

# *The Culture and Spiritual Expression of Denim Garments in Different Industries*

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**Abstract:** Jeans, as one of the most popular clothing in the world, have been actively appearing in the public eye, especially in the film industry and fashion industry. Jeans and other denim garments are no longer just a kind of clothing, they are more like a cultural or spiritual symbol. This article is dedicated to interpreting the culture and spiritual expression of denim garments in different industries. This paper uses the case analysis method and researches the fashion and movie industries. The research shows jeans and denim clothing symbolize the spirit of Western cowboys in the film industry. Movies rely on jeans to showcase the characters' freedom, wildness, and bravery. In the fashion industry, jeans have always been a popular item, symbolizing fashion's free and lazy side.

**Keywords:** Jeans, culture, cowboy, case analysis, research

## 1. Introduction

Denim garments are recognized as one of the most common clothing in the world. The earliest Denim garments jeans were cargo pants of Italian sailors, and the fabric used to make Cargo pants is called Denim [1]. Since Levi's began to mass-produce jeans during the North American gold rush, denim garments have become widely visible to the public [2]. Denim garments make a great impact on many cultures and industries like the movie industry and the fashion industry. For people, Denim isn't only a form of clothing and fabric but also a cultural carrier and spiritual symbol. With the rapid development of social economy and culture, consumers in the market and social popular culture have endowed denim garments with different cultural connotations. Since then, denim garments have been widely accepted by different classes and industries [1]. Denim garments can help convey the essence of the culture and reflect people's spirit or lifestyle. In short, Denim plays a crucial role as a cultural and spiritual expression in human society. According to current research results, most of the shapes and styles of denim garments encountered today come from the Western cowboy image. The Western cowboy culture and Hippie culture in the 1950s and 1960s gave denim garments a cultural connotation of freedom, uniqueness, and rebellion. For many years, denim clothing has influenced industries such as the film and television industry, the fashion industry, and the sports industry through these cultural connotations [3]. The current research results focus on explaining the source and subsequent impact of cowboy culture but have not conducted in-depth research on some details, such as the different connotations of cowboy culture in different industries. Understanding the cowboy culture of different industries can provide the public and the market with a deeper

understanding of denim garments culture, and also promote the sustainable design of cowboy clothing. In other words, interpreting the denim culture and spiritual expression in different industries can help the public understand the denim culture itself and the spiritual core expressed through Denim garments in different industries. This paper uses the case analysis method and does research on the fashion industry, the movie industry the television industry, and so on. This paper aims to summarize the spiritual demand expressed by denim culture through the case analysis method.

## 2. Case Description

Denim isn't only a form of clothing and fabric but also a cultural carrier and spiritual symbol. The paper used a few examples to explain how jeans convey these symbolic meanings from multiple perspectives.

First of all, Marilyn Monroe wears jeans in the movie *The Great River Goes East*. The role played by Marilyn Monroe has appeared in jeans many times. She is very capable and persistent in jeans. Marilyn Monroe likes her clothes in the film and has collected three pairs of jeans. In the drama, Marilyn Monroe has a unique and brave personality, even if she is seriously injured, she is willing to stand up and face it again. This also happens to combine the characteristics of jeans, never being repelled by difficulties, and always welcoming life with a smile. Furthermore, it is also the beginning of the slow acceptance of jeans.

Another example is that low-rise jeans, with the waist below the hip, are mostly women's styles, but men's jeans that pursue sexy effects are also often low-rise or medium-low rise [4]. Low-rise pants were first designed in the 1950s when they were also called Hip Huggers. Later, at the end of the 60s, the popularity of the Hippie style craze promoted the popularity of Low-rise pants. In the 70s, American children's hip-hop culture and art prevailed, and young people who sought perfection and uniqueness began to learn the dressing methods full of personality. Before that, people often focused on the creation of clothing itself, but when people gradually cared about showing their human happiness again, Low-rise pants returned to people's attention again. This is not only a form of confidence, but also a manipulation of one's own body. Under the guidance of the post-90s Interior designer, jeans brought people back to 20 years ago in a flash. This is a kind of low-rise jeans full of retro fashion aura. The styling design full of retro fashion aura has created a beautiful dream world [5]. For example, Glenn Martens used her unique cutting techniques at the 2022 spring/summer fashion show to create sleek and smooth low-rise jeans. This cutting design scheme, full of geometric graphic art beauty, reduces the freedom of relaxed jeans, enhances a lot of layering, and makes the overall design more elegant.

Fashion trend is a combination of various factors, but it is not static, but rather fluid and open to the outside world. It is an attachment to the body and an organism of culture and art.

## 3. The Origin and Development of Denim Garments

The origin of jeans and other denim garments began with the denim fabric. The predecessor of this fabric was a silk and wool blended fabric discovered by Columbus during his exploration of the New World. Later, British merchants named this fabric denim. Jeans were originally used as workwear by sailors in northern Italian ports. During the end of the 1840s, there was a gold rush in the Western United States. The arrival of a large number of gold seekers has greatly increased the local demand for practical workwear pants such as jeans. German Levi Strauss cut the canvas from the tents and made it into jeans, which he sold to the workers and the response was very good [2]. Because these kinds of pants are made of denim fabrics, they are very sturdy and durable and can support workers' high-intensity work. Also, jeans are always brown or blue, so they are very resistant to dirty. Moreover, the price of jeans is relatively cheap, and the working class can also consume them, thus

jeans were very popular among American workers in the early days. In 1890, the famous pants Levi's 501 (as shown in Figure 1) was officially put into production in San Francisco. Therefore, people believed that 1890 was the first year of the birth of jeans.



Figure 1: Levi's 501.

During the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, jeans were gradually transitioning from workwear to everyday clothing and becoming more popular among the public. During this period, Levi's and Lee continuously improved the design of jeans and introduced new styles of jeans to cater to the markets. Lee launched jeans with a U-shaped crotch that is more tailored to meet the requirements of daily clothing. In 1935, a photo of a female model wearing jeans was displayed in the fashion magazine, and jeans began to become popular among women [2]. Then, Levi's officially launched jeans for women in 1938. This marked the equality between men and women in clothing and also demonstrated the improvement of women's social status. Also, feminist organizations and other female participants see jeans as a symbol of gender equality. This significantly increased the popularity and acceptance of jeans among the public. Moreover, Western cowboy movies were very popular in the United States at that time, and most of the protagonists in those movies wore jeans. The film and television industry and movie stars have always had a strong influence on the public, especially adolescents, and the influence of cowboy movies and famous movie stars John Wayne and Gary Cooper has made jeans more romantic.

After World War II, the world economy was beginning to recover, and people were increasingly pursuing fashion [6]. Jeans, which were deeply loved by Hollywood stars and rock musicians, became the almost most popular clothing of that time. Afterwards, jeans began to appear more and more frequently in the public's sight. In the 1960s, Hippie culture became popular. The symbol of the 1960s and 1970s is rebellion and resistance to authority. During this period, industrial pollution was extremely severe, and society was turbulent with a significant increase in unemployment and serious polarization between the rich and the poor. Many young people cannot achieve their ideals and ambitions because of the social environment. Therefore, Hippie culture became popular in the early 1960s. Young people who opposed customs and the politics of that time got together and built a utopia. Fashion which helps those young people express their lifestyles is an important part of the Hippie culture. The fashion logo of Hippies is bell-bottoms which is a kind of jeans, the pants present their opposition to the secular world, their uninhibited and rebellious thoughts. With the growth and development of Hippie culture, bell bottoms have gradually become a cultural symbol of Hippie. Influenced by hippie culture, denim clothing design during this period mostly adopted exaggerated techniques [2]. For example, adding embroidered tassels and other decorative items to denim clothing, with holes in the pants legs, exposed stitches, and so on.

In 1971, Levi's achieved the Coty Award in the United States fashion industry, which marked that the popularity of denim clothing gained high recognition. The jeans of this period were deeply influenced by the popular punk style at that time and were mostly decorated with metal elements like

rivets, metal buttons, and so on. In addition, Jimmy Carter who was the former president of the United States wore jeans to participate in the election in 1976, which made the popularity of jeans no longer restricted by class. Moreover, luxury brands like Chanel and Saint Laurent used denim fabric in the production of their premium ready-to-wear collection. By the 1980s and 1990s, the denim clothing market had returned to basics, and basic denim clothing was once again popular.

Nowadays, environmental protection has become a global fashion trend. Under normal circumstances, producing a qualified pair of jeans requires about 3480 liters of water. In line with the social trend of environmental protection, the denim industry has begun to develop new types of denim fabrics and recycle waste fabrics [7]. According to the research, every consumer in the global clothing industry has more than seven pairs of jeans today, and jeans have become one of the most common garments in the world [8].

## 4. Denim Culture in Different Industries

### 4.1. Denim Culture in the Movies and Television Industry

Jeans first debuted in the film industry in the classic American Western movies of the first half of the 20th century. Take the classic Western movie *High Noon* (1952) as an example, the righteous cowboy characters led by the protagonist in the movies always wear classic style jeans with a belt and vest. Their images are similar to the classic Western cowboy image, they are free, brave, and righteous [9]. The free and rugged nature of denim clothing demonstrates the character of Western cowboys. The main theme of early classic Westerns was usually to forge ahead and defeat evil with justice. These movies advocate justice, peace, and love. Therefore, initially, jeans symbolized freedom and justice in movies. In the 1960s, the public of the United States opposed the mainstream culture, and the Hippie style became popular [10]. Then, there were many movies with Hippie Style like *Yellow Submarine*, 1968. This movie combines the music of the famous rock band The Beatles with Pop visual art. The Beatles praised hippie culture and once released some hippie-style songs. And most of the characters in the movie wear Bell-bottom made of denim. As an important carrier of hippie culture, jeans help those hippies express their rebellious and innovative lifestyle. Those movies often use jeans to express the connotation of innovation, uniqueness, and freedom. Moreover, the image of cowboys changed a lot during this period. Western cowboys are no longer the embodiment of justice, and bounty hunters who are both righteous and evil are gradually becoming well-known to the public. They also love freedom, but their images are more rebellious. This kind of character always wears relatively exaggerated jeans with accessories or holes to highlight their rebellious spirit. To sum up, denim garments in the film industry represent the cultural connotation of uniqueness and freedom.

### 4.2. Denim Culture in the Fashion Industry

Although jeans and other denim garments were used for work, they have always been very popular fashion items because of their unique patterns and versatile characteristics. Many celebrities love jeans. For example, Marilyn Monroe often wore jeans to appear in fashion photos, and Elvis often wore jeans or denim bell bottoms to attend concerts. People's love for jeans has not decreased over time. Jeans often appear in street photos of famous models Kendall Jenner and Bella Hadid. Moreover, major fashion brands also have a strong preference for jeans.

Levi's launched its brand's high-end branch LVC (Levi vintage clothing) in 1998, which recreates the classic jeans of history. Moreover, Chanel launched a series of denim ready-made clothes and bags in the 1970s, which also recreated the classic styles of the brand. Therefore, to a certain extent, denim clothing represents the historical sense of heaviness and retro styles in the fashion industry. From this, it can be seen that jeans have always been the darling of the fashion industry. Celebrities

use jeans to showcase their laziness and ease, and brands use denim elements to show the freedom and classics symbolized by their products.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is based on research on important factors in the development history of jeans. Believing that jeans play an important role in different industries. Doing analyzing this information, this paper shows how jeans culture developed and what people want to express when they are wearing these jeans.

To get started, jeans benefit workers at first since they are very comfortable and durable. Later, more and more people started to take advantage of them. In daily life, more women are beginning to wear denim fabrics. It interprets the rising status of women in society. Moreover, when the world experienced the hippie's period, people who opposed customs and politics picked up denim and made it a symbol of freedom and justice. Later, denim also appeared in movies and on celebrities with the same meaning, which also pushed the development of the popularity of denim.

Nowadays, more and more styles of jeans appear to everyone, almost every person has jeans in their closet. In this changing world, jeans are no longer a rarity. As a piece of clothing that can be easily paired, it coincidentally solves the problem of difficult choices for contemporary people. This is also one of the main reasons why jeans are so popular.

There are still many limitations in this paper, such as only discussing the representative significance of jeans in the film and fashion industry, but not analyzing their significance in other industries. Therefore, future research can be further explored based on the sub-paper.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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