

A Comparative Study on Fashion-Conservativeness of Religious People and Non-Religious People in Korea

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ABSTRACT

Religion is deeply connected with human culture and life, and affects all areas of religious people's lives. The aim of this study was to find out how fashion-conservativeness of religious people and non-religious people differ in Korea. Ten religious people and ten atheists all in their twenties were interviewed to find out the differences between religious people and non-religious people related to their viewpoints on clothes. The twenties age group was selected because people in their twenties are sensitive to fashions and styles, and a fair proportion of males and females were selected. The subjects were asked demographic questions, questions about their religion and faith, whether or not they thought they were conservative or affected by religion, and finally, what they thought of photographs of certain styles. 12 photographs from the 2006-7 F/W collections of London, Paris, New York and Milan were presented to the subjects. The photographs were from the Vogue U.K. website and divided into 6 major styles based on verbal evidence used to describe the collections in catwalk reports: "Sexy," "attitude/confidence," "luxury," "sophisticated/chic," "feminine," and "rock." In conclusion, religious people were found to be more conservative than non-religious people in their twenties because they prefer more conservative and covered up styles, have more negative views of bold and skin-showing trends, and regard some styles to be too sexy when non-religious people do not.

Key Words : Religion, fashion, conservativeness, Buddhism, Christianity

I. Introduction

Religion is deeply connected with human culture and life, making it a basis of individuals' words and actions, and simultaneously a social phenomenon too.¹⁾ People worshipped a supernatural God of some sort from ancient times, and have continuously made symbols and ceremonies to live a life close to

God, and religious communities to worship God together. Religious people go through religious experiences in everyday life, and religion is a way of life for them in that they are affected by their religion in making daily decisions, choices and in their basic perceptions. Therefore a presupposition can be made that religion may affect people's perceptions of clothing styles and fashions.

Although religion is undoubtedly an integral part of human culture, it is only fair to say that some

cultures are more affected by religion than others. For example a comparatively collectivist Arabic society where people openly wear turbans in everyday life as a sign of their faith may be more affected by religion than a more individualist and multi-cultural society like that of the United States.²⁾ Korea is not an extremely religious country but it does have deep Confucianism roots and three main religions exist in Korean society. This study aims to find out whether or not religious people in Korean society are affected by their religion in their viewpoints of clothes and if so, to find out how they are affected.

One predictable view would be that religious people are more conservative than non-religious people because religious people have a set of ethical and religious rules which they believe in and live by. Whether or not this is the case, a difference is expected to be found between religious people and atheists. This study aims to find out whether or not religious people are affected by certain styles compared to non-religious people, whether or not religious people accept the same styles as non-religious people, whether or not religious people wear the same styles as non-religious people and whether or not religious people are as fashion-conscious as non-religious people.

Three major religions co-exist in modern Korean society; Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity and Buddhism. Protestant and Catholic Christianity can be seen as two different branches of the same religion in many parts of the world, but the two are clearly differentiated in Korean society, mostly because of the difference in rituals and beliefs. For example Catholic people take part in Korean Confucian rituals that pray to ancestors whereas Protestant people do not for they consider it a form of worshipping other idols. Buddhism is the religion with the longest history in Korea.

II. Religious Values: Buddhism and Christianity

The fundamental purpose of religion is the same for all religions but the three major religions in Korea have diverse methods of religious expressions. Buddhism, a major religion in Korea, worships Buddha and lives by Buddha's religious doctrines, especially pursuing wisdom and mercy.³⁾ Christianity believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and although it is now divided largely into the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Church, the different groups of Christianity all share the same common belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and savior of all people. Christianity is a historically deeply rooted religion that started more than 2000 years ago when Jesus was born, and has continued to maintain a place as an important part of western culture since then. This is why the influences of Christianity can easily be found in many aspects of western historical life and culture such as music, books and artworks, which in turn passed on its influence to the east as the east adopted western culture.

Clothing and people's viewpoints on clothing are no exceptions for either Buddhism or Christianity. Religious influences are easily found in clothes of the past, making it a clear fact that religion historically had an immense effect on clothing, and fashion and everyday clothing of modern people, not only in the west but all over the globe, are greatly influenced by various cultures and religions. Therefore it can be said that fashion and religion both have great worldwide influences today, and influence each other too.

Buddhism is a very mental and spiritual religion, related to one's state of mind and way of life. It is based on the teachings of Guatama Buddha, called

“the Buddha,” who was born in what is now Nepal in around the fifth century BC. The aim of Buddhism is to put an end to the sorrow of existence. In the words of the Buddha: “I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering”. To achieve this state of the end of suffering followers train and purify the mind by following the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, eventually arriving at an understanding of the true nature of all things. Buddhists believe that all ignorance and unhappiness will end and they will be liberated through such a way of life.⁴⁾

According to 1 Timothy of the Bible, modest and humble clothes without elaborate decorations were a symbol of decency,⁵⁾ and a study by Kim Jin Goo on linen in the Bible claims that Hebrews regarded white linen as a mark of moral purity.⁶⁾ Decency and moral purity were dimensions held high in religious ethics, and so it can be understood that ethics was important in Christianity from the beginning, and a major value of the religion.

Europe was not developed much before the 1500s and Christianity had to battle hard not to be occupied by Islam or Mongolia. However after 1500, European countries started to rule the seas with their big battleships, and regularized efforts for development of science and capitalism, freedom, industrialization and globalization⁷⁾ made the major religion of the west, Christianity, stronger in a new way and opened the doors for it to gradually expand its influences farther out into the world.

Looking at the changes in Christianity focusing on the sixteenth century, first there is the epochal 95 article subject of Martin Luther that was announced on October 31st, 1517. Luther’s statements were based on the gospel he experienced, and there were two major points. First, he said that theology should only be based on the Bible. Second, it was

his idea that people were not saved based on their efforts but based only on their faith. In other words, he claimed that people were saved through the grace of God.

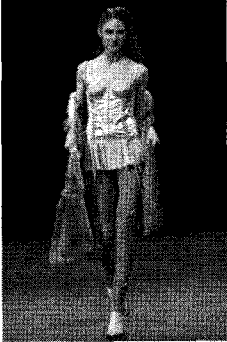


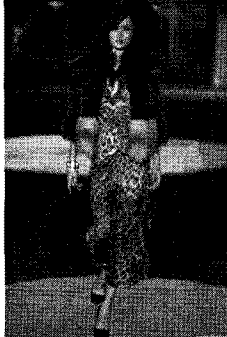
Living by the Bible means having faith by placing importance on and pursuing eternal life and the grace of God. Thus general faithfulness can be seen as another value of Christianity.





After the Religious Revolution the Roman Catholic Church underwent many changes and the basic frame of the modern Catholic Church was made. There were social changes in addition to the changes in Christianity too, and Christianity expanded more from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century due to these social changes, and continued to develop and change in the nineteenth and twentieth century to make Christianity today.⁸⁾ Above all Christianity changed into a religion more closely linked with everyday life as time passed, and into a religion that met personally with God instead of worshipping Him from far away. Such changes in the religion resulted in emphasizing a divine Christian lifestyle as well as the divinity of God Himself, making divinity another significant traditional Christian value.

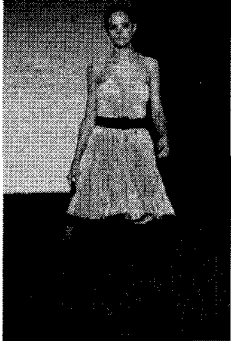
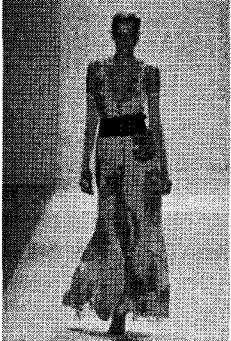


III. Religious People and Atheists

A total of twenty people were interviewed to find out the differences between religious people and non-religious people related to their viewpoints on clothes. Ten religious people and ten atheists all in their twenties were selected with a fair proportion of males and females. The twenties age group was selected because people in their twenties are sensitive to fashions and styles and it would be meaningful to find differences amongst such young people who do not seem to have boundaries but rather more and

<Table 1> Photographs of various styles presented during interviews

No.	Category	Designer	Evidence (quotes from <i>Vogue</i> catwalk reports)	Photos
1	Sexy	AF Vandevorst ⁹⁾	Sexy	
2		Brian Reyes ¹⁰⁾	Sexy, plenty of flesh on show	
3	Attitude/ Confidence	Oscar de la Renta ¹¹⁾	Self-assured	
4		Roberto Cavalli ¹²⁾	Strong on the inside	

No.	Category	Designer	Evidence (quotes from <i>Vogue</i> catwalk reports)	Photos
5	Luxury	Andrew Gn ¹³⁾	Height of luxury	
6		Ralph Lauren ¹⁴⁾	Downtown high quality luxury	
7	Sophisticated/Chic	Emporio Armani ¹⁵⁾	Perfectly chic	
8		Viktor & Rolf ¹⁶⁾	Class	

No.	Category	Designer	Evidence (quotes from <i>Vogue</i> catwalk reports)	Photos
9	Feminine	Salvatore Ferragamo ¹⁷⁾	Feminine, très éléganté	
10		Sass & Bide ¹⁸⁾	Feminine, Grecian and romantic	
11	Rock	Christian Dior ¹⁹⁾	Rock	
12		Gucci ²⁰⁾	Glam rock	

more similarities with each other these days.

All 2006-7 F/W collection photos with catwalk reports uploaded on the *Vogue U.K.* website were reviewed, and the collections were categorized into 14 groups, “sexy,” “attitude/confidence,” “ladylike,” “pretty,” “luxury,” “medieval,” “sophisticated/chic,” “feminine,” “rock,” “grunge,” avant-garde,” “girlish,” and “androgyny” according to the words that were used to describe the images and styles of the collections in the catwalk reports. However only 6 of the groups “sexy,” “attitude/confidence,” “luxury,” “sophisticated/chic,” “feminine,” and “rock” had three or more collections in the group so these 6 groups were selected as the major styles of the 2006-7 F/W season. Only two collection photos from each group were selected to be used in the interview process, and the choice was made based on which photographs best reflected the image group. The photographs selected are shown in Table 1.

The 12 photographs above were shown to interviewees in random order and the subjects were asked the following questions: demographic questions including age, sex, education. Then religious people were asked what their religion was and how long they had been religious, in order to ensure that they were in fact religious. Next, the subjects were asked whether or not they thought they were conservative, whether or not they were affected by religion in everyday life, and whether or not they thought their everyday clothes reflected religious values. Finally, they were asked 5 questions for each of the photographs shown. First, how much they liked it, second, how they would describe the style, third, what they would think of someone wearing the clothes, fourth, for males, whether they would like to buy the clothes for friends or family and for females, whether they would like to buy the clothes for themselves, and fifth, for males, whether they would

like their family or friends to wear the clothes, and for females, whether they would like to wear the clothes. The subjects were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 5 for the questions regarding their views on the clothes, 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive.





IV. Different Views on Dress



The results of the interviews show that there are slight differences in viewpoints and attitudes towards dress between religious people and non-religious people. Generally the subjects, all Korean people in their twenties, showed similar reactions to the pictures of the clothes, but some differences were observed concerning 6 of the photographs.

It should be noted that when asked about their own self-awareness of conservativeness, 5 of the 10 religious people said they were conservative, but only 2 of the 10 non-religious people regarded themselves to be conservative. 4 of the religious people said they were affected by religion in everyday life whilst none of the non-religious people said they were, but 8 of the religious people said their clothes were not affected by religion whilst all but 1 of the non-religious people answered that their clothes were not affected by religion.

However the study shows that religious people are indeed a little more conservative than the atheists. For instance, the “feminine” Salvatore Ferragamo collection photograph was a design that shows a lot of flesh in a tube dress and only 4 religious people said they liked the clothes to a “5” but 8 of the atheists said they would give it a “5.” Also, only 3 of the religious people had a positive “5” viewpoint towards someone who would wear the dress, but 7 of the atheists had a “5” viewpoint. When shown the “sophisticated” Viktor and Rolf photograph of a

<Table 2> Differences between religious people and atheists' views on clothes

	Answer	Religious			Atheist			
		Male(6)	Female(4)	Subtotal	Male (4)	Female(6)	Subtotal	
Conservativeness	Yes	4	1	5	0	2	2	
	No	2	3	5	4	4	8	
Affected by religion?	Yes	3	1	4	0	0	0	
	No	0	1	1	4	5	9	
	Slightly	3	2	5	0	1	1	
Clothes affected by religion?	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	No	5	3	8	4	6	10	
	Slightly	1	1	2	0	0	0	
Photo 3 	Like it?	5	1	3	4	4	4	8
(Salvatore Ferragamo, feminine)	Viewpoint	5	1	2	3	4	3	7
Photo 5 	Viewpoint	1	3	0	3	0	1	1
(Viktor and Rolf, sophisticated)	Would you buy it?	1	4	0	4	0	1	1
Photo 6 	Would you buy it?	5	5	3	8	2	3	5
(Ralph Lauren, luxury)	Would you wear it?	5	4	3	7	2	3	5
Photo 7 	Like it?	5	0	1	1	4	0	4
(Brian Reyes, sexy)	Would you buy it?	5	0	1	1	3	1	4

 Photo 9 (Sass and Bide, feminine)	What style?	sexy	1	2	3	0	1	1
		feminine	2	1	3	4	5	9
 Photo 10 (Emporio Armani, sophisticated)	Like it?	5	4	2	6	1	2	3
	Would you buy it?	5	4	2	6	1	2	3
	Would you wear it?	5	5	2	7	1	1	2

tight fitting women’s suit, 3 of the religious people had an extremely negative view on the style and 4 said they would never buy it, but only 1 of the atheist subjects had an extremely negative view and only 1 said they would never buy it. Only 1 religious person said they loved the “sexy” see-through Brian Reyes collection photograph and that they would buy it, but 4 non-religious people said they loved and would buy the same style.

By contrast, religious people were more positive and open about styles that cover up a lot of the body. The “luxurious” Ralph Lauren collection photograph of a much covered up women’s pant suit showing no flesh at all provoked a lot of positive responses from the religious people. 8 people said they would absolutely buy it and 7 said they would wear it, while only 5 atheists said the same about each question. A similar reaction was found with the “sophisticated” Emporio Armani collection photograph of a very well covered women’s skirt suit. 6

religious people said they really liked it and would buy it whilst only 3 non-religious people said the same thing, and 7 religious people said they would wear it whilst only 2 non-religious people said they would.

Religious people and non-religious people also seem to have different views on “sexiness.” The “feminine” Sass and Bide collection photograph was recognized as “feminine” by 9 of the non-religious people, but only 3 of the religious people accepted the style to be feminine and 3 thought it was “sexy.” Only 1 non-religious person called the same style “sexy.” Table 2 shows the main findings of the study.

V. Conclusion

Young people in their twenties are known to be fashion-conscious, and with so much sexiness and eroticism emphasized in fashion today, many young

people dress “sexy” and most people do not think the way they dress is affected by their religion. However this study shows that religious people are more conservative than non-religious people in their twenties because they prefer more conservative and covered up styles, have more negative views of bold and skin-showing trends, and regard some styles to be too sexy when non-religious people do not. Not many differences were found between men and women.

The limitations of this study were that only 20 people of similar background were interviewed, and answers were not analyzed statistically to see if they had any statistical significance. It also failed to cover differences between different religions, and since photographs of fashion collections were used in interviews to reflect recent fashion styles, not all of the photographs were clothes people in their twenties would actually buy or wear, so in some cases, asking whether or not they would buy or wear the styles was not very significant. A further study on a larger group of people from different backgrounds and religions using photographs of more wearable designs sold in stores could produce more in-depth results on the actual effect of certain religions on people’s viewpoints and choice of clothes, and statistical verification could provide significant evidence to support the results.

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- 16) Viktor & Rolf, 2006-7 F/W
- 17) Salvatore Ferragamo, 2006-7 F/W
- 18) Sass & Bide, 2006-7 F/W
- 19) Christian Dior, 2006-7 F/W
- 20) Gucci, 2006-7 F/W