FROM HANBOK TO YANGBOK. A STUDY ON MODERN FASHION IN KOREA

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Abstract

The great success attained by South Korean TV shows (known as *kdramas*) has entailed a gain in popularity also for Korean historical series called *sageuk* (사극), which typically depict stories from the history and mythology of the peninsula. Althought they're not very common, some *sageuk* are modern historical dramas set in the early decades of the 20th century. I tend to deem those particularly enthrelling for their juxtaposition of traditional Korean clothes and Western attire during what is considered to be the period of "Westernisation" of the country. For this reason, I decided to inquire into how this transition from traditional to modern dress took hold in Korea, the relationship between the Korean traditional dress and modernity, and the causes and consequences of the "Westernisation" of Korean clothing.

During the researches I was struck by something I read in Penelope Francks' article *Was Fashion a European Invention?: The Kimono and Economic Development in Japan*:

> «If fashion were to have been operating in anything like its modern form in preindustrial and industrialising Japan, it would therefore have to have been located within the world of the kimono».[1]

I wondered if the same thing could be said of the *hanbok*, the Korean traditional attire.

Hence the theme of this thesis, which explores elements of fashion present in Korea at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This historical period witnessed the introduction of Western contemporary fashion in Korea, and therefore provides the opportunity to debate about Korean transition in dress, including the discourse of tradition and modernity along with the issue of colonialism and the dichotomy between Western and non-Western dress.

I will start with a first chapter dedicated to the presentation of *hanbok* and its characteristics, accompanied with a brief historical excursus up until it persisted as the only form of dress in the country. The second part of the chapter, titled *The encounter between hanbok and yangbok*, tries to clarify how Western dress reached the country and

[1] Penelope Francks, "Was Fashion a European Invention?: The Kimono and Economic Development in Japan", *Fashion Theory*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, 2015, p. 352

the influence it had on *hanbok* and viceversa, covering the period that goes from the opening of the Korean ports to Western envoys in 1876 up until the early 1960s, when North and South Korea were established and stabilised.

In the second chapter I will explore the notion of modernisation in the context of fashion, the theory around it, and how and why it was problematised. The focus will then come back on the Korean case in order to investigate the local fashion practice and its relationship with modernity.

Finally, the last chapter will be regarding the legacy of *hanbok*, how much space it still occupies in the wardrobes of Koreans, and how contemporary designers are influenced and inspired by it. In particular, the emphasis will be put to Korean fashion designers and their work dedicated to *hanbok*.

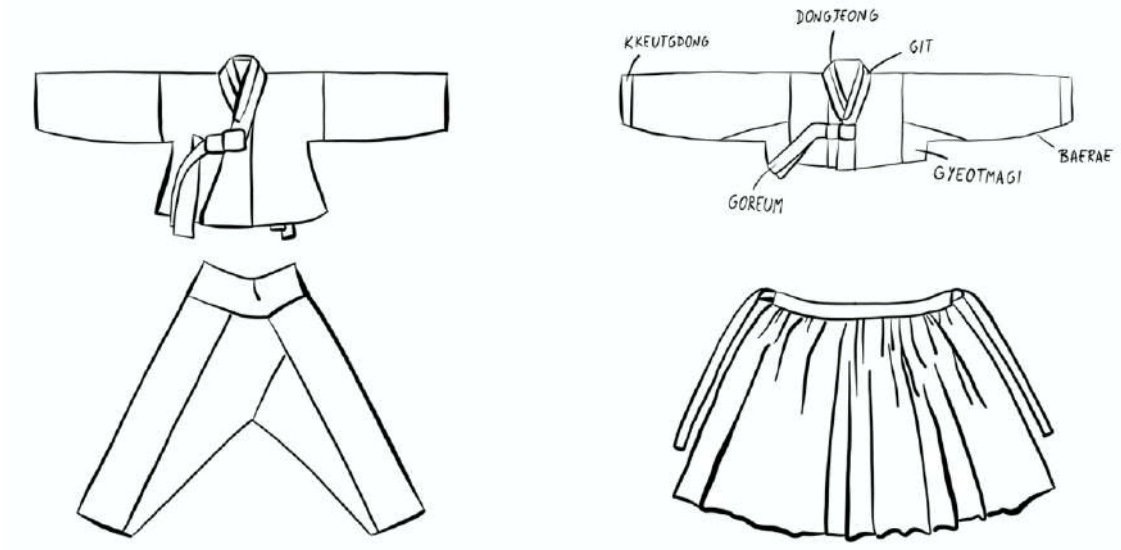
1
Hanbok and its history

1.1 Introduction to the subject: the hanbok

For those who are not familiar with the term, *hanbok* (한복) is the vernacular word that refers to the traditional dress of the Korean peninsula, which can be also denoted *chosŏn-ot* (조선옷) in North Korea. Both words translate as "Korean clothing" and refer to the attire of men as well as women. Nowadays, the term is generally used to refer to the colourful ensemble worn by the most affluent classes during the late 19th century, which is donned even today by Koreans on festive occasions or special anniversaries. However, before the country opened to Western influences and dress codes almost 150 years ago the *hanbok* was an everyday attire for everyone: commoners used to wear it in its basic components, while higher social classes used to attire also with robes and accessories which were chosen according to the rank of the wearer and occasion.

In its basic configuration, a traditional *hanbok* is made up of a top piece *jeogori* (저고리) which was very similar for both genders, and a bottom piece that consisted of a pair of pants *baji* (바지) for men and a skirt *chima* (치마) for women.

Figure 1.1
Drawing of flattened *hanbok* for man (right) and woman (left)



Source: author's drawing

The *jeogori* top is the principal upper garment, it covers the torso and the arms, with the length changing throughout history. The *jeogori* can vary in fabric, sewing technique and shape, and depending on the historical period it could be fastened at the waist with a belt or wrapped at the front with a knotted ribbon. It always has a white collar named *dongjeong* (동정) attached to the neckline, and a typical women's *jeogori* would also present the neckline *git* (깃), ribbon *goreum* (고름), sleeve cuffs *kkeutgdong* (끝동), and armpit insertions *gyeotmagi* (겯마기) in a differently coloured material. In the *jeogori* we can find the elements which usually determine the beauty and quality of an *hanbok*: the *goreum*, the *baerae* (배래, the curved line of the sleeves) and the way the *git* is terminated.

As for the bottom piece, the lower part of the *hanbok* worn by men is called *baji*, which literally translates as trousers but in the context of traditional dressing indicates a particular kind of pants with a very large silhouette, ideal for sitting on the floor. Furthermore, they have ties that wrap around the waist and ankles, meaning that there is no need for a sizing system.

Instead, a woman's *hanbok* is made up of a *chima*, which is a long and high-waisted skirt fastened above the waist. A *chima* is manufactured out of a rectangular cloth, which is then pleated and attached to a white cotton band that gets wrapped around the body at chest height and tied in front through a small sash. It's usually worn with an underskirt called *sokchima* (속치마) and other undergarments, which are layered up to completely concealing the body lines of the wearer and create a silhouette which shapes changed over time based on the trend of the moment.

The traditional attire also includes a wide number of outerwear possibilities generically called *po* (포), which could be donned over these basic garments. Their shapes and components are very similar to those of the *jeogori*, although much longer (the bottom of some *po* can reach to the wearer's knee). The fabric, design, and layers that make up the *po* vary depending on the social status of the wearer and the formality of the occasion. The most common was a long coat called *durumagi* (두루마기), which is worn over the *jeogori* by both males and females. From the 18th century onwards, the most common type of *po* among women became the *jangot* (장옷), which was used as an everyday headdress to obscure the upper body when going outside for modesty reasons dictated by Neo-Confucianism.

Figure 1.2
The woman in the centre covers her head with a green *jangot*
이승영기 (A Buddhist Nun Greeting a Gisaeng), Shin Yunbok, 1805

Source: Google Arts & Culture

With regard to headwear, men would usually also wear a *gat* (갓), a cylindric hat made from horsehair with a wide brim supported by a bamboo frame.

To conclude, a typical Korean piece of footwear clothing is *beoseon* (버선), a pair of socks that stems from ancient times on the Korean peninsula. They are commonly made with white cotton (only royalty used silk) and worn for protection and warmth but also for style, as they could be found in a wide variety of designs. The word literally means "magic socks" as they were superstitiously thought to bring luck and drive away evil.

Figure 1.3
Man and woman dressed in *hanbok*
춘색만원 (Spring Mood Comes to All Places), Shin Yunbok, 1805

Source: Google Arts & Culture

Before industrialisation, it was costume for women to either sew or mend the *hanbok* of their family members, and during the traditional holidays that marked the beginning of a new season (*Seollal*, the Korean Lunar New Year; *Chuseok*, the Korean thanksgiving holiday before the mid-autumn harvest; *Dano*, the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar) they would procure new fabrics to make clothes as a wish for good health and wellbeing.[2]

1.1.1 A brief historical excursus of hanbok

The *hanbok* is believed to have been worn in the areas of ancient Korea that today correspond to North Korea and Manchuria since the period of the Three Kingdoms of Korea (57 BCE - 668 CE): Goguryeo (고구려), Baekje (백제), and Silla (신라). Its basic design features can be found even in the murals of Goguryeo that date back to the 5th century CE. During the beginning of the Three Kingdoms era, there was no major difference between men's and women's attire as they both used to wear large-fitting *baji* and waist-length *jeogori*, although women used to wear a *chima* over the *baji* and had a slightly shorter *jeogori*.

Figure 1.4
Dancing scene from the south wall of the main chamber in Muyongchong Tomb (5th century CE)
Here are visible the *hanbok* of men and women of the time

Source: UNESCO's program of Preservation of the Koguryo Kingdom Tombs

[2]http://english.cha.go.kr/cop/bbs/selectBoardArticle.do?nttId=83971&bbsId=BBSMSTR_1200&pageIndex=2&pageUnit=10&searchCnd=&searchWrd=&ctgryLrcls=&ctgryMdcls=&ctgrySmcls=&ntcStartDt=&ntcEndDt=&searchUseYn=&mn=EN_01_01

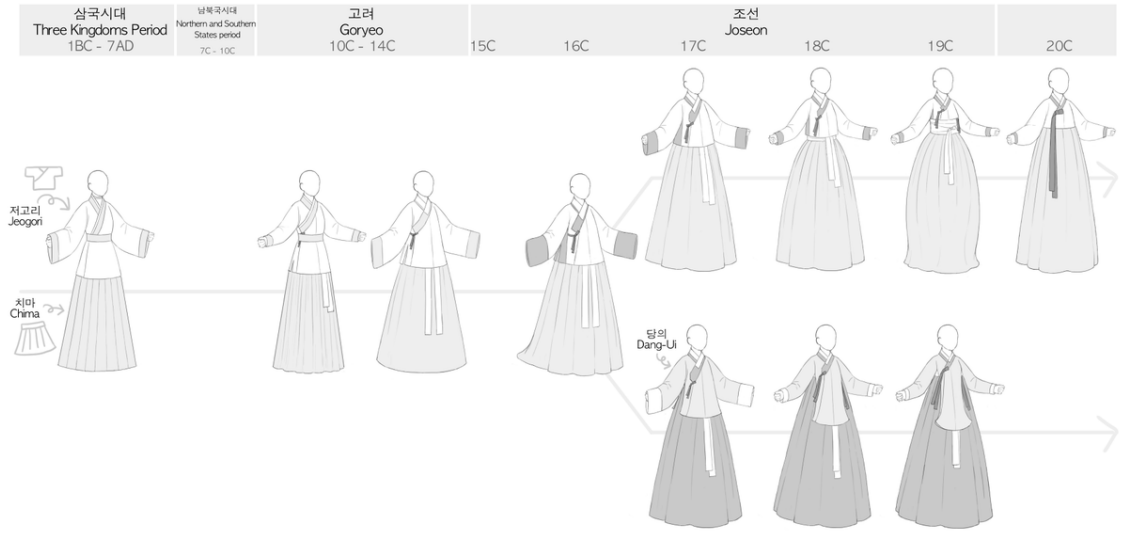
With the incorporation of two of the Three Kingdoms under the third Silla Kingdom in 668 CE we have the start of the golden age of Korea, during which silks and linens started to be imported from Persia and China. In the process, the latest fashion trends of the Chinese Tang Dynasty attire were introduced in the region and in the late Silla decades women started copying their use of wearing skirts over jackets.

In the following Goryeo Dynasty (고려, 918-1392), the Tang Dynasty style faded away and women went back to wearing the *jeogori* over their *chima*, a trend that was revived by the aristocrat class. With the rise of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) under Genghis Khan in the early 13th century, the kingdom of Goryeo was eventually forced to acknowledge a tributary relationship which also entailed a great influence on fashion, as many Yuan princesses married the Kings of Goryeo. Without losing the main features that characterised it since the time of the Three Kingdom, in this period the ladies' *hanbok* underwent some changes that made it what it is today: women started wearing several layers of *chima*, and the *jeogori*'s length got shorter, raising above the waist. A major countenance of this era is that *hanbok* started to determine differences in social status, becoming an important element of social distinction.

When the Goryeo Dynasty was overthrown in 1392 and the Joseon Dynasty (조선, 1392-1897) was established, Neo-Confucianism was introduced in the country and its principles of simplicity and austerity became part of the everyday life of Koreans. Its social values reflected also in fashion, where the form and style of the dress depended on the ceremonial occasion (stipulated with Confucian meanings) and social class (the rigid Confucian social class pyramid had the emperor at the top, followed by king, government officials, scholars, commoners, and lower classes). This influenced the essential features and basic design of *hanbok* but not only: as Neo-Confucianism considered integrity the greatest virtue for males, Joseon men refrained from being seen outside without the proper attire; and being chastity an essential principle for females, Joseon women hid their faces with overcoats when they left their houses. The Neo-Confucian edict according to which females should never show their flesh to other people influenced women into wearing longer *jeogori* and putting on multiple layers of clothing, to the point that under their skirts they started wearing baggy pants over three pairs of increasingly smaller pants and a loincloth. The fuller volume of the *chima* created by all those layers of undergarments came to accentuate a slim waistline and rounder hips which, together with the fact that

women only wore a tight-fitting blouse under their *jeogori*, created an overall appearance of a figure with a narrow upper body and a voluminous lower body. Therefore, while in the mid-16th century the fashion was characterised by a straight silhouette, during the mid-18th century it was reshaped into voluminous curves concentrated around the hips, and it evolved into more natural curves in the late 19th century. Despite this, Joseon lower-class women evinced ambivalence toward the exposure of their breasts or undergarments and, as a result of the changing social mores and ethics, after the mid-Joseon period the *hanbok* became more provocative, reaching the point of showing the wearer's undergarments. In fact, with time women's *jeogori* became closer fitting and it grew shorter and shorter, cutting back approximately 10cm each century and reaching the point of revealing the undergarment by the end of Joseon. The piece of fabric worn underneath to cover the breasts was called *heoritti* (허리띠) or *jorinmal* (졸잇말) and it was initially used by low-born women, who then influenced higher-class women into wearing it. At times some of them even removed this piece of fabric and revealed their breasts to make breastfeeding easier and to show off that they had given birth to a son, in an attempt of provoking envy in other women. A trend of the time was also the use of shorter *chima* that allowed the display of the end of the pants worn underneath. A more subtle way to appear sensual in an *hanbok* were the particular movements of the wearer or the use of transparent fabrics, which in a less evident way allowed women's undergarments to be shown.

Figure 1.5
Evolution of women's *hanbok*



Source: https://twitter.com/shashasocool/status/1432925438909640706

On the other hand, the form and design of men's *hanbok* hardly changed during the Joseon era. Only one main alteration took place in men's attire when in 1884 a king decree banned the *jungchimak* (중치막), an overcoat with very long sleeves and splits in the lower part on both sides that created a fluttering effect in motion. It was replaced by the *durumagi*, which was a housedress a little shorter and with tighter sleeves usually worn under the *jungchimak*.

Figure 1.6
Cotton padded *jungchimak*

Source: Google Arts & Culture

Figure 1.7
Ramie *durumagi*

Source: Google Arts & Culture

It's also important to consider that Neo-Confucianism also applied strict regulation of clothing based on the social status of the wearer, so that each class wore a different type of *hanbok*. For example, during the 15th century women from the aristocratic class wore a wraparound *chima* that was approximately 30cm longer and had more pleats compared to regular ones, two characteristics that indicated their higher social status because they limited the mobility and were suited only for a sedentary lifestyle. On the other hand, women belonging to the commoner class were prohibited from wearing a *chima* wider than a certain measure and had to overlap them on the right side, which was the opposite direction to that of aristocrat women. Some differences were also present in women's *jeogori*, as the Neo-Confucian emphasis on hierarchy did not permit lower classes to employ a wide variety of colours. Only women from the upper classes would wear a particular type called *samhoejang jeogori* (삼회장 저고리), which had distinguishing colours on the neckline and collars, while lower classes would wear the *banhoejang jeogori* (반회장 저고리), which was simpler in design and lacked the armpit insertions of contrasting colours.

1.1.2 Colours and materials

While the design was pretty much consistent among social classes, colours and materials differed according to some of the wearer's traits such as gender, age, marital status, and social position. Particularly during the Joseon period, these two characteristics of *hanbok* used to indicate social status, with the implication that for centuries "clothing was not a unifying medium for all Koreans"[3].

As per materials, the upper classes wore *hanbok* made from silk for winter and lightweight materials such as ramie during the warmer months, while lower classes were restricted to hemp or cotton.

Regards to the colour of the *hanbok*, instead, the situation was a little more complex, as it is very symbolic on different levels. In general, Koreans were long known as the "white-clad people", and as a matter of fact they traditionally held a preference for the off-white colour of undyed cotton and hemp. Among various reasons, there is the aesthetic fact that white contrasted well with black hair, a juxtaposition that suits them because of the radically different tonal values of their hair and skin colours. But beyond this purely aesthetic motivation, there's a reason related to the value of material and spiritual purity. Indeed, both Confucianism and Buddhism consider colour to be an emblem of desire, and its use is prohibited in order to suppress it to show self-control, while Taoism prefers natural colours because of its focus on nature. Therefore, the colour white was favoured as it came to symbolise innocence, purity, nobility, honesty, and integrity.[4] Furthermore, in the past commoners were required by law to wear white, and only for special occasions such as seasonal festivals and weddings they could dress in neutral and earthy colours (e.g. shades of pink, green, or grey). On the other hand, the upper classes used to wear traditional dresses in a wide variety of bright and eye-catching shades, which is the reason why today's *hanbok* presents combinations of strong colours. They preferred primary colours because they were flattering to the wearer and were also believed to expel evil spirits, making colourfulness a symbol of auspiciousness. They used to combine primary colours with their complementary because they looked for an eye-catching contrast to

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[3] Lynn Hyunggu, "Fashioning Modernity: Changing Meanings of Clothing in Colonial Korea", Journal of International and Area Studies, Vol. 11, No.3, 2004, p. 77

[4] Seo Bongha, "White Hanbok as an Expression of Resistance in Modern Korea", *Journal of the Korean Society of Clothing and Textile*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2015, pp. 122-123

attract attention to the wearer. For this reason, harmonious combinations of primary colours can be also seen in embroidery and women's ornaments and accessories. According to experts, the beauty of *hanbok* lies exactly in the harmony between its colours, which is a focal point of its aesthetics. In the words of the *hanbok* designer Lee Younghee:

> «The key in hanbok is the line and color. In Western attire, there are usually two colors for the upper and lower pieces. This is not the case with hanbok. The skirt, jacket, ribbon strings and the neckband have all different colors. Even with four different shades, harmony exists. This works for two colors or one color. The harmony of color is a characteristic of hanbok».[5]

The colour of the *hanbok* didn't differ only because of the social status, but it also varied based on the age of the person, as bright colours were generally worn by children and girls, while middle-aged women wore muted hues. Moreover, the colour combination of *jeogori* and *chima* could also reveal the marital status of a woman: unmarried young women used yellow and red, young brides donned bright green with crimson red, married women wore yellow with blue, matrons preferred green and red, and women who birthed a male child wore navy. A particular colour scheme was the *saekdong* (색동), a combination of colourful stripes of equal width, with each colour representing a different natural element of the universe: white for metal, blue for wood, black for water, yellow for earth, and red for fire. It was used on the sleeves of wedding gowns, clothing for festivals and children, and ritual costumes of shamans. Finally, the colours also had different meanings, such as life, purity, and truth for white, spring and reproduction for blue, yellow as in the centre the universe and red for creation and enthusiasm.

Figure 1.8
***Saekdong durumagi* from the 20th century**

Source: National Palace Museum of Korea

[5] KBS WORLD TV, "Hanbok, the Art of Line & Color", in *The Wonders of Korea*, 2016

The colour variety of *hanbok* originates from Korea's natural environment that gifted the peninsula with over 50 dye plants, more than the variety found in the whole European continent. Among those we have the indigo plant, famous for giving the colour to blue jeans, which was the most popular colour during Joseon and therefore became also the most representative colour of *hanbok*.

Another symbolist element of *hanbok* were patterns, present as nature-inspired embroideries. The most popular adornments were phoenixes, butterflies, lotuses, and the ten traditional symbols of longevity, which were mountains, water, clouds, the sun, pine trees, the mushroom of immortality, stones, turtles, white cranes, and deer. Not everyone could wear them, as some patterns represented a particular role within society: a dragon could be found an emperor's garments, a phoenix could adorn those of a queen, floral patterns were indicative of a king's daughter (both from the queen or a concubine), while clouds and cranes symbolised high ranking court officials. Other flowers such as the rose of Sharon were often seen embroidered on the *hanbok,* while the lotus flower usually embellished the folding screens of a woman's room during summer to symbolise nobility. A more straightforward embroidery was that of Chinese characters, and the most common were the one of "good fortune" (福), and that of "longevity" (壽), which were used to wish luck and a long life. In particular, embroideries were often created on the *hwarot* (활옷), a type of traditional clothing worn by royal women over their *jeogori* and *chima* for ceremonial occasions, and which was later adopted by commoners for weddings. When worn as a wedding dress, peonies were embroidered to indicate a wish for honour and wealth, while bats and pomegranates symbolised many children.

1.2 The encounter between hanbok and yangbok

Although influenced by styles coming from neighbouring countries, the *hanbok* remained the prominent attire for Korean people for thousands of years. Only with the introduction into the country of Western modernity, the Western dress first appeared in the life of Koreans and was denominated *yangbok* (양복), which literally means "Western suit", or *yangjang* (양장), which distinguished women's Western-style dress.

As we will see, the modern era was a period of great turmoil for Joseon (as Korea was called at the time) which caused a breach from the traditional culture of the country,[6] with profound changes not only in the way of dressing but also "in the social structure, perceptions of power, and constructions of identity"[7] of the Korean society.

Western clothing didn't become everyday wear for the whole country overnight, instead it was a long and often opposed process that took almost a century. Both styles started to be seen side by side since the late 19th century, starting from the late 1870s early 1880s and intensifying during the period of the Great Korean Empire, when early Korean modernists began to clad themselves in *yangbok*. Before the Colonial Period, new meanings for Western clothing and style were introduced into Korea but this didn't reflect any larger cultural or social changes. Instead, the introduction of new meanings for clothing was accelerated by industrialisation during the 1920s and 1930s.[8]

1.2.1 Gaehwagi (1876-1910)

Up until the end of the Joseon period, the *hanbok* had functioned as means of social differentiation. As previously stated, in Korea people dressed not only based on what fabrics or dyes a person could afford, but there were government regulations based on Confucian perceptions that dictated what clothes could be worn by specific ranks of royalty, officials, and commoners. This strict association between clothes and status with its own codes and conventions began to fade with the Treaty of Ganghwa in 1876, when Joseon was forced by Japan to start holding diplomatic relationships with Western powers among which the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany and to open its ports to Western diplomats, entrepreneurs, and missionaries. This unequal treaty between Korea and Japan was reached and signed under duress after the Un'yō Incident (1875), during which the Nippon Empire appropriated and applied the "gunboat diplomacy" typical of Western powers against Korea to push it to open the ports of Busan, Wonsan and Jemulpo, allowing modernity to enter the country[9]. This period is considered as the

[6] Cho Seunghye, "The Ideology of Korean Women's Headdresses during the Chosŏn Dynasty", *Fashion Theory*, 21:5, 2017, p. 568

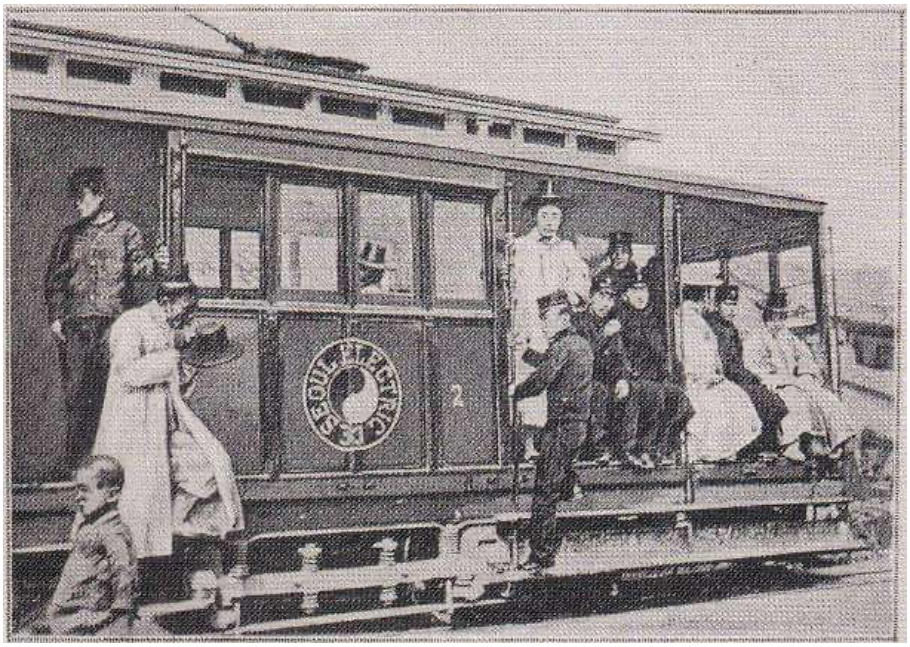
[7] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 76

[8] Ivi, p. 79

[9] Hwang Kyungmoon, A History of Korea. An Episodic Narrative, 2nd edition, London, Palgrave, 2017, p. 106

start of the modern era in Korea and is called Gaehwagi (개화기), which means “bloom”, while in English it’s referred to as the Enlightenment period of Korea. Such epoch witnessed a sudden introduction to Western culture and its modernity not only for what concerns communication infrastructures, means of transportation, and technologies, but it also faced a deep quiver of the traditional and centuries-old form of politics, economy, and culture of the country.

Figure 1.9
Tram run in Seoul in May 1899
Photograph published in the art magazine Wolganmisul, No. 309, October 2010



Source: Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 149

On top of these complex and overwhelming circumstances there was also the fact that the 20th century was an age of high imperialism, and however hard Korean people sought to sovereignly lead an autonomous path toward modernity, the initiation to the modern era was permeated by foreign forces that threatened their control. Situated at the centre of a fierce zone of imperial competition such as East Asia, Joseon became a particularly coveted territory, and soon the imperialist rivalry pervaded the court and was appropriated by the opposing political factions, soaring the political conflict among Korean elites, monarch included. The country tried to stand its peace by declaring itself an empire in 1897 and adopting the name Daehan Jeguk (대한제국), or Great Korean Empire. The change was pursued mostly for a matter of diplomatic recognition of the country’s independence, but it encompassed some symbolical and organisational changes

nonetheless, such as the adoption of a flag and national anthem and the proclamation of royal absolutism. This, among others, encouraged the newly proclaimed emperor Gojong (고종, 1852-1919) to rescind some construction concessions granted to foreigners and to assume responsibility and command on the further development of such industries by sponsoring major infrastructural projects. Nevertheless, the Korean Empire didn't cease selling permits to foreign venturers, as it was perceived as an opportunity for financial benefit whilst being able to bring in commercial and industrial technologies. What couldn't be predicted is that some of these novelties would be later used as a vehicle for the imperialist ambitions of Japan, who justified its expansion in the neighbouring country as its own duty to lead a civilising mission to modernise the nation. Using as an excuse the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) that broke out on the western coast of Korea, the Nippon Empire stationed thousands of Japanese soldiers and policemen in the peninsula, and through a series of coerced treaties they officially established first a protectorate (1905-1910) and then, after forcing the emperor to abdicate in 1907 in favour of his meeker son, a colonial government (1910-1945).

Starting from the Protectorate Period, Japanese government officials vigorously endorsed the diffusion of the "modern appearance". Under these circumstances, among Koreans the Western attire came to be associated with two contrasting visions: the first one saw it as a sign of progress and modernity, while the other connected it with imperialism and traitorous activities.[10] This division was widespread in the country, and people sided either with reformist or conservative factions.

In the former case, the first reported Koreans donning Western clothing were the ambassador to Japan Park Younghyo (박영효, 1861-1939) and his foreign envoy to Japan in 1882.[11] Park Younghyo was associated with and strongly supported the liberal Gaehwa Party (개화당), also called the "Enlightenment Faction", whose members are known for being pioneers of embracing the Western culture in Korea. As a matter of fact, the movement was a big sponsor for those educational institutes that took on the role of spreading the "new learning", which is how Western knowledge and Enlightenment were called. Founded by Seo Kwangbum (서광범, 1859-1897) in 1879 under the influence of Park Kyusoo (박규수, 1807-1877), Oh Kyungseok (오경석, 1831-1879) and Yoo Hongki

[10] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 78-79

[11] Cho Seunghye, 2017, op. cit., p. 566

(유홍기, 1831-1884), some of its most prominent members were Kim Okgyun (김옥균, 1851-1894), Yu Giljun (유길준, 1856-1914), Hong Yeongsik (홍영식, 1856-1884) and Yun Chiho (윤치호, 1864-1945). The party was composed by a small circle of young activists who advocated for greater opening on the model of Japan's Meiji Restoration[12] and for independence, especially from the situation of tributary state that Joseon had towards Qing dynasty China. Thanks to the support of the Japanese, they were also able to hold power for a small period of time with an attempted *coup d'état* called Gapsin Coup (갑신정변 or 갑신혁명, 1884), but it was crushed by the Chinese. During this time they promoted a series of laws aimed at modernising the country, which then continued in the Gabo Reforms (1894-96). Among them there was a decree of cutting the traditional hair topknot called *sangtu*, which was pivotal in men's appearance as Neo-Confucianism believed that the body was a blessing from one's parents and cutting any of its parts (including hair) was considered an impingement on filial piety. But Japan forced King Gojong to issue the decree, and the king had to cut his topknot with great sorrow. Such change brought to the disuse of the traditional headband *manggeon* (망건) and the wide-brimmed hats *gat* were discarded in favour of narrower-brimmed ones or of Western hats such as the Panama hat and the straw hat[13]. Furthermore, a clause of the Gabo Reforms stated that "the use of Western clothes would not be hindered"[14], officially allowing such practice. However, even after the Reforms only few men actually adopted the *yangbok* as their own style, and it mainly consisted of the same sack suit that prevailed in Japan since the 18th century - in fact it was usually acquired in Yokohama, a port city south of Tokyo. The coat presented a stand-up collar, narrow lapels, and rounded edges, and it was worn together with a round collared dress shirt, bow tie and striped trousers.[15] Only in 1896 the first advertisement of a Western-style clothing store of Korea appeared. For these reasons, during these years people connected Western clothes with pro-Japan activities. For instance, in the countryside the pro-Japan organisation Ilchinhoe (일진회), or "Advance in

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[12] Political revolution of 1868 that restored the emperor Meiji ("enlightened rule") to power and called the beginning of the Westernisation of the country, which turned Japan into an industrial and capital nation with a constitution and parliament

[13] Yu Huigyeong, Kim Munja, *한국 복식 문화사* [Korean Costume Cultural History], Seoul, Gyomunsa, 1998 [1981], p. 350 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, pp. 47-48

[14] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 78

[15] Yu Huigyeong, Kim Munja, 1998 [1981], op. cit., pp. 345-46 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 46-47

Unity Society", tried to convey the message that a change in clothing would foster modernisation, with the only outcome that the flat felt caps that they were usual donning became known as the "Ilchinhoe hat" and negatively associated with collaborators of the Japanese.[16] We can then say that "donning a Western suit was more of a political than fashion statement"[17].

Figure 1.10
Members of the Enlightenment party

Source: Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture (한국민족문화대백과사전)

Nevertheless, the members of the Enlightenment party weren't the only ones cladding the Western style due to the fact that, following this reform movement, the *hanbok* uniform worn by officials at the Joseon court underwent some alterations which completely changed it into *yangbok* style in 1900.[18] Consequently, the association of the Western suits with progress, power, and cosmopolitanism began reinforcing during the Protectorate Period.[19]

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[16] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 78-79

[17] The Korea Society, *Missionary Photography in Korea: Encountering the West through Cristianity*, 2009, p. 106 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 252

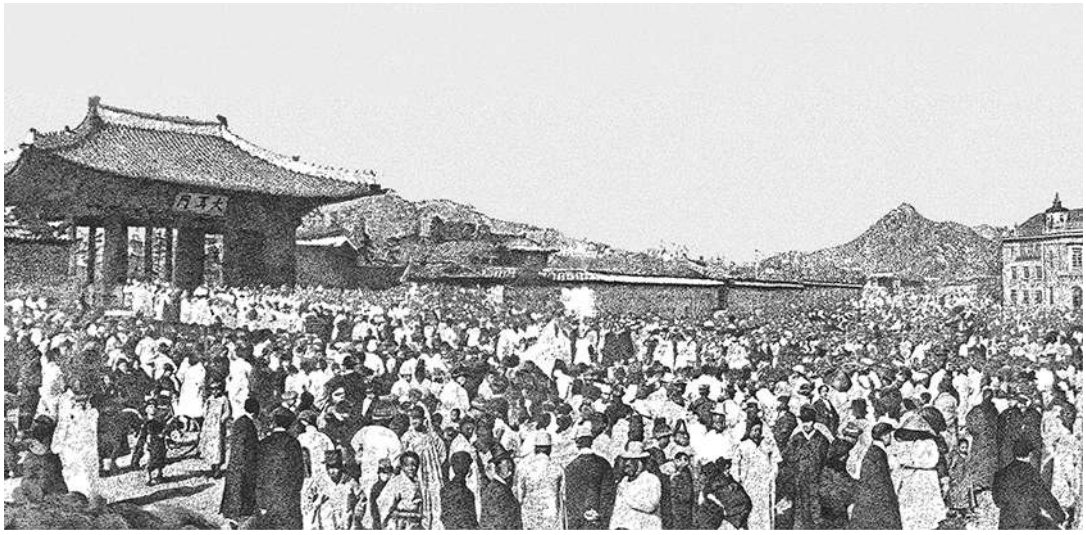
[18] Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 47

[19] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 79

On the other end of the ideological and political spectrum were the Righteous Armies (의병), who tried to protect traditions by vehemently opposing the Gabo Reforms and the diffusion of Western culture through trade. They were guerrilla groups formed by nobles and commoners alike, who started acting sporadically since 1894 targeting both Japanese soldiers and all kind of Korean collaborators, them being officials, policemen or villagers. The activity bore an increase when in 1907 the Korean army was disbanded by the Japanese protectorate government and many of the soldiers joined the Resistance, which was led by prominent elites such as the Confucian scholar Choe Ikhyeon (최익현, 1833-1906) and the journalist Sin Chaeho (신채호, 1880-1936). Many of the leaders traced the problems of the country back to a lack of nationalistic consciousness and therefore tried to raise awareness through education and publishing, with the aim of instilling a sense of urgency and appeal for direct action. Just as the Enlightenment party did with *yangbok*, they too found a way of expressing their ideals though clothing: the attire they adopted to show their resistance against Japanese imperialism was the white *hanbok*. Up to that moment, Japanese scholars had used the garment to belittle the Korean people and claim their superiority, asserting that the use of white clothes was used by Koreans either to manifest their sorrow for losing their country (in East-Asian societies white was used for funeral clothes), because they could not afford dying them or because the government forced them to. As historical documents show, none of these claims stood, because Koreans had traditionally favoured natural colours for their garments both for religious and political reasons since the Samhan period (삼한, 1st century BCE to 4th century CE). The custom was so rooted to the point that commoners used to wear white from the moment they were born until they died, and they had opposed every ban on the use of white clothes even when it came from their own monarchs, as it had already happened a couple of times in history. In this context, the white *hanbok* became a nationalistic emblem, and during the modern period it grew into an expression of resistance uniting Koreans in the fight against the Japanese coloniser.[20]

[20] Seo Bingha, 2015, op. cit., pp. 122-126

Figure 1.11
People protesting against the Japanese colonial government on March 1, 1919
Most of them are dressed in white *hanbok*



Source: Korea.net

Setting aside this ideological fight, most commoners kept wearing their everyday *hanbok* but with a few changes. During the Open Port era, men's *hanbok* either imported or altered some existing garments, adapting them into a new outer coat *durumagi*, over-jacket *magoja* (마고자/마괘), and waistcoat *jokki* (조끼).[21]

For Korean men this change was either a political choice or imposed through uniform reforms, while women's use of the imported dress was more of a personal practice and therefore the Western style was adopted much later by them. The first to be reported wearing foreign clothes was women's rights activist Yun Goryeo (윤고려, 1891-1913) in 1899[22], but other famous modernists women wearing Western style were medical doctor Park Esther (박에스더, 1876-1910), the first female independence activist Ha Ransa (하란사, 1875-1919), and Imperial Lady Eom (엄비, 1854-1911), who was the first woman to wear a Western dress in the royal court. Those ladies used to wear S-line dresses, "a Western dress with big shoulders and a full skirt line alongside a ribbon around the neck with a hat, or a high-necked blouse with a long A-line skirt".[23]

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[21] Yu Huigyeong, Kim Munja, 1998 [1981], op. cit., pp. 351-52 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 48

[22] Cho Seunghye, 2017, op. cit., p. 566

[23] Yu Songok, 한국 복식사 [Korean Costume History], Seoul, Suhaksa, 1998, pp. 365-366 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, pp. 48

Figure 1.12
Imperial Lady Eom in a Gibson girl style Western dress, circa 1907

Source: Seoul Shinmun (서울신문)

In this period women's *hanbok* underwent some big alterations, which were dictated by the influence of Western missionaries and of the Korean women who assisted them called "Bible Women" (전도부인). One of the most significant changes concerned the length of the *jeogori*: in the 1890s it measured around 20 cm and required an extra piece of cloth to cover the otherwise exposed breasts, but it then proceeded to lengthen in the 1910s, and it would reach 22 cm in the 20s, about 26 cm in the 30s, and 30 cm in the 40s.[24] *Jeogori* sleeves and arm holes grew larger and wider as the jacket grew longer, adding to the ease of its shape over the wearer's body. The *chima* underwent some changes too and, contrary to the *jeogori*, it got shorter. During those years a black narrower skirt called *tong chima* (통치마) came to be used by women who did social activities, such as female students and workers. The new Japanese protectorate government abolished the head cape and it was replaced by the parasol, growing women's interest in hairstyles (especially the pompadour).[25]

[24] Yu Songok, 1998, op. cit., p. 362-363 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 48

[25] Samuel S. Lee, *Hanbok: Timeless Fashion Tradition*, Seoul, Seoul Selection, 2013, p. 77

1.2.2 Colonial Period (1910-1945)

In the summer of 1910 Japan officially annexed Korea and organised a colonial government presided by a Governor General. One of the first step was to shut down all unofficial publication and unauthorised activities, institutionalising a new bureaucratic order and enforcing a heavy hand of colonial control and oppression. Becoming known as the "Military Rule" (무단 통치, 武斷統治), it swept away any form of social activity to forestall any resistance seeking the restoration of Korean autonomy for almost a decade.

The Japanese colonial government enforced a ban on *hanbok* wearing and linked it explicitly with "backwardness" and "simpleness", claiming that the lack of change made it "primitive" while the lack of colour made it "inefficient". This was used by Japan as a justification for the imposed rule but also for the constructions of the ethnic difference and discrimination that they were perpetrating, amplifying the ties between *hanbok* and "Koreaness". Clothing became a marker of Korean ethnic identity, used by the resistance as a mean to distinguish from the one imposed by the Japanese coloniser. However, apart from increasing the boundaries of ethnic identity, the difference between "traditional" and "modern" clothes underlined by the colonial government "acted as visual markers of power".[26]

Because of the restrictions, women's clothes became more Western. In big cities more women started wearing *yangjang* according to the Gibson Girl style, with broad-shoulders top and A-line bottom that produced an "x" shaped silhouette. Whether it was a one-piece dress or a blouse and skirt combination, the top part featured broad-shoulders, gigot sleeves with bare arms and highly detailed collars (usually stand or ruffled), while the bottom presented an A-line silhouette and ended over the ankles. Compared to the custom of the time, this *yangjang* style was a bit more revealing.[27] And while the number of Korean women donning *yangjang* gradually increased, the *hanbok* continued to undergo

[26] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., pp. 79-81

[27] Geum Gisuk, et al., 현대패션 100 년 [Hyeondaepaesyeon 100nyeon], Seoul, Gyomunsa, 2006, p. 75 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 49

changes in order to be modernised, such as different pleating styles or fastening ways, and it was often used with Western parasols and handbags.[28]

Men's *yangbok* on the other hand saw a big increase in its popularity among both skilled workers and the society's affluent elite. This was also caused by its increased use made by Korean independence leaders and modernists[29]. Men adopted double-breasted jackets with peaked lapels and wing-collared or French-collared dress shirts accessorised with bow or derby ties underneath. Frock coats were instead replaced by inverness capes or cloaks.[30] As for younger males, school uniforms presented an *hanbok* with a religionised buttons fastening, and it required short hairs to wear caps on top. Furthermore, the introduction of Western sports in schools required the use of certain *yangbok* garments that were generally used mixed with *hanbok* when doing sports.[31]

1.2.2.1 "Cultural Rule" in the 1920s

After years of repression of people's expression, the discontent prevailed among Koreans and students, who had studied in Japanese metropolises where the political expression was a much freer. In February 1919 they joined forces to publish a manifesto and started organising a mass demonstration for independence. Empowered by the wave of self-determination among European nations that followed the end of World War I (1914-1918), they eventually assembled eminent religious and social figures and redacted a Declaration of Independence, which they read aloud in Pagoda Park in Seoul on March 1, two days prior the funeral of the last autonomous monarch of independent Korea king Gojong. They were soon joined by masses of people who marched together chanting "Long Live Korean Independence!" throughout the whole country. Passed into history as the March First Independence Movement (Figure 1.11), they were brutally shut down by the Japanese military police, ultimately failing in achieving their ambition. Nevertheless, their significance was enormous: they reignited a resistance against the Japanese rule that would continue throughout the Colonial Period and provoked a revaluation in how the Japanese thought about governing the peninsula. Indeed, an important outcome of this

[28] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 72 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 49

[29] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 252-253

[30] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 76 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 49-50

[31] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 50

movement was the "Cultural Rule" (문화 통치, 文化政治), a reform program initiated by the Japanese Governor General aimed at reforming the governing approach in favour of a freer social, economic, and cultural activity for Koreans, fundamentally conceding them a greater role in the country's development. With this change of approach, the Japanese loosened the control over the press and the restrictions on native enterprises, which in turn stimulated the birth of many local Korean newspapers and companies. The Japanese's effort in building communication and transportation infrastructures accelerated the migration towards urban centres, where the then once deep-rooted traditions of social hierarchy and hereditary status weakened in favour of associational activity and greater educational opportunities.

Among the biggest beneficiaries of this situation were women: from peasants to courtesans, from housewives to wage workers, from rural residents to city dwellers, these years were a fundamental step in redefining their role:

> «This marked the beginnings of a female subjectivity that, through its growth in fits and starts the rest of the twentieth century, would leave a major imprint on the development of modern gender roles».[32]

As in many other countries, also in Korea in the 1920s emerged the new female type of the "New Woman" or "Modern Girl". In Korean they were called *shinyeoseong* (신여성), a term which applied to women who wore Western clothes and were characterised by an education pursued in one of the major cities, a strong consumerist inclination, and connections with the new social elite - especially thanks to their husbands, who often belonged to the category of urban professionals. They frequently appeared in the contemporary literature as well as articles and advertisements and even produced this as authors, translators, essayists or critics directed to young students at some of the secondary all-girls schools that were growing in number during those years. Examples of this productions are magazines such as *New Woman* (신여자), which advocated for a greater independence and equal rights for Korean women and provided them both a place where to publish and to read about their interests. Many of them also had an impact in the cultural sphere, becoming renowned as the singer Yun Simdeok (윤심덕, 1897-1926), the dancer Choe Seunghui (최승희, 1911-1969), and the artist Na Hyeseok (나혜석, 1896-

[32] Hwang Kyungmoon, 2017, op. cit., p. 142

1948). Nonetheless, thousands of women conducted a drastically different life. Most of them worked in the agricultural fields or as housewives, but many young girls of the age between puberty and marriage chose the life of the factory worker (either in the textile or in the food industry) because they were attracted by a regular wage and the allure of the big city life. But the reality was that the salary was meagre and most of it was sent to the family in the countryside, and the miserable working conditions allowed only one day off per week, preventing them the consumption or education that were quintessential to become a "New Woman". The Cultural Rule fostered a wider spread of *yangjang*, not only among upper class women or entertainers - called *kisaeng* (기생) in Korean, equivalent to the Japanese *geisha* (芸者) -, but because of new social engagement of women it was required also among students and career women. During the 1920s the pervading style was that of the flappers and its boyish vibe.[33] The dresses of this period were either one-piece or two-piece outfits with a straight silhouette, and they were usually worn with a sweater or jumper, a coat, a cape or cloak, a scarf, and a cloche hat. The hemlines of skirts shortened, passing from ankle-length in 1921, to calf-length in 1925 and then reaching knee-length in 1928, affecting in turn the length of coats. Blouses went through many alterations which involved changes in the style of collars (including sailor, oblong and shawl collars), the sleeves (such as bishop or bell sleeves), and the length of blouses, which went from overblouse to tunic style around 1926.[34] During those years, Western accessories as scarfs and shawls were in fashion among Korean women.[35] Also, Western sportive style, such as white blouses and shirts worn with belted black bloomers and skirts, gained some popularity.[36] People used both traditional Korean socks *boseon* and Western socks in either Western shoes or *gomusin* (고무신), which were rubber shoes that resembled the traditional shape.[37] The boyish *yangjang* style influenced also the

[33] Ryu Huigyeong, et al., 우리 옷 이천년 [Two Thousand Years of Korean Dress], Seoul, Misulmunhwa, 2001, pp. 131-133 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 50

[34] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., pp. 98-99 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 50-51

[35] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 51

[36] Ibidem

[37] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 80 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 51

hanbok silhouette, with knee-length *chima* featuring wider pleats extending to the hemline and matching waistline-reaching *jeogori*.[38]

As for men, the *yangbok* established itself among the high society, becoming an indicator of affluence and involve in the new economy, especially because it was worn by the new professional middle class. Consequently, the number of tailor shops increased, and in particular those run by Korean tailors. In vogue was a jacket style called *sebiro* (세비로, 背広) , a distortion of "Savile Row", as it was similar to the English lounge jacket. It was a bit longer, with narrow lapels, a deep V-line and an emphasized shoulder line, and Korean gentlemen used to wear it with a pocket watch and either a walking stick or a cane. During these years the *combi* (콤비) style was very popular amongst the most stylish men. It mismatched jacket and trousers, and the most famous combinations were check patterned jackets and white trousers, alpaca jackets and white serge trousers, navy tops and yellow bottoms.[39] On the other hand, ensemble three-pieced suits grew in popularity in the second half of the century, and were combined with a Norfolk jacket, spring coat and overcoat of same fabric. During the 1920s the *hanbok* could still be seen worn by the elderly of suburb areas, usually together with Western hats.[40] Finally, male students' school uniforms adopted the *yangbok* style as they were comprised of black or grey trousers, a flannel jacket with a stand collar and buttons down the front, and a square cap.[41]

1.2.2.2 Late Colonial Period: 1930s

After the Cultural Rule reform, the late colonial period of the 1930s witnessed a more mature public discourse about colonial-life issues, which took place especially in Korean language printed media. In the discussions there was space for all kind of opinions, although at times the colonial authorities applied a form of censorship. Pro-independence journalists could face severe consequences for criticising the Nippon Empire in their editorials and investigations, although the highest sentence for thought crimes was only incarceration. They often featured also social and philosophical reflections, scholastic

[38] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 100 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 51

[39] Ivi, p. 103 as cited in ibidem

[40] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 51

[41] Ryu Huigyeong, et al., 2001, op. cit., p. 125 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 51-52

discoveries and poems, becoming foundamenetal means of expression for the most important Korean literates of the time. Periodicals often published also serialised novels, and with most novelist being or having been journalist, they tended to portray mundane topics of daily life in colonial Korea, with a big role played by the fear of modernity. Furthermore, Korean newspapers of the time had a big interest in educating the Koreans living in the countryside, which was still the majority. For this reason they often sent envoies to schools in the villages to educate people on hygiene and teach *hangul* (the Korean alphabeth) and history. Considering the proliferation of cultural production of this decade and the new collaborative efforts of the colonial government, it doesn't come as a surprise that those years were a fundamental moment for the definition of Korean culture, with big efforts of reevaluating the cultural heritage and constructing a modern one, with a big influence in the developement of modern national identity. The outcome was the emergence of "Korean studies" investigating matters such as Korean history and linguistics. As for popular culture, those years witnessed the rise of theaters with both foreign and native plays, early cinema projecting Korean stories, and a star system promulgated mainly through phonographs and radios. The latter in particular played a big role in entertaning as well as educating and creating a sense of community among Koreans. In general, the new production of popular culture, mass entertainment and publishing worked all together in favour of a reflection on modern life and its features, trying to give them a new vision.

During the 30s, the popularity of *yangbok* grew among society at large as there was an increase in availability, variety, and handle and care information.

In womenswear, the *yangjang* boyish style of the 20s was replaced by a more feminine one featuring separate suits, sporty coats, and both tailored and bolero jackets. Knitwear such as cardigans, waistcoats and sweaters became diffused after short knitting courses became available to women earlier in the 1920s. In the earlier part of the period, the overblouse provided a tunic appearance, however it later changed to a belted one and its flattened collar was replaced with a bow tie one. The skirt's hemline hoovered around the knees in the early 30s and around the calves later on, and various models arrived in the country, such as flared skirts, jumper skirts, semi-tight skirts and pleats skirts. One-piece dresses worn with belts at the waist were also very fashionable, also showed different necklines and sleeve designs such as cowl necklines, puff and raglan sleeves with laced

decoration at cuffs. As for *hanbok*, there was a wide variety of textiles women could choose from. Together with the traditional silk, ramie and cotton, these textiles included velvet, muslin, surge, musca, and artificial silk or rayon. They could be also coloured and patterned to reflect different styles.[42] During this period the *jeogori* came in longer lengths and the lines of the sleeves were more rounded. To resemble the Western suit style, the *joegori*'s colour was popularly matched with that of the *chima*, which now presented narrower pleats and reached the knee. This mixing of Western and Korean fashions and accessories were also popular, and people used parasols, wore shawls and coats, and also adorned Western hairstyles.[43] Significantly, also women's school uniform started to follow the Western style of the boys' uniform.

Yangjang production was mainly produced abroad and then imported to Korea directly by the wearer, and only in 1938 the first dressmaking school was opened to teach the making of women's Western clothes. The school directed by Choe Gyeongja (조경자, 1911-2010) is an example of how Western, Japanese and Korean fashion was mixed during this period, as it can be seen in Figure 1.13 where students are seen wearing *yangbok*, *kimono* and *hanbok*.[44]

Figure 1.13
Photo of Hamheunmg Dressmaking School (함흥 양재학원) in 1938
Circled in the centre is the founder Choe Gyeongja

Source: Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 262

[42] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., pp. 125-129 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 52

[43] Yu Huigyeong, Kim Munja, 1998 [1981], op. cit., p. 366-369 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 52-53

[44] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 261-262

In the early 1930s men's suits were extensively varied, presenting both single- or double-breasted jackets and coats such as the frock, trench, and chesterfield. The jackets were usually well-fitted with long and narrow lapels and were worn over trousers with turnups at the end. Later on, men began wearing bold styles that emphasised the upper body, and the double-breasted jacket adopted padded shoulders and wide, short lapels, while the trousers presented pleats at the waistline. During the 1930s, many men still wore *hanbok* made up of *baji*, *durumagi* and *jeogori* made from trendy fabrics, but they also wore Western-style coats, shoes and hats mixed with the pieces of their traditional outfits.[45]

1.2.2.3 Wartime mobilisation during the 1940s

Like for the rest of the world, the 1940s were a particularly tough time. Despite Korea was not directly involved as a country in World War II (1939-1945), it experienced the wartime mass mobilisation to back up the Japanese effort in the conflict. Althought people were affected differently based on class, geography and gender, these were years of forced labour, sexual slavery, and assimilation of their ethnic identity. In fact, with the canalisation towards total war enacted by the colonial government, Korea became a fundamental player for Japan in its imperialistic expansion towards China. After the start of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the few textile and food processing industries established in the 1920s were joined by war-focused heavy industries such as armaments, machinery, chemicals and minerals, bringing the total economic output of the country from being mainly agricultural to accounting for 40% on industry in a decade. This enormous growth was possible thanks to the lowering of working conditions of labourers: for those who worked in industries in the country the colonial government provided to abate organised work unions, while many Koreans were deceivably drawn or even abducted to conquered Japanese territories such as Manchuria or Sakhalin Island and forced into labour with dangerous and miserable conditions and of little to no possibility to escape. A similar story of deception and kidnap also awaited many young women, whose reality became that of the "Comfort Women" at the service of Japanese soldier, which were nothing less than prostitution rings. One last important mistreatment that Koreans had to endure during the war period was the effort of the colonial government to turn Koreans into "imperial subjects". This assimilation campaign tried to

[45] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 132-133 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 53

force an identification with Japan under the slogan “Japan and Korea as One Body”, and it was implemented through the coercing of some acts such as a ritual bow for schoolchildren and public employees towards East in honour of the Japanese emperor, the prohibition to speak Korean in school, mandatory visits to Japanese religious shrines, or the requirement for everyone to register a Japanese-style surname. Furthermore, the government found a way to penetrate, monitor and control all Korean human and material resources through Neighbourhood Patriotic Associations, which organised people into multi-family groups to better implement public rituals, rationing and imposed “common good donations”.

It wasn’t long before such totalitarian regime got to the point where it exerted authority also on the wardrobes of Koreans. For this reason the wartime is considered a dark period for the Korean sartorial practice, when men’s “national clothing” (國民服) and military uniforms pervaded the streets. The jackets were made of cow-hair fabric in khaki colour and, as most uniforms, presented small stand collars, angular shoulders, flap pockets and five to six front buttons.[46] On the other hand, the elders started using also Western fabrics to manufacture their *hanbok*.[47]

Korean women’s version was the “simple dress” (簡單服), a one-piece dress ornated with a belt and two pockets. The *chima* and skirts in general were replaced by Japanese loose work trousers called *mombbe* (몸빼) as an alternative to maximise women’s work efficiency.[48]

The same changes were reflected in men’s and women’s school uniforms, as male students’ clothes adopted the military style while females had to wear *mombbe* trousers with their blouses or jackets.[49]

In face of those problems, during those years a substantial number of Koreans supported the Japanese rule; a number which was actually higher than that of those who were openly in favour of independence. Rather than “collaboration”, we can say that it was a form of passive resignation to being part of the Nippon empire. In fact, many Koreans had to

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[46] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 162 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 53

[47] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 53

[48] Ryu Huigyeong, et al., 2001, op. cit. pp. 135-137 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 54

[49] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 54

conform because they earned their livelyhood from the colonial system, while a big number of them truly believed that being part of the Japanese empire was the best prospect for the Korean people, without giving too much improrttance to being a politically autonomous nation.

Interestingly, a survey showed that around 1945 in Seoul, out of 1,716 women aged 18 to 45 only 24.5% were *hanbok* users, 34.6% were *yangjang* users, and 40% were alternating *hanbok* and *yangjang*. Compared to the fact that only 1% of South Korean women in their 20s and 50s wore Western clothes, it shows that women in the capital embraced *yangjang* faster and more fully than women in other regions.[50]

1.2.3 Acculturation Period (1945-1962)

The post Second World War period in Korea witessed drammatic changes both in the political and cultural spheres, and the life of the Korean people changed with the expansion of educational opportunities and the increased contact with Western cultures.[51]

From the Japanese liberation in 1945 to the take over of the military government in 1963, the instability of the country was felt not only politically but also culturally in South Korea, as it broke from ancient tradition to enter the modern world and assume an international role. This period was when Western style dress actually pervaded South Korea due to the influence of different events of these years, such as the stationing of American soldiers to fight in the Korean War, the return to the homeland of many emigrated Koreans, the increase in mass communication and the more direct contact with the Western world it entailed, the new economic situation that brought an increase in consumption, and the changes in the educational system.[52]

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[50] Geum Gisuk, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 156 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 54

[51] Park Sunae, Patricia Campbell Warner, Thomas K. Fitzgerald, "The Process of Westernization: Adoption of Western-Style Dress by Korean Women, 1945-1962", *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, 1993, p. 39

[52] Park Gillsoon, "A Study on the Factors of Change in the Korean Dress and Personal Adornments", *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1993, p. 34

1.2.3.1 Liberation from Japan (1945-1950)

The Japanese Emperor's proclamation of unconditional surrender on Agust 15, 1945 was followed by great celebrations of Koreans, who took over the streets with flags and other improvised symbols. Interestingly, today the Liberation Day is the only festivity celebrated equally in both Nord and South Korea.

Before the surrender, the Japanese entrusted the moderate leftist Yeo Unhyeong (여운형, 1886-1947) to form a new provisional government, which took the name Committee for the Preparation for Korean Independence (CPKI). This then gave way to the Korean People's Republic (KPR) with the rightist nationalist and independence activist Lee Seungman (이승만, 1875-1965) as chairman, and the government's main issue became that of rectifying war injustices such as redistributing ill-gotten gains and implementing standard labour laws. Unfortunately, 1945 was a year of high inflation, unemployment, and poverty in general, causing massive discontent and uprisings among Koreans. In the South dissenters took the name of *ppalchisan* (빨찌산), from "partisans".

This situation did not last long: before the liberation from Japan the Allied leaders had already agreed on a five years trusteeship on the country which was implemented through a temporary partition between the United Stated and Soviet Union, creating two occupation zones divided by the 38th parallel. This agreement brought more economical and political freedom to Korea but still no national autonomy, and while the left wing came to support this supervisory control after a first moment of opposition, in the South the rightists vehemently disagreed and used this excuse to persecute leftist politicians for treason. In this effort of eliminating the antagonist communist political force they had the support of the United States Army Military Government (USAMGIK), which shut down any organised activity that could be connected with communism and persecuted thousands of leftist activists, incarcerating and killing many of them. After the attempt of a Joint Commission to create a unified government, the Cold War broke out and the matter was entrusted to the United Nations, but they failed to get the Soviet Union to cooperate and therefore elections were held only in the southern occupation zone. On May 10, 1948 South Korea chose its National Assembly representatives and elected Lee Seungman as the Assembly's speaker. On the third anniversary of the liberation August 15, 1948 the new Republic of Korea was born with a liberal constitution that established a presidential system officially separated from that of North Korea. On the other hand, a national

government came to be in the North through a single-candidate election hold on September 9, 1948, giving birth to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the lead of Kim Ilsung (김일성, 1912-1994), who up to that moment had been chairman of the provisional government. As it had happened in the South, all political opposers were eradicated, especially the right-wing Protestant nationalists of the Pyongyang lay and their prominent figure Jo Mansik (조만식, 1883-1950), who was assassinated in 1950 after he refused to forefront a Soviet-friendly government. Under the rule of Kim Ilsung, the social revolution established a Soviet-style systematic and totalising regime backed by a powerful army and with a political leader personality cult. In 1946 North Korea implemented a land reform that stripped and redistributed to the people the land owned by landholders and "social enemies", among which Colonial Period officials, starting a period of strong decolonisation and consolidation of power. The country became a dangerous place for landlords and former colonial officials as well as professionals and businessowners, producing a refugee flow towards the South. There, the social and political privileges of the Late Colonial Period police, high official and elite were preserved by Lee through the National Security Law, which was used to dissolve the criminal court investigating pro-Japanese collaborators.

This period marked the beginning of the so-called "Acculturation Period", which goes from the end of World War II to 1962. The name refers to the dramatic cultural and political changes that took place in Korea due to the Japanese domination and the start of a bigger shift towards Western culture. It brought gradual but great changes in people's life, starting from women's dress, which in the next 20 years would undergo the greatest change in Korean history.[53]

In general, *hanbok* fell into disuse in urban area, especially among the youth and professionals, and it became associated with ethnic and national identity, and it was used as a statement of such. A case in point is the use made by South Korea's first president Lee Seungman, who after 1945 wore the *hanbok* in many public appearances, replacing the suits he used to wear during the Colonial Period.[54]

[53] Park Sunea, et al., 1993, op. cit., p. 39

[54] Lynn Hyunggu, 2004, op. cit., p. 77

By the mid 20th century, most Koreans already wore *yangbok*, while the original form of *hanbok* remained as a ceremonial costume.[55]

1.2.3.2 Korean War (1950-1953) and the post-war years

At dawn on June 25,1950 the Korean People's Army of North Korea overpassed the 38th parallel to launch the attack that would set off what is considered the first open conflict of the Cold War tension: the Korean War. After several occasions set in motion by both sides that nearly ingnited an armed confrontation, Kim Ilsung finally decided to persue the coveted unification thanks to the approval by the communist bloc. The charge came as a surprise and the Northern army invaded most of South Korea in a matter of weeks, and were helped by communist sympathisers that were hiding in the country in the chase of the unprepared rival army and refugees southward. During this witdrawal started one of the most tragic events of the Korean War: the brutal reprisals and cleansings of opponents or suspected thereof, which caused the death of many innocent people. While in the first months of the war the victims of persecutions were the leftists or the people with suspected ties with communism, the tables turned as soon as the American Army approaded through the "Incheon Landing" of September 1950 and the United Nation intervened in favour of the South. The Korean People's Army was chased back north just as fast as it had come down and, just like the South Korean Army did, they got rid of properties and people who might assist the enemy during their retreat, which arrived to the border with China. This sprung the intervention of China, whose hundreds of thousands of troops re-stablished the North Korean dominance all the way to Seoul, conquering the city until the UN forces took it back. The situation entered a stalemate that lasted until the armistice reached in July 1953, which definitively divided the country along the same borders prior the start of the war. Although without major territorial advancements, the stalemate turned out to be a devastating moment of the Korean War, as North Korean modern infrastructures and agriculture were razed to the ground by American bombs and napalm. Therefore, the period that followed the Korean War was inevitably one of reconstruction for both North and South Korea. For North Korea the 1950s represented a particularly formative period full of material and cultural

[55] Kwon Yoojin, Lee Yheyoung, "Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics Traced in South Korean Contemporary Fashion Practice", *Fashion Practice*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, October 2015, 155

developments. In December 1955 the vernacular political system *Juche* (주체) was presented and implemented, and the country entered an era of self-reliance with the pervading principle of nativist isolationism. Under this ideology the country underwent a process of cultural uniformity that politicised culture to promote nativism and witnessed a fabrication of all Korean history as a neverending struggle against foreign forces, where Kim Ilsung's credits were enhanced. In the political life of the country, following *Juche*'s idea that foreign models had obstructed the progress of the nation, Kim proceeded to eliminate Soviet-Koreans and Chinese-based Korean communists. Nevertheless, the influence of the Soviet Union and China remained prominent in political actions such as the collectivisation and industrialisation of the economy that began in the late 1950s under the name of *Cheollima* (천리마), a great effort that resulted in an increase of economic output which raised the living standards. Together with economic and military aids coming from the Soviet Union and China, North Korea's growth surpassed that of the southern neighbours. In South Korea the rest of 1950s after the Korean War proceeded under the presidency of Lee Seungman, whose administration was characterised by pervasive despotism and corruption. When he bluntly tried to fraud the 1960 election, student protests erupted in the south and diffused through the country, with the repression causing the death of hundreds of demonstrators. Taking the name of April Student Revolution, they succeeded in bringing an end to the dictatorial system implemented by Lee and brought the establishment in June 1960 of the Second Republic, this time with a parliamentary system. The first prime minister Chang Myon (장면, 1899-1966) fought the political corruption and extended electoral democracy to the provinces, but his efforts were brutally shut down when on May 16, 1961 Major General Park Chunghee (박정희, 1917-1979) and his troops staged a military coup, pronouncing a third revolution with a strong anti-communist drive. For the following two decades, Park Chunghee remained the apex political figure that led South Korea through its modern transformation. The reconstruction that he enacted entailed both a deconstruction of old ways that led to corruption and impoverished the country and construction through a series of five-year plans for economic development to foster industrialisation.

In this period, the import of both foreign clothes and textiles was limited by post-war restrictions, and until the mass production of the early 1960s began women learned to copy pictures of Western magazines and catalogues. The best shops used *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* to draw inspiration for their creations, while cheaper tailors had pieces

recreated from *J.C. Penney*'s and *Sears*' catalogues. But with Western fabrics short in supply, a big source was American second-hand clothing brought in by missionaries as relief supplies. Those were then fitted and revamped at home thanks to the great dressmaking skills of young women. In a study made by Park Sunae, who in the 1980s collected the testimony of several Korean women that had grew up in Korea during those years and then emigrated to the US, it came out that "the more urban and affluent the women, the more Western dress was worn"[56], and that most urban women switched to *yangbok* soon after the end of the Korean War, while in the countryside many kept wearing *hanbok*.

In 1956 we have also the first fashion show held in Seoul by what would become the most famus South Korean designer: Nora Noh. Born in a wealthy family, Noh left Korea at the age of 19 to study fashion in the US, and when she came back two years later she set up her own label House of Nora Noh, the first Korean designer brand ever established. Because of the lack of interest in Korean brands, she had to design for the show business, and when in the 1960s her clientele started to increse she opened her first formal boutique, and in 1965 she became the first Korean brand to sell ready-made. She was also the first Korean designer to enter the US market in 1979, and there her name got linked to big firms, with her designs appearing on the covers of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, showcased by Macy's, and sold to Sak's Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom, and Bloomingdale's.[57]

Figure 1.14
A group of women in Western clothes (left) and one in *hanbok* (right)
Photograph taken by Limb Eungsik (임응식, 1912-2001) in early summer of 1956

Source: Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 45

[56] Park Sunea, et al., 1993, op. cit., p. 45

[57] You Jihye, "Nora Noh, The First Korean Fashion Designer", *International Foundation for Women Artists BLOG*, 2014 (https://ifwartistsblog.wordpress.com/tag/south-koreas-first-fashion-show/)

2
Fashion theory and its application to the Korean case

Fashion studies have recently acknowledged the extent to which the fashion discourse has been permeated by a Eurocentric perspective and how much this has created an unbalance in the relationship with other vestimentary cultures. This condition resulted in a limitation of the discussion of fashion in non-Western countries and a lack of elaborated research in the study of their fashion histories, which mostly used European frameworks as reference.[58]

For a long time fashion has been described as a strictly Western phenomenon which has reached non-Western contexts only recently as the outcome of modernisation and globalisation, without taking in consideration the historical, social, and cultural role that non-Western fashions held. For this reason, the theory of dress developed as a Eurocentric episteme that sees Western fashion as "the norm" and everything else as "Other" and "in relation to"[59], placing Europeans and later Euro-American sartorial traditions in a position of power and dominance over non-Western ones. In light of this, fashion theories have been permeated by binary dichotomies such as West and non-West, modern and traditional, change and fixedness, global and local, fashion and costume.

As a matter of course, such approach brought a division of the world's vestimentary cultures into what is to be considered fashionable and what is not, which was a choice undoubtedly based on power, political, and economic relations. As it might be expected, it was decided *a priori* that fashion is a Western phenomenon and the definition of fashion traced that of the Western dress system, while theorists agreed on assigning an unchanging and tribal way of dressing to the "cold societies",[60] which Lévi-Strauss

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[58] Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil (eds.), *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 4-5 as cited in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, "Introduction", in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, *Modern Fashion Traditions. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, p. 9

[59] M. Angela Jansen, "Decolonizing Fashion, Defying the 'White Man's Gaze'", *Vestoj.com*, 2019

[60] Sandra Niessen, "Afterward: Re-Orienting Fashion Theory", in Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, Carla Jones (eds.), *Re-Orienting Fashion. The Globalization of Asian Dress*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003, p. 244

defined as those which "tend to preserve themselves in their initial state" and "seem to us as societies without history or without progress"[61].

But not only was this based on power relations, it was also useful to European powers to nourish such unbalances because clothes were used to save and underline the supposed superiority of the West. An example is the fact the British prevented the indigenous rulers of their Indian colony from wearing Western clothes when visiting the UK so that the difference between them would be maintained. Similar were the instances of other countries, as the denomination of costume was attributed to each form of dress different from the Western one that were found by European colonisers. All this was consolidated when in the 19th century Paris became the capital of fashion thanks to the invention of *haute couture*, which strengthened the link between the fashion system and urban life, and the rise of London as a *mecca* for male fashion. But in order for this to happen, every other source of inspiration for fashion had to be denied.[62]

According to the authors of *(Re)Defining Fashion* Abby Lillethus, Linda Welters, and Joanne Eicher, this dichotomy in the concept of fashion has to be reconducted to Social Darwinism, which produced a definition of fashion that perfectly adheres to the perspective of Western cultures as it considered them to be at the top of the hierarchy of all human typologies. Therefore, fashionable behaviours became associated to the European constantly changing styles, while, on the other hand, the aperently unchanging dress cultures that were at the bottom of the darwinian hierarchy of societies were not considered such. In the words of the fashion anthropologist M. Angela Jansen:

> «For Europeans, the rest of the world never reached the state of producing art, literature or fashion; it is stuck producing 'arts-crafts,' 'myths' and 'costume'».[63]

Just like in the past the concepts of history and art were assigned solely to the Western world, also the word "fashion" has been used exclusively in the analysis of Western dress

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[61] Georges Charbonnier (ed.), *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1969, p. 33

[62] Simona Segre Reinach, "Ethnicity", in Alexandra Palmer (ed.), *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Modern Age*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, pp. 153-154

[63] M. Angela Jansen, 2019, op. cit.

system, the only focus of fashion studies for decades. On the other hand, Other fashions have been studied in anthropological works under the designation of "dress".[64]

Such polarisation between what is fashion and what is Other is so imperative that there is still a lack for a better term to refer to "non-Western fashion" that recognises the Other in its own characteristics and is able to escape the implicit relation to Western fashion[65]. For example, the anthropologist Sandra Niessen mentions the work of Ted Polhemus and Linda Proctor Fashion and Anti-Fashion, where the two authors define the world's clothing under the single denomination of "adornment" and then procede to differentiate it between "fashion", presented as "the model of time as change", and "anti-fashion", "the model of time as continuity". In this oppositional structure, they define anti-fashion as "all styles of adornment that fall outside the organised system or systems of fashion change"[66]. But according to Niessen, althought the accuracy of basing the definition on cultural alterity has to be recognised, Polhemus and Proctor's anti-fashion is a "relational term" that doesn't fully consider the power relations between the two clothing systems, while instead it references "anti-Western-fashion" because the authors indistinctively group non-Western clothing systems in a primitive and tribal category. Beyond that, the anthropologist points out that this system can be useful to understand the power dynamics on which fashion globalisation is based. In fact, according to Polhemus and Proctor, some ideologies and images of anti-fashion are appropriated and mainstreamed by fashion to become part of the establishment through a process that they call "fashionalisation". Niessen explains that this process is an important aspect of fashion globalisation, as it exposes the way through which independent and self-referential dress systems become fashionalised as non-Western, taking up the role of anti-fashion (always relative to Western fashion) instead of being their own clothing identity. But instead of the one-sided definition given by the authors, Niessen recognises both the role that anti-fashion has as

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[64] Sandra Niessen, 2003, op. cit., pp. 246-247

[65] Some alternatives have been "ethnic fashion", "world fashion", "global fashion", "postmodern fashion", and "fusion fashion"

[66] Ted Polhemus, Linda Proctor, *Fashion and Anti-Fashion*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1978, p. 13-16 as cited in Sandra Niessen, "Afterward: Re-Orienting Fashion Theory", in Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, Carla Jones (eds.), *Re-Orienting Fashion. The Globalization of Asian Dress*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003, p. 251

an inspiration for the fashion's process and the process clothes can undergo to become anti-fashion.[67]

2.1 The theory of fashion decolonisation

Only lately in fashion studies surfaced a school of thought that challenged and tried to discard the binary oppositions that pervade the fashion discourse, changing the perspective according to which there is an Other and such Other has been "civilised" by European fashion. This concept of fashion decolonisation is still relatively recent, as the first form of criticism to this Western-centric view of fashion started to take shape in the 1980s.[68]

In that regard, a noteworthy work has been done by the academic journal *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, whose founding editor-in-chief Valerie Steele has propounded different contributions both on Western and non-Western dress phenomena since its foundation in 1997.

Other prominent figures of fashion decolonisation are M. Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik, who in the introduction they wrote to volume *Modern Fashion Traditions* argue that "different fashion systems have been, and are, located all around the world, and these have been developing in conjunction, competition, collaboration, and independently from the European fashion system"[69]. However, the Eurocentric representation of hegemonic fashion emphasised the element of novelty of Western bourgeois womenswear and created this binary opposition between Western newness and non-Western stillness that is far from the state of facts.

As Joanne Eicher explains in the introduction to *National Geographic Fashion*, the fact that from the outside it may seem that some fashions never change, for an insider that is

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[67] Sandra Niessen, 2003, op. cit., pp. 252-258

[68] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, "Introduction", in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik (eds.), *Modern Fashion Traditions. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, p. 6

[69] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 1

used to wearing such clothes it's very clear what is in fashion and what is not.[70] On this point, the anthropologist and professor Simona Segre Reinach writes:

> «It is the lack of knowledge of different dress phenomena that leads Western scholars to wrongly attribute an almost complete staticity to clothes which they were or are not able to de-codify or of which they have indirect knowledge».[71]

Some studies have demonstrated not only that fashion intended as an undefined degree of change existed even before the origin of fashion (located between the 14th and 15th centuries), but also that it was present in non-Western countries. This is because fashion, like every other human phenomenon, cannot have total fixity, and the desire of following the latest fads and to be in style is intrinsic also of wearers of "ethnic fashion".[72]

According to Jansen and Craik, all fashions - Western and non - are reinvented according to society's developments to express the local identity, and for this reason they incorporate a continuous negotiation between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, local and global.[73] Thereby, Western fashion couldn't threaten the continuity of local fashions of many non-Western countries, instead it "boosted its development through the introduction of new consumption patterns and marketing strategies"[74].

When the imperialistic wrong belief that the global exchange of ideas is a unilateral contribution of the West - such as in the case of the definition of fashion -, Amartya Sen reminds us that throughout history the direction of the circulation of ideas from one side of the globe to the other has varied multiple times.[75]

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[70] Joanne Eicher, "Fashion of Dress", in C. Newman (ed.), *National Geographic Fashion*, Washington, D.C., National Geographic Society, 2001, p. 21 as cited in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, "Introduction", in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik (eds.), *Modern Fashion Traditions. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, p. 6

[71] Simona Segre Reinach, 2018, op. cit., p. 154

[72] Ibidem

[73] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., pp. 3-4

[74] Ivi, p. 10

[75] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, New York, Allen Lane, 2005, p. 341 as cited in Simona Segre Reinach, "Ethnicity", in Alexandra Palmer (ed.), *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Modern Age*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p. 154

2.1.1 Modernity and the modern/traditional binary

As already stated, at the base of the definition of fashion there is a series of binary oppositions that were constructed by the West. In particular, the concepts of tradition and modernity have been a fundamental tool for the West to perpetrate the idea of their superiority over a "primitive" non-West. Indeed, in the book *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*[76] Leslie Rabine explains that the dichotomy between modernity and tradition comes from the colonial discourse, where the African colony, described as traditional in the sense of primitive and static, was juxtaposed to the European power, considered modern for adhering to the values of Enlightenment.

Modernity *per se* is a complex notion strictly related to the Western world that has been undermined by scholars of decolonisation. The word is rooted in the Latin term *modernus*, which was coined in the 5th century by the Romans to refer to the Christian present as opposed to former Pagan times. In the same way, it was used to refer to the "here and now" during the Middle Ages to set the present apart from the ancient past, and during the 16th century to demarcate the present from the Medieval period. It was during the Age of Enlightenment that the concept of modernity took a nuance of superiority of the contemporaneity compared to the past, which was due to the new core values of the modern thought: rationality and the secularisation of values and norms through the replacement of divine providence with rational mind of humankind. Features of the modern society were institutions such as the nation-state, or the commodification of products and wage labour, formal schooling, and the predominance of urban life. The nature of these new institutions, together with the pace and scope of change, are considered by Anthony Giddens the three big discontinuities that differentiate modern times from pre-modern ones.[77] But as the European exploration and colonisation advanced, this also acquired a new shade of meaning:

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[76] Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002, p. 10 as cited in Sandra Niessen, "Afterward: Re-Orienting Fashion Theory", in Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich, Carla Jones (eds.), *Re-Orienting Fashion. The Globalization of Asian Dress*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003, p. 10

[77] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Great Britain, Polity Press, 1990, p. 6 as cited in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Third Edition, London; New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 161

> «[…] this sense of the superiority of the present over the past became translated into a sense of superiority over those pre-modern societies and cultures that were 'locked' in the past – primitive and uncivilized peoples whose subjugation and 'introduction' into modernity became the right and obligation of European powers».[78]

In this sense we can say that the West monopolised the concept of modernity, applying solely its own criteria and bypassing any cultural specificity. "Europe constructed itself as modern" and imposed its model of historical change on societies that were pointed at as traditional, which also implicated static, without any internal dynamic or capacity for developement.[79] What was not taken into consideration is the cultural relativism needed to understand foreign contexts, but instead European Enlightenment values and standards of modernity were imposed on entirely different logics.

The Eurocentric definition of modernity had as a central point the ideas of reflexivity and re-examination which questioned all sources of knowledge, and the out-turn were countinuously changing fashions, being clothes "the repository for conceptions of individual and collective identity"[80]. Furthermore, fashion became the best suitable expression for the individual experience and materiality that is emphasised by the modern life and the newly emerged consumer culture of the 18th and 19th centuries. The complex relationship between the history of fashion and modernity is traced in Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams*, in whose pages she explains that the growth of fashion, "the child of capitalism", became "the civilising process" of the primitive or barbaric non-Western clothing and fashion, so much so that "Western fashions have overrun large parts of the so-called third world"[81]. In the name of modernity those dresses have been considered without history, without time and static, absolute. Indeed, Anne Hollander wrote in the article *The Modernization of Fashion* that "if dress were going to be seen as a modern rather than a primitive art, aesthetically serious for modern society, then changeable,

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[78] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Third Edition, London; New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 161

[79] Ibidem

[80] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 13

[81] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity.* London; New York, I.B. Tauris, 2003, p. 13-14

dynamic form in fashion would have to acquire an authority"[82], making change a fundamental characteristic of fashion.

On the other end there is tradition. Although common knowledge sees tradition as a static representation of the past, scholars consider it a dynamic and fictitious construct that has more to do with responding to new situations. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger talk about "invented tradition" and define it as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past"[83].

According to Sandra Niessen, tradition and cultural heritage of ethnic nations are needed and used in their visual illustrations to defend the purity of their own inherited identity, so that on the other side they can also appear modern and developed in order to be taken into consideration internationally. Therefore, this insistance on developing a traditional dress form opposed to the modern dress can be read as a form of resistance, although it doesn't break from - but istead embraces - the Orientalist fashion framework. The strategy of self-Orientalising becomes then an approach used by Asian states to represent themselves in front of the West.[84] So rather than being a defined and faithful representation of the past, tradition is a dynamic and ideological construct that answers to the need of defining indigenous culture in front of foreign influences. As Angela Jensen writes, "modernity is a catalyser for tradition"[85]. For this reason, "those in the indigenous (anti-fashion) domain [need] to have conceptually traditional clothing regardless of the degree of material change that the clothing may have undergone", and the meaning of such tradition is constantly updated to adapt to the evolving circumstances.[86] A similar concept is also expressed by Simona Segre Reinach:

> «Going back to the local way of dress to so-called ethnic, popular, autochthonous, and authentic traditions, although they were very often culturally constructed and in any

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[82] Anne Hollander, "The Modernization of Fashion", *Design Quarterly*, No. 154, Winter 1992, p. 27

[83] Eric J. Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 1

[84] Sandra Niessen, 2003, op. cit., pp. 258-260

[85] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 11

[86] Sandra Niessen, 2003, op. cit., p. 257

> case always hybrid - became part of a necessary search for stating their own identity and political and cultural autonomy, as well as the expression of alternative modernities. Fashion became a marker of identity and political questions, sharply undermining the opposition between modernity and tradition, male and female, and accentuating the theme and the ambivalences of the relation between personal identity and collective identity».[87]

In this sense, modernity is not a break from tradition but a reinterpretation, and the opposition of "modern" as change versus "traditional" as staticity, that we have seen at the beginning of this chapter as a base of the definition of fashion, is problematised.

2.2. The Korean case

So far we have discussed about how the concept of modernity is strictly related to the West, but it's time to answer the question: to what extent did it permeate the Korean world and how was it received?

Throughout history, Koreans have been subjected to foreign influences from both China and Japan. As we have seen in Chapter 1, after the opening of the ports in 1876 and throughout the whole period of the Korean Empire the country was slowly embracing also the influence of Western countries, autonomously experiencing the first instances of modernity. But the imperial ambition of Japan "robbed the Koreans of the capacity to forge their own modern existence"[88], and the encounter with Western modernity took another turn.

2.2.1 Colonial modernity in Korea

Since the 1990s in the critical studies started circulating different and new approaches to modernity that work outside the Western-centrist perspective, such as alternative modernity, multiple modernities, fluid modernity and vernacular modernism. Among those, the thesis of "colonial modernity" was advanced by Tani E. Barlow[89] to address

[87] Simona Segre Reinach, 2018, op. cit., p. 163

[88] Hwang Kyungmoon, 2017, op. cit., p. 128

[89] Tani E. Barlow, *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997

the origination of modernity in East Asia during the colonial period, particularly the 1920s and 1930s. In an issue of the magazine *Cultural Studies* dedicated to the topic, Lee Hyunjung and Cho Younghan identify as a unique feature of East Asian colonial modernity the contradiction of the duality West/non-West due to the presence of Japan as colonising power. In fact, being a non-Western and non-white coloniser, Japan had to base its imperial position as a national matter rather than a racial one, and it required a legitimacy from the West.

A second relevant feature that Lee and Cho ascribe to colonial modernity in East Asia, which is the role of Western-centrism: even if the East Asian colonised were under the Japanese's rule, they looked at the West as a cultural imaginary to emulate. This meant that the colonised countries had to deal with dual colonisers: "the West became a more indirect, imaginary source for the colonized to define themselves and their surroundings whereas the colonized engaged in more direct, immediate interactions with Japan"[90]. This means that colonial modernity comported a triangulation of influences that included on the one hand Korea as the colonised country, and on the other Japan with a type of influence that has already been worked through Western influence. In fact, Western clothing became avaiable in Japan and were adopted by many men since the 1850s, while it came later for women as it was very expensive and regarded as unpatriotic, but around the end of World War I most Japanese had switched to Western clothing. So in between the foreign influences coming from the local microarea that we have seen have been part of Korea's past history (e.g. Neo-Confucianism was introduced in Korea during the Yuan occupation of the puninsula during the Goryeo Dinasty), in the XIX century we have the entrance of Western clout.

In Korea the debate around colonial modernity presents a balance between nationalism and colonialism, and both the "perspective of colonial modernisation" (식민지 근대화론) and that of "perspective of exploitation" (수탈론) see modernity as representing historical progress, although they present opposing point of views about the Japanese rule.[91]

It's also interesting the fact that, according to the Lee and Cho, colonial modernity is a "living structure" that is visible in past but also in present East Asia, as this area of the

[90] Tani E. Barlow, 1997, op. cit., p. 605

[91] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., pp. 37-38

world continues to experience this colonial condition in regards to America as a superior Other:

> «As a living structure, colonial modernity has appeared and reappeared in various places and periods in East Asia; therefore, colonial modernity in East Asian contexts is understood not as simple repetition but as iteration, comprising the multiplicity and historicity of regional scenes that are always unfinished, always being made and remade».[92]

2.2.2 The conditions of modernity in Korean fashion

Being fashion considered a "primary symbol" of how societies construct modernity and tradition,[93] it's a useful tool to investigate modernities different from the ones that emerged in global markets and media.[94]

For what concerns the understanding of the emergence of modern fashion in Korea, the thesis of colonial modernity implies that there wasn't a direct civilising process of the West over Korea, but that we have to consider that we have a concomitance of Western and Japanese influences. Indeed, this Western influence penetrated into the life of Koreans also through certain impositions of a Westernized Japan. Under the Japanese rule the country's economical, social and political life rapidly adopted the Western capitalistic system, and instances of modernity rose locally in the sartorial aesthetic of the country. As the associate lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London Lee Jungtaek expressed in his PhD dissertation, these "local meaning and experiences of fashion" can help us approach the subject of modern dress in Korea in a way that challanges the Westcentric notion of fashion and modernity.[95] To do so he looked for modernity not only in *yangbok* but also in *hanbok* and in their mixed use,

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[92] Lee Hyunjung, Cho Younghan, "Introduction: Colonial Modernity and Beyond in East Asian Contexts Cultural Studies", *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 5, September 2012, p. 603

[93] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 37

[94] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 18

[95] Daniel Miller, *Modernity, An Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad*, 1993 as cited in Lee Jungtaek, The Birth of Modern Fashion in Korea: Sartorial Transition between Hanbok and Yangbok, and Colonial Modernity of Dress Culture, PhD thesis, London, SOAS University of London, 2015, p. 37

and he identified three conditions of modern fashion: production, mediation, and consumption.

Lee says that in terms of production, as it had happened in Japan, the beginning of modernity in fashion came with a new approch to dress production system derived by the opening of the ports and trade with foreign countries, which brought cheaper textiles and made it possible for Koreans to source fabrics of different prices and qualities. Furthermore, whether to modernise people's lifestyle or to pursue their own interest, the Japanese authorities prohibited the use of white *hanbok*, fostering the chemical dyes market and influencing the emergence of new colours and patterns that weren't used in the past (although with a certain degree of adaptation, as for example the preference of floral patterns over the Japanese ones). The fabrics, colours and patterns newly found in *hanbok*, were accompanied by the introduction of some modern novelties. The first one was the use of the sewing machine, which didn't replace hand sewing completely but accompanied it for what concerned straight line seams in places that needed more durable stitches such as the sleeves. A modernised waist of women's *chima* was also created to make the skirt more convenient by replacing the strap-style fastening with a vest-style one, which was also detatchable to make washing easier. Such alteration attributed to the influence of Western missionaries and women's modern schools such as Ewha Womans School, as Western ideas brought a new consciousness of the dress-body relationship and the notion of convenience typical of the modern life model. Lastly, there is the introduction of details such as Western-style pockets, and Lee Jungtaek bring two examples of *hanboks* that presented this feature. The first one is a woman's *durumagi* (Figure 2.1) that presents not only an inner pocket, but also the owner's name stitched on it. This detail is very significant because it shows the desire to demonstrate one's status and identity through clothing that is typical of developing capitalistic societies. The second is a man's black *durumagi*, whose colour can either be an indicator of the owner's will to adapt to the Japanese directions for the use of coloured clothing that often recommended dark blue or black, or his attempt to resemble a Western style suit. In this case we have a lable of the tailor shop on top of the pocket, another feature that represents one of the forms of hybrid modernity of this period.[96]

[96] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 246-252

Figure 2.1
Woman's *durumagi* with an inner pocket and her name stitched on it

Source: Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 250

Figure 2.2
Man's black *durumagi* presents an inner pocket and a label

Source: Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 251

In addition, on this point Professor Cho Woohyun, a Korean costume scholar, pointed out that the lack of big changes in *hanbok* until the 20th century was due to the predominance of Neo-Confucian ideology, but nevertheless there were some subtle ones in secondary features, such as gradual alterations in length and width. As Lee Jungtaek argues, although they were not big stylistic changes like those of Western clothing, they should be considered nevertheless, as "other factors such as fabrics, colours, dyeing, patterns, weaving and sewing techniques can be highlighted as key features of traditional Korean fashion, when encountered and compared with Western dress and fashion"[97].

In the instance of mediation, an important medium for the circulation of fashion were the movies, which showcased the fashion of the modern woman both in *hanbok* and *yangbok*. But a key role in presenting new trends and products to potential Korean custumers was also played by newpapers, and an exemplification is the series of fashion reports in the *Dong-A Ilbo* (one of the main Soutkorean newspapers) that talked about style, colour, and fabric taking into consideration the local modernity and taste.

[97] Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit. p. 24

Figure 2.3
Page from *Dong-A Ilbo*, August 22, 1934
The titles read "New Fall Fashion" (새가을의유행) and "Women's Western Clothing" (부인양복)

Source: Lee Jungtaek, 2015, op. cit., p. 266

At the time, many daily newpapers presented articles about American and European fashion accompanied with images, causing it to become very diffused and influential also under the visual side. But they also wrote a lot about *hanbok* and its market trends in terms of fabrics, colours and prints, the most fashionable styles among different groups of women and so on. Newspapers also talked a lot about movie stars, which were noteworthy wearers of Western style fashion, and made satires about fashionable figures such as modern boys and girls.

Figure 2.4
Cartoon from *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 9, 1928
It portrays New Woman stepping out of a hut dressed in Western clothes

Source: Yi Jaeyoon, "The Ideal Image and Fashion of the 'New Woman' in Korea in the 1920s and 1930s", Journal of the Korean Society Costume, Vol. 64, No. 7, November 2014, p. 180

Finally, for what concerns consumption Lee Jungtaek references the advertisements of the time, which clearly distinguished among the traditional style as *hanbok* and the modern one as *yangbok*. Such advertisements represented women (mostly celebrities) wearing both styles, allowing Western and Asian forms to interact. In fact, the everyday Korean women consumed fashion in a mixed way though advertisements and images, putting together local and foreign clothes and accessories. This balanced blend of modern and traditional elements, that followed Western trends without adopting it wholesomely, was pursued by the State itself in order to fit the image of a "non-Wester-but-developing state", as explained by the anthropologist Rebecca Ruhlen, author of *Korean Alterations: Nationalism, Social Consciousness, and "Traditional" Clothing*. Such "images of 'appropriately' modern women" were fostered by the government to represent the national development.[98] As Stuart Hall writes in *The Spectacle of the Other*, people who are considered Other and that are often exposed to binary forms of representation - as it happened in the case of Koreans - are oftentimes required to be both the binary extremes at the same time[99]. That of assimilating the "white norms of style, looks and behaviour" is considered by Hall as a strategy to transcode the meaning of Otherness and adapt it to reclaim one's own identity.[100] But this counterstrategy is limited:

> «To reverse the stereotype is not necessarily to overturn or subvert it. Escaping the grip of one stereotypical extreme […] may simply mean being trapped in its stereotypical 'other'».[101]

According to Hall, instead of fighting racial representation by trying to introduce a new content, it would be more useful to try to change its forms. This is because meaning cannot be fixed once and for all, allowing no final victories on this topic.[102]

Instead, the way fashion is worn and used can have different meanings and practices depending on the cultural and social variables, and the way it is produced, distributed, and consumed can vary between settings. This is exactly the notion of "'cultural

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[98] Sandra Niessen, 2003, op. cit., p. 259-260

[99] Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London, SAGE, 1997, p. 229

[100] Stuart Hall, 1997, op. cit., p. 270

[101] Ivi, p. 272

[102] Ivi, p. 274

authentication,' i.e. the process in which the members of a cultural group incorporate extraneous cultural elements and make them their own", which means that fashion is always subject to a degree of local interpretation which sees people adopt the Western style but applying a different grammar dictated by the local reference context.[103]

Western framework around fashion diverted the attention from a possible discourse of Korean fashion - and non-Western clothing in general - if not through the lenses of imperialism and/or capitalism. Nevertheless, by looking at the vernacular context and overcoming the idea of *hanbok* as the mere opposite of modernity, we can understand that modern Korean fashion developed a local fashion practice that questions the Eurocentric vision of fashion.

[103] Simona Segre Reinach, 2018, op. cit., p. 156

3
Contemporary hanbok practice in South Korea

Even after Western clothes became the dominant wear and *hanbok* lost its use as everyday attire, the traditional dress remained a strong means of expressing Korean identity under the practice called *saenghwal hanbok* (생활한복), translatable as "*hanbok* lifestyle". This term indicates the whole cultural experience around the making, wearing, and enjoying of *hanbok*, and it embodies the intangible characteristics derived from the lifestyle and knowledge around this garment. The South Korean national agency of Cultural Heritage Administration announced on July 21, 2022 that they will designate it as National Intangible Cultural Heritage asserting that "*hanbok* is more than just a piece of clothing to Koreans, an important custom through which people have practiced courtesy and wished for each family member's good health and well-being"[104].

This interest comes right after a high increase in the public appreciation of the national traditional heritage. As a matter of fact, the regard shown by the government towards fashion is part of its efforts to support the "Korean wave" *hallyu* (한류), which has seen the global spread of Korean culture and enhanced the country's image and bringing a big economical revenue (in 2021 Korea's export value was around USD 644.4 billions)[105]. The new importance in the global economy that is now given to culture produced an increase in the interest for a national fashion worldwide, being fashion a prominent part of a country's culture. After the success obtained during the 1980s by the Japanese Avant-Garde Trio[106] and by the Antwerp Six[107], cultural heritage established itself as a foremost source of inspiration and the need for a defined national design identity became even more eminent as marketing leverage in a fashion system that is increasingly global and without borders. According to professor Marilyn Halter, this renewed interest for tradition

[104]http://english.cha.go.kr/cop/bbs/selectBoardArticle.do?nttId=83971&bbsId=BBSMSTR_1200&pageIndex=2&pageUnit=10&searchCnd=&searchWrd=&ctgryLrcls=&ctgryMdcls=&ctgrySmcls=&ntcStartDt=&ntcEndDt=&searchUseYn=&mn=EN_01_01

[105] http://www.kita.org/kStat/overview_BalanceOfTrade.do

[106] Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo

107 Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee

is driven by a search for authenticity that people find in an ideal of pure and uncorrupted tradition, as opposed to the artificial and anonymous contemporaneity[108].

This was manifested both in the growing number of fashion weeks around the world and in the agenda of many countries, which have seen the increase of strategies aimed at the promotion of local fashion and brands (e.g. Vietnam's "Speed Up Strategy for 2010" or China's "Creative China", but also Brasil, Canada and the Scandinavian countries). Lofgren and Willim call it "catwalk economy", and being part of it is sign of political and economic strenght.[109] In the case of South Korea, the government has not only invested on *saenghwal hanbok* but it has also founded different Korean fashion designers, with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism looking out for talents providing a platform such as Seoul Fashion Week to connect with the international market.

But in order to develop a national fashion that is competitive on the international market it's fundamental to have a recognisable national aesthetic. On the one hand this means that "to establish their original contribution, [countries] have to emphasise national markers and their ethicising traditions", but on the other "to demonstrate their ability to produce fashion, nations have to demonstrate that they are modern".[110]

3.1 Korean traditional aesthetic and its influence on Korean fashion designers

In Korea the effort to develop a national design aesthetic was pursued through the use of traditional Korean design elements, which have become an important part of the country's fashion also thanks to the aggressive marketing of tradition in general.[111]

Many young Korean fashion designers refer to their cultural identity in their creations and are influenced by the aesthetic and design elements characteristic of Korean traditional

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[108] Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: the Marketing of Ethnicity*, New York, Schocken Books, 2000, p. 17 as cited in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, "Introduction", in M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik (eds.), Modern Fashion Traditions. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, p. 11

[109] Simona Segre Reinach, "Ethnicity", in Alexandra Palmer (ed.), *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Modern Age*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, p. 165

[110] Ibidem

[111] Kwon Yoojin, Lee Yheyoung, "Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics Traced in South Korean Contemporary Fashion Practice", *Fashion Practice*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, October 2015, p. 165

arts. On this subject, in an article for *Fashion Practice* assistant professor Min Seoha analysised the work of international Korean fashion designers based on four design elements: line, form, texture and colour. Each element also had a coding scheme that indicated the features typical of that design element in Korean background, which she extracted from reviewed literature on the topic.

Table 3.1
The design elements of Korean traditional costume identified by Min Seoha and their most prominent characteristics

Design elements	**Coding scheme extracted from review literature**
Line	• A sleeve of a top is slightly curved (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • A neckline of a top has a V shape (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • A side seam of a top is slightly curved or straight (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • There is a horizontal line in the waist or bust • There is a high waistline • There are many pleats in the skirt stretched downward from the high waistline (Yang 2004)
Form	• A length of a top is shorter than a waist • A skirt, pants or a coat create an unconstructed silhouette, which is easily changed depending on the wearer's movement (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • A skirt has many layers and creates voluminous form (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • There is a snap tie ribbon whose shape is asymmetric (Yang 2004) • There are forms of Korean traditional accessories, such as crowns, necklaces, earrings, hats, and pendants
Texture	• Korean traditional fabrics, such as biodegradable linen or Hansan ramie, are observed from the image (Lee 2012) • Korean traditional natural motifs are observed, such as dragon, deer, butterfly, tiger, phoenix, turtle, plum, orchid, chrysanthemum, or bamboo (Yang 2004) • Korean traditional geometric motifs are observed, such as Dancheong, Bojagi, or Teaguck (Yang 2004)
Color	• One of the following colors is observed from the image; unbleached white, yellow, blue, white, red, and black (Yang 2004; Kim 2010) • There are striped patterns with the following colors: white, blue, green, yellow, and red (Kim 2010) • The color combination of black and white is observed from the image (Geum and DeLong 1992) • The color combination of red and green is observed from the image (Geum and DeLong 1992)

Source: Min Seoha, "Korean Fashion Designers' Use of Cultural Expression and Its Influence on Their Design", Fashion Practice, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2015, p. 221

Such elements represent a competitive advantage in the global market because of the fact that consumers tend to naturally pursue novelty in their purchases, and being novelty dependent on context, what comes from unknown cultures may possess the element of novelty for foreign consumers. And this is valid also for unfamiliar Korean design elements.

In order to understand the use and influence of cultural expression in Korean fashion, Min Seoha also conducted both a visual analysis of three Koreans fashion designer's work and a questionnaire, which was answered by five other professional Korean fashion designers that presented their collections at Seoul Fashion Week. The visual analysis was conducted on the fashion designers Lie Sangbong, Doori Chung, and Jung Wookjun, all three of which corresponded to the criteria of having a Korean cultural/ethnic background, having presented their collection in one of the four major fashion capitals and having their work uploaded on Style.com and Vogue.com. The first designer, Lie Sangbong has studied at Kookje Fashion Design Occupational Training College in South Korea, and his womenswear brand presents avant-garde, dramatic and feminine designs that earned him a presidential citation at Korean Fashion Award in 2009. Thanks to this award, he was sponsored by the Korean Fashion Association and got to present a fashion show in New York. The Korean-American designer Doori Chung graduated from NY Parsons School of Design in 1995 and she is well known for her drapped jersey dresses, one of which was worn by First Lady Michelle Obama for a state dinner with the Korean president in 2011. Some years prior, Chung had won both the 2006 Swarovski's Perry Ellis Award and CFDA's Vogue Fashion Fund Award. The last designer Jung Wookjun graduated from ESMOD Seoul in 1992 and then founded his label JUUN.J, which was nominated by BoF "one of Asia's most successful menswear labels"[112]. He became well known in the international market for his "street tailoring", as he calls it, and he was featured at Pitti Uomo in 2016, becoming the first Korean designer to participate at what is considered to be one of the most important men's trade fairs.

[112] https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/jung-wook-jun

Figure3.1
Lie Sang Bong FW 2009
This piece was also worn by Lady Gaga

Source: Ladygaga.fandom

Figure3.2
Doo.Ri SS 2012
The dress is an example of her renowned drapery

Source: Vogue Runway

Figure3.3
Juun.J SS 2022 Campaign
The volumes of the dress recal that of *chima*

Source: Juun.J website

From this work she collected that 83.16% of the sample of designs reference the colour typical of Korean traditional dress, concluding that most of the Korean designers expressed their culture through traditional colours, especially neutral ones. Instead, only 26.12% of the forms were related to those of *hanbok* and those were typically found in deconstructed and reconstructed oversized pieces. Finally, the 12.48% of designs reflecting traditional textures and the 5.23% of lines comprised the least used traditional design elements[113]. As for the survey, the questions regarded how their national identity influences their design aesthetic and it revealed that cultural identity is often incorporated subconsciously, but the presence of Korean design elements depends on the brand image, target market, and fashion trends.

The integration of Korean-inspired design elements into modern fashion practice shows a level of self-exoticisation. It might seem similar to the charme of the unknown of Orientalism, but "the self-exoticizing strategy is to adopt Korean design elements on the basis of understanding or consideration of cultural meanings and values behind them"[114].

[113] Min Seoha, "Korean Fashion Designers' Use of Cultural Expression and Its Influence on Their Design", Fashion Practice, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2015, pp. 229-230

[114] Kwon Yoojin, Lee Yheyoung, "Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics Traced in South Korean Contemporary Fashion Practice", *Fashion Practice*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, October 2015, p. 155

3.2 The reiterpratation of hanbok in nowadays fashion

An example of how the element of "local" is brought into fashion is the redesign of "authentic" garments to adapt them to the contemporary global fashion context. Such attempt produces a hybrid that lays outside the dichotomy of traditional and modern, local and global. The *hanbok* is a perfect example of this, as nowadays small Korean brands and big international names are revisiting it both explicitly and implicitly.

Figure 3.4
Chanel Resort 2016
Karl Lagerfeld's show in Seoul integrated elements of the *hanbok* in the collection

Source: Vogue Runway

Figure 3.5
Carolina Herrera SS 2011 Ready-to-Wear
The hat resembles the Korean men's *gat*, while the blouse presents *hanbok*'s fastening

Source: Vogue Runway

Figure 3.6
Danha SS 2020
Black *hanbok* pleated short coat

Source: Danha e-commerce

Figure 3.7
Lee Younghee 2011
***Hanbok* collection shot in Dokdo island**

Source: CNN Style

Such modern interpretations of tradition is not new to Korean fashion, with the first attempts dating back to the 1990s. The first example was Lee Younghee's 1993 *hanbok* collections, which is the one that made her the first Korean designer to present in Paris. During this decade many designers worked on fusing of the unique Korean aesthetic with modern materials and made the country famous in the fashion industry for the beautiful aesthetics of their collections' flowing lines.

But today's revitalisation of the traditional Korean silhouettes aims at giving it a new and more widespread place in the life of Koreans, and with the support of governmental authorities it also regaining a little place in their day-to-dayness. For example, the number of schools adopting *hanbok*-style uniforms is slowly rising (34 in 2022 from 19 in 2021 and 15 in 2020), and there are also 12 public workplaces employing *hanbok* uniforms, among which national museums and district and city government offices.[115] Another case is the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports' efforts to promote a daily use of the *hanbok* through the creation in April 2014 of an Hanbok Advancement Centre to organise promotional events. In February 2022 a ministry's Hanbok Design Project Contest involved six South Korean designers to produce and exhibit 50 *hanbok*-inspired modern designs, which were also showcased at the Hanbok Expo 2022 from August 25 to 28.

Figure 3.8
***Hanbok*-inspired school uniforms from the Hanbok Design Project Contest**

Source: Korea.net

[115] Park Gayoung, "Not only for special occasions: Exhibition highlights daily use of hanbok, Korean traditional attire", *The Korea Herald*, February 2022 (http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220209000778)

However, the intermingling of local and global elements can be problematic for non-Western fashion designers: when they source inspiration from their cultural heritage their designs tend to be considered traditional, while if they adhere to the Western aesthetics then it becomes a case of westernisation and loss of local culture.[116]

As for the first point, the issue arises when running into self-Orientalism, which for fashion designers would mean looking at their own heritage through the Western gaze, presenting a mythicised version that doesn't correspond to the reality. Through this practise the binary Western and non-Western is reinforced.[117]

The double standard that still pits fashion against tradition even today shows that the influence of colonialism on the fashion industry is as strong as it has ever been.

> «Fashion designers outside the established fashion capitals are repeatedly considered according to (the references they make to) their cultural identity, while European designers will rarely be asked to explain or justify their references in regard to their cultural/national identity (just imagine asking Nicolas Ghesquière to explain his French references in his work for Louis Vuitton). Today a designer can easily be born in Morocco, grow up in France, study in Brazil and work in Korea. Does this make his or her work Moroccan, French, Brazilian or Korean? The so-called 'globally recognised signifiers,' be it wax-print for African designers, bold colours for Latin American designers or minimalism for Asian ones, are not only a stubborn heritage of Eurocentric imperialist thinking, but also a persisting means to differentiate, diminish and exclude 'Other' fashions from the dominant Eurocentric fashion discourse».[118]

What has changed is the fact that scholars of decolonisation have noticed and talked about it, igniting the change that will hopefully one day bring to the dismantling of the Eurocentric notion of fashion in favour of a one truly written in a global perspective.

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[116] M. Angela Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 4

[117] Ivi, p. 18

[118] Jansen, M. Angela, 2019, op. cit.

Conclusions

In this thesis we have gone through the changes in the history of Korean dress with the purpose of trying to overcome the practice that sees two-dimensional, uncut dress typical of Asian sartorial traditions juxtaposed and subordinated in front of the three-dimensional, sewn one that characterises European cultures. Such practice of comparing and relating the different costumes of the world without questioning or problematising the colonial gaze that first encountered and described them has brought to the misassumption that there was one fashion which was exported to the rest of the world. Instead, as Penelope Francks suggests, rather than of a global hegemony of Western fashion, we should talk of a historically conditioned appropriation of it.[119] In fact, although at some point Koreans did enthusiastically adopt European fashion trends, the legacy of their sartorial tradition was a fundamental factor in the process, and it conditioned the whole outcome of such shift between *hanbok* and *yangbok* through the filtering of a local adaptation. The intentional attempt to modernise the country on behalf of the progressist Koreans and the Westernised Japanese Empire set off a big social change for Korea, and the intersection between Korean, Japanese and Western cultures had its most visible effects in fashion. This convergence and confrontation of influences that in the time span of a century changed the wardrobes of millions of more or less conscious people cannot be read as a Eurocentric narration:

> «Fashion simply cannot be reduced to a form of cultural imperialism and to a mere commercial expansion of brands from the West to the rest of the world. According to some authors, the very expression "expansion of fashion" from Europe to other parts of the world is not correct, in that it is already an ethnocentric expression.»[120]

Fashion outside the Western context is not simply an uptake of the Euro-American sartorial tradition as a consequence of globalisation, since it carries its own historical, cultural, and social value and relevance. For this reason, fashion cannot and should not be located as a binary concept that gravitates between what is Western and what is Other, and rather than being perceived as something inherent to an object, it would be better to see it as an added value attributable to dress in people's imaginations and beliefs, a

[119] Penelpe Francks, 2015, op. cit., p. 353

[120] Simona Segre Reinach, 2018, op. cit, p. 156

desirability of a dress at a given moment and place based on different variables such as society, politics, nationalism, nostalgia, exclusivity and so on.[121]

With this in mind, then, we can finally say that "fashion and dress came to represent stereotyped ideal types that are loaded with ideology, rather than real oppositions between ways of dressing"[122]. Instead, nowadays fashion is rediscovering the aspects of ethnicity and identity in a completely different way than the mythical pre-modern one, and traditional dresses such as the *hanbok*, which fashion studies have long considered a fossilised and surpassed form of dressing, have reassumed their very much alive and influential roles.

Since the end of the 20th century the contributions of non-Western fashion as a source of inspiration in the global market became more and more evident and non-concealable, and fashion became more transparent on the impossibility of maintaining authenticity and purity in an age of globalisation. Those cultures are claiming their role in the fashion system, blurring the line between "fashionable" and "traditional" and bringing to fashion theory their contribution, which can be central for the ethical aspects of fashion such as sustainability.

[121] Angela M. Jansen, Jennifer Craik, 2016, op. cit., p. 8

[122] Simona Segre Reinach, 2018, op. cit., p. 154

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