains limited. These highlight the need for focused research on culturally protective design strategies.



**Figure 2** 2021 Ethnic Koreans in China Attire Modern Design Fashion Show

Source: Graduation Design Exhibition of Northeast Normal University, 2021

Therefore, this study first analyzes the artistic design elements; patterns, colors and style of traditional wedding attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, exploring their embedded ethnic sentiments and aesthetic values. Secondly, by examining innovative contemporary wedding attire design cases, this research proposes design strategies suitable for contemporary aesthetic preferences and practical applications, thus providing new opportunities for the preservation and development of this cultural heritage.

## Research objectives

1. To analyze the Artistic design elements of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.
2. To propose innovative strategies that transform change into an opportunity for growth, ensuring the preservation and development of cultural heritage.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using methods including Literature Review, Fieldwork, and Case Study to deeply explore the artistic design elements and innovative strategies for the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China. Specific details of the methodology are as following:

### 1. Target Group

The target group of this research is the Ethnic Koreans in China, specifically those residing in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin Province. Particular attention is given to the younger generation (aged 18–35), focusing on their aesthetic attitudes, acceptance, and changing demands towards traditional wedding attire. Yanbian was selected due to its highest concentration of Ethnic Koreans in China, providing an ideal cultural context to accurately reflect the inheritance and evolution of traditional attire in contemporary society.

### 2. Scope of Study

This study focuses on the artistic design elements of Traditional Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, specifically examining patterns, colors, and styles. and explores innovative design strategies for contemporary wedding attire. The study primarily examines relevant design cases and literature from the past decade (2014–2024).

### 3. Literature Review

Utilizing databases such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Google Scholar, the study systematically reviews academic sources, including journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and theses. Literature reviewed encompasses studies related to Traditional Wedding Attire, cultural heritage preservation, and innovative designs, providing a comprehensive theoretical foundation for this research.

#### **4. Fieldwork**

From June to August 2023, fieldwork was conducted, including attending traditional Ethnic Korean weddings in Yanbian and visiting the Yanbian Korean Museum. Field visit observation, photography, note-taking, and interviews were employed to collect the firsthand data about traditional wedding attire design elements.

#### **5. Case Study**

Representative innovative designs of contemporary wedding attire were selected from international fashion shows and brands. For example, Valentino's 2016 Haute Couture show and Vivienne Tam's Fall/Winter 2024 collection were analyzed to identify innovative strategies integrating traditional and modern design elements.

#### **6. Data Analysis**

Qualitative data collected through literature review, fieldwork, and case studies were systematically analyzed using Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis methods. Initially, traditional design elements such as patterns, colors, and styles identified from the literature and fieldwork were categorized. Subsequently, comparative analysis of contemporary design cases was conducted to formulate innovative strategies applicable to the traditional wedding attire of Ethnic Koreans in China, addressing both cultural preservation and contemporary aesthetic needs.

## **Research Results**

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## 1. The Artistic Design Elements of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

To gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotation and artistic value of traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China. This study explores the patterns, colors and style used in the attire. These elements reflect the unique aesthetics and profound cultural heritage of the wedding attire of Ethnic Koreans in China. Analyzing these design elements enhances our understanding of the significant role that the wedding attire of Ethnic Koreans in China plays in both historical inheritance and modern innovation, providing theoretical support for future design improvements.

### 1.2 Patterns of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

The patterns on the wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China reflect the unique aesthetics of the Korean ethnic group and the holistic perspective of their traditional culture, encompassing aspects such as traditional customs, religious beliefs, philosophical thoughts, and ethnic traditions. In the design of traditional Korean wedding attire in China, these patterns are not only decorative but also imbued with deep cultural significance. Common patterns include animal patterns, plant patterns, landscape patterns, and calligraphy patterns.

**Animal Patterns:** In the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China, using animal patterns in wedding attire reflects the idea of harmony between humans and nature. This cultural belief has been preserved and passed down through generations via wedding attire (Park & Rhee, 2022). Certain animals hold totemic significance in Korean culture, representing tribal protectors and spiritual symbols. Incorporating these animal patterns into wedding attire seeks the protection and blessings of the spirits, enhancing the sacredness and ceremonial atmosphere of the wedding. Famous animal patterns include cranes, deer, turtles, butterflies, and phoenixes. Cranes, turtles, and deer are commonly used in the groom's attire, while butterflies and phoenixes are frequently featured in the bride's attire. They are used to convey auspicious expectations and meanings in the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans (Table 1).

Table 1 Animal Patterns the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

Name	Picture	Drawings	Meanings
Crane			longevity and wisdom
Deer			happiness and prosperity.
Turtle			Stable and lasting marriage.
Phoenix			Auspicious, Harmony, Nobility, Blissful Marriage.
Butterfly			Symbol of eternal love and lifelong companionship.

Source: The Researcher, 2024

Plant Patterns: In these weddings, plant patterns are indispensable decorative elements. They not only enhance the festive atmosphere of the wedding but also carry profound cultural connotations and beautiful meanings (Park & Rhee, 2022). Famous plant patterns include Lingzhi, pines, lotus, peony, and pomegranate (Table 2). Lingzhi, pine trees, and deer are commonly used in the groom's attire, while lotus, peony, and pomegranate are more frequently seen in the bride's attire. They are not only aesthetically pleasing but also embody people's good wishes for the newlyweds' future life

**Table 2** Plant Patterns in the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

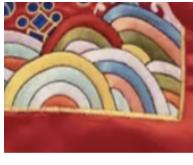
Name	Picture	Drawings	Meanings
Lingzhi (mushroom)			Lingzhi means longevity and fortune. Its patterns bless the couple with health and love.
Pine			Pine means resilience and longevity, blessing newlyweds with a lasting marriage in wedding attire.
Lotus			The lotus pattern means pure love, beauty, and a harmonious future.
Peony			The peony pattern means wealth and happiness, blessing newlyweds with love and a bright future (Pan et
Pomegranate			pomegranate patterns means fertility and prosperity, blessing the couple with many offspring.

Source: The Researcher, 2024

Landscape Patterns : Famous natural landscape patterns in the traditional wedding attire of Ethnic Koreans in China include Cloud Patterns, Mountain Patterns, and River Patterns (Table 3). These patterns, crafted with delicate lines and colors, convey reverence for nature and aspirations for a good life (Park & Rhee, 2022). They symbolize the beauty and harmony of nature, reflecting the Ethnic Koreans in China people's admiration and love for the natural world. For example, cloud patterns mean purity and good fortune. The patterns of river and

mountain represent the vastness and eternity of love, symbolizing the enduring beauty of marriage. These patterns are often used as detailed decorations in wedding attire, rather than as the main visual elements.

**Table 3** Landscape Patterns in the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

Name	Picture	Drawings	Meanings
Cloud			The Cloud mean good fortune and blessings for the newlyweds' happy future.
Mountain			The Mountain mean solidity, stability, and eternity, representing the enduring strength of the marriage and a lasting life journey for the newlyweds.
River			The River mean purity and harmony, representing pure love and a smooth, harmonious life for the newlyweds.

Source: The Researcher, 2024

**Calligraphy Patterns:** In the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China, the calligraphy patterns primarily use Chinese Calligraphy. These calligraphy patterns are not only decorative but also carry profound cultural connotations and positive meanings. Common Calligraphy such as the characters “福” (good fortune) and “囍” (Double Happiness) means good fortune, happiness, and auspicious wishes (Figure 3). These calligraphy patterns are not only used as decoration in traditional Korean wedding attire but also widely applied in wedding ceremonies and wedding items.



**Figure 3** “福” (Happiness) and “喜” (Double Happiness) Calligraphy Patterns

Source: The Researcher, 2024

### 1.3 Colors of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

In the cultural context of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China, the colors are diverse, each carrying a special meaning (Figure4). Red and blue are particularly significant, carrying important symbolic and auspicious connotations (Park & Rhee, 2022).

Red is one of the most prominent auspicious colors in the culture of Ethnic Koreans in China. It conveys excitement, warmth, and festivity, enhancing the celebratory atmosphere. In the traditional wedding attire , the bride typically wears a red wedding dress to symbolize good wishes and blessings for a happy marriage. Red is often used in the bride's upper garment and skirt, symbolizing hopes for a blissful married life and a bright future (Kim et al., 2019). Additionally, red is believed to ward off evil spirits and ensure the smooth progression of the wedding and a successful married life.

Blue is commonly used in the groom's attire, meaning nobility, dignity, and strength. The use of blue highlights the groom's important role in the wedding, showcasing the ceremony's solemnity and formality. The shades of blue, ranging from deep to light, reflect the groom's authority and stability .

Other colors such as yellow, green, white and pink are frequently used for decorative purposes.



**Figure 4** Colors of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

Source: The Researcher, 2024

#### 1.4 Style of the traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China.

The wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China embodies traditional aesthetics, ethnic characteristics, and cultural symbolism. Its style is primarily reflected in two key aspects: shape and materials (Kuhn-Osius, 2013).

**Shape :** The shape of ethnic Korean wedding attire is loose and flowing, with rich layering, a high-waisted design, and a buttonless closure, presenting an elegant and dignified appearance (Figure 5).



**Figure 5** Traditional Korean Wedding Attire for Groom and Bride in China

Source: The Researcher, 2024

**Women's Wedding Attire:** Consists of a short jacket paired with a high-waisted long skirt, secured below the chest with a tie, creating a slender and graceful silhouette (Kuhn-Osius, J. 2013). An outer robe is layered over the attire, adding depth and dimension, often adorned with embroidery symbolizing prosperity and good fortune.

**Men's Wedding Attire:** Typically consists of a long robe with a vest, featuring a loose fit that is cinched at the waist with a belt, creating a dignified and elegant look (Kuhn-Osius, 2013). A blue silk outer garment is worn over the robe, symbolizing nobility and respect, while also enhancing the formality of the ensemble.

**Materials :** The choice of materials for ethnic Korean wedding attire is highly refined, emphasizing lightweight, luxurious, and textured fabrics to enhance the solemn and festive atmosphere of the wedding. Silk is the most commonly used fabric in traditional wedding attire, known for its soft sheen and smooth texture, symbolizing nobility and elegance (Kuhn-Osius, 2013). It is often used in the bride's long robe or the groom's outer garment, enhancing the luxurious and refined appearance of the attire.

## 2. Innovative Strategies that Transform Change into an Opportunity for Growth

This chapter explores the evolution of traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans in China in modern society, analyzing the reasons behind the declining acceptance among younger generations, primarily due to the lack of modern appeal in patterns, colors, and styles. As market demands and aesthetic preferences shift, traditional wedding attire is gradually facing challenges. To address this, the chapter draws on innovative cases from other cultural wedding attire, examining modernization approaches through pattern simplification, color optimization, and style refinement. By integrating these insights with the cultural characteristics of ethnic Koreans in China, this study proposes design strategies that align with contemporary needs, fostering both the preservation and development of this cultural heritage (Bala, S., & Gupta, 2011).

## 2.1 Changes in the Selection of Ethnic Koreans Wedding Attire

The traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans continues to hold deep cultural significance among the elderly population in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. However, market research and interview findings indicate that younger generations are becoming less receptive to traditional designs, primarily due to their limitations in modern aesthetics, personal expression, and practicality (Audita et al., 2023). As a result, an increasing number of newlyweds prefer Western-style wedding attire, such as suits and wedding gowns, leading to a noticeable shift in wedding clothing choices.

**Pattern Changes :** The traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans is often adorned with symbols of prosperity and good fortune, such as animals, plants, natural landscapes, and calligraphic motifs. However, contemporary design trends favor a minimalist aesthetic, causing traditional patterns to become more abstract or simplified to align with modern tastes.

**Color Changes :** The traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans predominantly features highly saturated red and blue tones, symbolizing celebration and prosperity. In contrast, modern couples tend to favor softer hues, such as pink, light blue, and beige, to create a more romantic and elegant wedding atmosphere.

**Style Changes :** The traditional wedding attire of ethnic Koreans emphasizes layered structures and intricate embroidery, which, while visually stunning, may lack comfort for prolonged wear. In response, modern adaptations of wedding attire focus more on simplified tailoring and comfortable fabrics to better suit contemporary wedding ceremonies.

These changes do not signify a decline in cultural traditions but rather represent the natural evolution of wedding attire among ethnic Koreans in China within modern society, aligning with contemporary needs while preserving cultural value. Through innovative designs of traditional clothing, cultural heritage is transmitted and disseminated, enhancing national cohesion and a sense of identity (Ermilova, D. Y. 2020). It is essential to adopt innovative design strategies to

actively respond to these changes, ensuring the effective protection and transmission of the wedding attire culture of ethnic Koreans in China.

## 2.2 Innovations in Contemporary Wedding Attire

Innovation of Traditional Patterns in Wedding Attire : In the Valentino 2016 Paris Haute Couture Show (Figure 7), the designer skillfully integrated traditional Chinese embroidery with Western wedding gown design, reinterpreting traditional patterns through a modern approach. By deconstructing and simplifying motifs such as dragons, auspicious clouds, and peonies, the designs retained cultural heritage while aligning with contemporary aesthetics. Unlike the symmetrical layouts of traditional Chinese garments, this collection adopted irregular arrangements, gradient embroidery, and subtle embellishments, creating a sense of fluidity that harmonized with the light and ethereal nature of Western wedding gowns. This case demonstrates that traditional patterns can be revitalized through modern design language, seamlessly integrating into the contemporary wedding attire fashion system.



**Figure 7** Valentino Haute Couture Bridal Fashion Show

Source: <http://fashion.ladymax.cn/201601/28-29808.html>, 2016

Innovation of Traditional color in Wedding Attire: The Chinese “Xiuhe” Dress is a traditional wedding attire, worn by both men and women with variations in style. It originated in the late 19th to early 20th century and remains a popular choice for modern Chinese couples due to its unique cultural significance

and design. Traditionally, Xiuhe dresses feature red and gold as their primary colors. To cater to contemporary aesthetics, the Chinese brand Yiluan has innovatively fused the Pantone trending color Cerulean Blue 15-4020 with the traditional golden hue. This modern adaptation has gained widespread popularity among young consumers.



**Figure 8** Yiluan brand Xiuhe dress Cerulean Blue design.

Source: [https://jianghu.taobao.com/guanglocal/47835\\_1ccdd7b21911845c8438e79d0c5c715d](https://jianghu.taobao.com/guanglocal/47835_1ccdd7b21911845c8438e79d0c5c715d)

Innovation of Traditional style in Wedding Attire : At the 2024 Paris Fashion Week, Vivienne Tam's Fall/Winter Collection (Figure 9) introduced innovative changes in the style design of modern wedding attire, focusing on both silhouette and materials. Designer Vivienne Tam skillfully merged the shape of the Chinese qipao with Western bridal gown design, endowing the dress with both Eastern refinement and Western ethereal elegance. In terms of materials, she moved away from heavier silks and satins, opting instead for breathable fabrics like tulle and mesh, layered to create a lighter, more dynamic effect. This approach not only meets modern brides' demands for fashion and comfort, but also offers a new form of expression for the traditional Chinese qipao in contemporary wedding settings.



**Figure 9** Vivienne Tam Fall/Winter 2024 Collection

Source: <https://nowfashion.com/acne-studios-ready-to-wear-fall-winter-2024-paris-2/>, 2024

### 2.3 Innovative Strategies for the Wedding Attire of Ethnic Koreans in China

**Pattern Innovation Strategy :** Based on traditional patterns such as animals, plants, landscapes, and calligraphy modern visual appeal can be achieved by simplifying and rearranging these elements. Using digital design tools improves both the accuracy and the modern style of the patterns, making them better suited to current aesthetic preferences.

**Color Innovation Strategy :** While keeping the traditional red and blue tones, designers can adjust the brightness and saturation or introduce related colors and trend tones (such as magenta or Klein blue). Adding gradient or mixed-color designs can make the outfits more colorful and attractive, especially for younger people.

**Style Innovation Strategy :** The basic features of ethnic Korean wedding attire can be kept, while combining them with Western-style suits or bridal gowns to create a lighter and more modern form. Fabrics such as silk, lace, and velvet can offer comfort and elegance, helping the design meet today's needs for both beauty and wearability.

## Conclusion

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This study begins by analyzing the artistic design elements of traditional wedding attire among ethnic Koreans in China. The findings reveal that motifs featuring animals, plants, natural landscapes, and calligraphy embody profound cultural sentiment and aesthetic value. A color palette dominated by red and blue symbolizes auspiciousness and festivity, while the distinctive combination of silhouette and fabric highlights the elegance of traditional wedding attire.

However, as aesthetic preferences and market demands evolve, younger generations have shown diminishing acceptance of these traditional designs, creating challenges in both practicality and fashion appeal within contemporary wedding contexts. To address these issues, this study draws on innovative cases of modern wedding attire to propose strategies for patterns, colors, and overall style—for instance, digitally reconstructing traditional motifs, incorporating softer or trend-oriented hues, and merging Western tailoring with lightweight materials, thereby reinvigorating traditional attire. These strategies not only preserve its cultural essence, but also open new avenues for the ongoing vitality and promotion of Chinese-Korean wedding attire in modern society.

## Discussion

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This study critically analyzes the traditional design elements of ethnic Korean wedding attire in China and evaluates contemporary innovation strategies in response to modern demands. The findings reveal that its patterns, colors, and styles convey cultural symbolism and reflect the ethnic Korean community's visual identity. However, shifting aesthetic preferences among younger generations have led to declining interest in traditional styles, with a growing preference for more contemporary and comfortable attire. This poses challenges to the preservation and cultural continuity of traditional wedding customs.

Drawing from international examples such as Valentino and Vivienne Tam, the study illustrates how modern design approaches can abstract and recontextualize traditional motifs, enhancing cultural relevance among younger audiences. This supports Ermilova's (2020) view that traditional dress, when adapted creatively, retains communicative and symbolic power. Unlike prior studies such as the 2021 "Ethnic Koreans in China Attire Modern Design Fashion Show," this research offers clearly defined strategies in three areas—patterns, color application, and garment construction—thus contributing to a framework for sustaining cultural identity through adaptive design.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies in practical contexts remains unverified. Future studies should include empirical evaluation through user feedback, market testing, or interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, expanding the research to include other ethnic groups could help assess the cross-cultural applicability of such strategies, fostering ongoing innovation in traditional attire design within the globalized context.

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