

China's Metamorphosis:



Global Perspectives


衣食住行在中国

主 编：姜丽萍 (Jiang Liping)

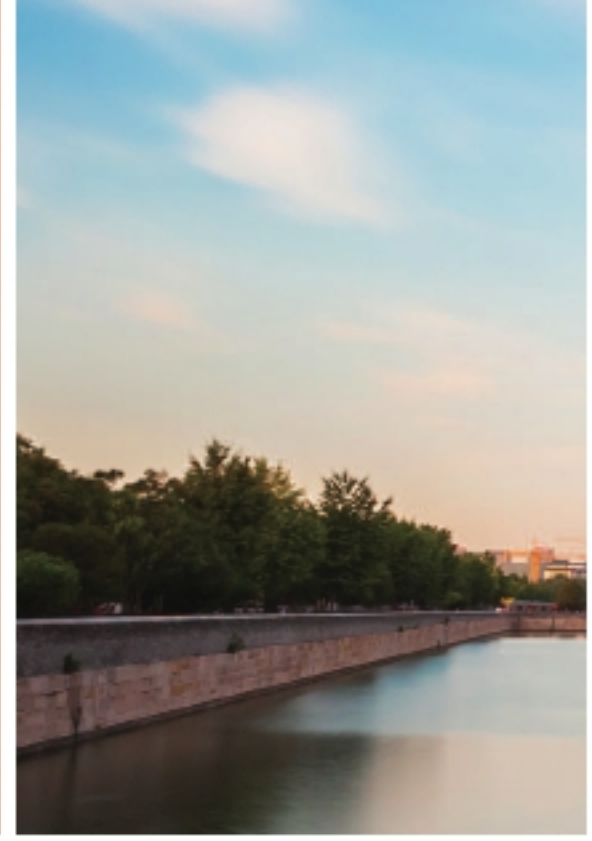
副主编：乐 琦 (Yue Qi)



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“Sweet, Your Smile Is as Sweet as Honey”



Hwang Lanah (Republic of Korea)

“Sweet, your smile is as sweet as honey,
Just like flowers blooming in the breeze,
The sweet spring breeze...”

When I was young, my mom used to sing this Chinese song *Sweet as Honey*¹ and tell me this was one of the most popular songs in China that was also well liked in South Korea. Every time I heard the song, my lips would curl

¹ *Sweet as Honey*, or *Tianmimi* in Chinese, is a well-known song performed by Teresa Teng.



into a smile and a “sweet” feeling would come over me. I couldn’t wait to go to China one day and get close to this “sweet” country.

In 1999, when I was 12, I heard that Chinese young people really liked Korean fashion and called it “Korean Wave” (韩流). At the same time, Hong Kong movies became popular in South Korea. The Hong Kong movie I remember most clearly was *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*. Accompanied by the familiar song of *Sweet as Honey*, the smile of Chinese actress Maggie Cheung touched my heart. From her undefiled beauty of 1986 to her gorgeous costumes of 1997, Maggie Cheung’s image had changed a lot, but to me, she would always remain sweet.

The scene where Li Qiao (Maggie) is sitting on the back of Li Xiaojun’s (Leon Lai’s) bike, with the wind gently blowing against her face and her beautiful sweet smile, will always remain in my heart. Her smiling face was the first Chinese woman’s face I had seen and it was this face that strengthened my initial yearning for China.

In 2007, I came to China for the first time to study. Walking around the campus I could clearly see the youthfulness and vitality of the Chinese students. I realized the girls here didn’t put much make-up on. Their plain faces had the typical pure sweet beauty of Chinese girls and were full of hope and expectation. We Korean girls would never walk around with plain faces. We longed for perfection in our looks and clothing, so our make-up was exquisite. On campus, we turned heads, and everyone could see from just a glance that we were Koreans.



I remember in winter that year, I was in a dress waiting for a bus at the bus stop and a Chinese uncle looked at me curiously and asked, “Girl, are you not freezing?” He probably thought I was the most scantily clad person in all of Beijing that day!

I also remember one of my Chinese classmates telling me that only the Korean boys would wear their baseball caps in class, and he couldn’t understand it. I explained to him that in South Korea, this was actually a kind of style and had nothing to do with practicality. The Chinese have a saying, “Clothes make the man.” We Koreans also have a saying, “Clothes are a person’s wings.”

I returned to China in 2017 as a foreign teacher at my old university. I realized that “whether or not people wear caps, whether or not girls wear make-up on campus or how much people wear in winter” can no longer be used as the standard to differentiate between Chinese and Korean young people. My Chinese students told me that almost all of them had been abroad on holiday or as exchange students, because “Knowledge comes from books and experiencing the world.” I observed that both their looks and clothes were confident and stylish, and their brilliant smiles had personality.

In 2019, I returned to China again and walked into my favorite university to do a PhD in Chinese studies. Seeing all the youthful faces and colorful clothes of the Chinese young people made me happy. The pure smile of Li Qiao (Maggie Cheung) in 1986, the confident smiles of the young women and the happy and fulfilled smiles of the women dancing in the square all appeared in my mind. What kind of China and what kind of Beijing is this? Chinese people and foreigners, Beijingers and outsiders, old-fashioned and modern people, with all their different lifestyles and faces, filled with hope for the future, are joined together, adding beauty to this modern capital. The beautiful song, *Sweet as Honey*, once again fills my mind:

“Where, where have I seen you before?

It’s as if flowers are blooming in the spring breeze.

Ah, in my dream...

It was you, it was you,

It was you that I saw in my dream...”

