

Textbooks and Textiles: Fashion in East Asia, 1920-1945

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Abstract From the 1920s to 1945, East Asia experienced radical social change with the introduction of new fashion styles, and new ways of thinking, from the West. The emergence of a new generation of “new women” educated in modern schools was part of this phenomenon, and functioned as a trend-setting influence in East Asian society. In schools, education in dressmaking, sewing, and home economics were important parts of female education. Adopting a new fashion style is, by necessity, accompanied by the new technology of dressmaking. Given that ready-made clothing was not generally available, dressmaking education also served to introduce a new material culture. In Korea and Taiwan under Japanese colonization, the greater part of school curricula and textbooks mirrored those in Japan, which enabled these countries to develop and adopt transnational styles as well as local styles. This research explores the transition of women’s fashion in East Asia in modern and colonial conditions from the 1920s to the 1940s by analysing curricula and textbooks on dressmaking in comparison with the prevailing styles in each region. This is expected to suggest the impact of modernity in East Asia and the transnational styles of fashion in colonial Korea and Taiwan, as well as Japan, developed within the local culture. Colonial conditions are also discussed in terms of their impact and limitations in the transition of styles.

Key words good wife, Kokuminka (Japanization), modernity, colonialism, dressmaking education, transnational style.

Introduction

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the “new woman” was seen as a symbol of the modern era. Radical appearance was one of the movement’s more intriguing characteristics, along with a new way of thinking. The “new woman” was a worldwide phenomenon, no less so in the East than in the West.

In East Asia, this was a time when women also began adopting new styles from the West. These “new women” were at the vanguard of adopting new ways of living, and their “Western” appearance was the most noticeable manifestation of this phenomenon.

As a predicate to this movement, education served as a cradle for the development of the new

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woman in Asia and of this new cultural phenomenon. In Japan, state education for women started in 1872. In Korea, education for women began in 1886, particularly with the influence of American missionaries. By the 1920s, the number of female students had grown dramatically, and women's schools had become the centre for introducing and nurturing new perspectives.

One of the ideals of this new education was reflected in the expression, "Good Wife, Wise Mother." The modern view encouraged a scientific attitude in everyday life, and this was applied to women's education regarding housekeeping. The ideology of a woman's role as a "good wife" was as important in the East as in the West, and perhaps traditionally more so. As a result, housekeeping-or "home economics"-became an important subject in the school curriculum for women's education. The curriculum for female students differed from that of their male counterparts as early as elementary level, where subjects such as housekeeping, dressmaking, and handicrafts constituted the main part of a young girl's education, and this gender-based curriculum continued well into middle and high school. Later, under Japanese colonialism, even greater emphasis was placed on these "female" subjects as a means of furthering vocational training for industry.

At the same time, however, the same dressmaking taught as part of the core curriculum for young girls also provided an opportunity to learn new ways of Western dress, which they would later adopt in young adulthood. Similarly, the adoption of new technology for production allowed for the adoption of new styles. In this way, women's education functioned as a conduit for both new technology and new styles during the East's early modernization period. Previously, readymade clothes were uncommon, and people had to buy raw fabric to make their own clothing. The new technology of dressmaking - disseminated by the education system and by private classes often organized by private organizations - changed all that, and in the process allowed for the development and adoption of radically new styles of women's fashion.

Another key factor in this development was imposition of colonial rule in East Asia during this period. Both Korea and Taiwan came under Japanese colonial rule at the same time that modernization was becoming a major movement throughout the East. And with Japanese occupation came colonial control of the local education system. As a result, the development of fashion in East Asia during this period was the product of both modern and colonial circumstances and influences.

This paper explores the transition of women's fashion in East Asia under modern and colonial conditions from the 1920s to the 1940s by considering school curricula and textbooks on dressmaking during this period, and comparing them with the prevailing styles of those decades. The results suggest that the impact of modernity in East Asia and the transnational styles in fashion in colonial Korea, colonial Taiwan, and colonialist Japan all developed within the framework of local culture, even as colonial conditions influenced the transition in styles.

Female Education in East Asia and Colonial Japan: The Central Role of Housekeeping in Women's Education

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The development of an ideology of the “good wife” as the ultimate object of women’s education during the colonial period had its roots in colonialist Japan but found ready soil in the traditional cultures of East Asia. With Japan’s Government General exercising control over colonial Korea and Taiwan, this ideology became the basis of colonial education policy as well. Since Korean and Taiwanese culture both shared a Confucian legacy in which the role of women was often limited to domestic matters, this new colonial ideology and education system were readily implanted in the fertile soil of the local culture.

Under colonial education policy, it was mandatory for female students to take housekeeping classes beginning in elementary school onwards, and apart from male students. Moreover, dressmaking was the most important element of the housekeeping curriculum. This curriculum began in elementary school, where young women were taught various subjects related to dressmaking. By secondary school, the curriculum divided into two types of education: regular high school for general education, and trade school for vocational instruction.

Even though there were differences in weekly hours, housekeeping classes constituted fully 10 percent or more of all coursework, and sometimes as much as 30 percent. In 1910, for example, students at vocational schools took 14 to 18 hours of dressmaking classes per week, while students at regular high schools took 4 hours (Noda et al., 1995, p. 21). By 1935, these figures had decreased only marginally, to 4 to 10 hours for students at vocational schools and 3 hours for students at regular secondary schools (Noda et al.). Likewise, in Taiwan, records from 1943 show that female students studied clothes-related subjects for 4 hours out of every 35-hour school week (Taiwān zongdufu, 1943). As early as 1909, dressmaking in Korea was the third most important subject in school, after Korean and Japanese (Gim et al., 2000, p. 95). (As a secondary school female student, one should take Korean-Chinese Language, Japanese language, and housekeeping, for five hours each in the first year student, five-four-four hours in the second, and two-four-four hours in the third year.) In contrast, the emphasis for male students was placed on history and mathematics (Joseonchongdokbu, 1909). In this manner, one can see the emphasis Japanese officials placed on dressmaking for female students in Korea and Taiwan as a reflection of gender differentiation and the importance of these subjects in colonial education policy (Jeong, 1993, p. 125). (Jeong Deokhee argued that more focus was put on technical practices such as dressmaking among the housekeeping-related curricula in women’s education in Korea under Japanese colonialism because Japan intended to educate Korean women as factory workers-to-be with technical skills.)

The “good wife” ideology was also not only reinforced by the educational systems in Korea and Taiwan; it was also part of colonial assimilation policy. Beginning in the 1910s, Japan embarked on a colonial policy of assimilation, and to better assimilate its colonial subjects, colonial policy initially targeted women “of low self-consciousness.” This eventually culminated in Tokyo’s “Japanization” policy toward Korea and Taiwan in the 1930s. Under this assimilation policy, Korean and Taiwanese women

were seen as pillars of the family whose roles were to assist in larger colonial policy, which saw Korea and Taiwan as an extended family of Japan. Here, women's domestic roles were particularly accentuated (Gim et al, 2000, p. 98), as seen in the remarks made by Terauchi Masatake (寺内正毅), Japan's first Governor General in Korea, who announced on November 1, 1911, that the formation of Korean education "aims to equip the qualification of loyal subjects ... especially in women's education, which is needed to develop virtuous and gentle women." (Hashisawa, 1989)

What Did School Textbooks Include?

In 1895, the Korean government issued an edict on the country's educational system that included a regulated curriculum that made sewing classes compulsory for female elementary students. In 1904, the Ewha Girls School in Seoul adopted a curriculum for middle school students that incorporated dressmaking as a key component of its education program. During this period, dressmaking, sewing, and handicrafts were required subjects in primary school, but only for girls. By 1911, regulations for secondary school dictated that female students were to be instructed in basic needlework, the sewing of "normal" clothing, and cutting and repairing fabric, as well as how to use a sewing machine and how to care for clothing (Joseonchongdokbu, 1911). From these regulations, it is unclear what "normal" clothes referred to.

In the case of Korea, primary school textbooks were controlled by the Ministry of Education (*Hakbu*, 學部) and Japan's Government General, but all textbooks were published by the Governor General. Schools could use textbooks approved by either the Government General or the Ministry (Joseonchongdokbu, 1911), but interestingly textbooks on technical subjects, including housekeeping, were not written locally but were translated from foreign textbooks. For instance, two textbooks on home economics, *Hanmun-gajeonghak* (漢文家政學, 1907) and *Sinpan-gajeonghak* (新版家政學), were approved for use in 1910, but both were actually translations from the Chinese written by *Wu, Rulun* (吳汝綸), which itself was a translation from the original written by Shimoda Utako (下田歌子) in Japan (Jun, 2005). In this way, school textbooks became a mechanism for colonial assimilation in East Asia. Japanese control over education also applied to Taiwan. The Governor General established a modern education system and published textbooks. In this way, the content of textbooks was shared among Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

The contents of these textbooks ranged from basic sewing technique to dressmaking. Beginning with simple aprons, one of the most basic forms of dress and involving a minimum amount of sewing, these textbooks featured instruction on Western undergarments and Japanese clothes such as socks and other basic forms of clothing. According to one study in 1928, the beginning curriculum of dressmaking in Korea was centered on Japanese clothing (*wafuku*, 和服), with Western dress introduced in the sixth year of elementary school (Makino, 1928).

Korean textbooks also included Korean dressmaking for Korean-style jackets (*jeogori*) and trousers (*baji*) (Son, 1931). (From the fourth year in elementary school, students were taught how to make aprons; gowns, skirts, and Japanese socks in the fifth year, and Korean jacket and trousers in the sixth year.) Another Korean textbook, *Joseon Jaebong Jeonseo* (朝鮮裁縫全書), published in 1925, included

dressmaking instruction for Western undergarments, neckties, manteau, and aprons, in addition to Korean clothing (Gim, 1925, p. 19, 107, see Figures 1 & 2). Another example is the textbook *Joseonjaebong-changoseo* (朝鮮裁縫參考書), published in 1925 by Son, Jeonggyu (孫貞奎), a faculty member at Gyeongseong. Even though this text was written in Japanese, its contents were dedicated to Korean dressmaking (Son, 1925).

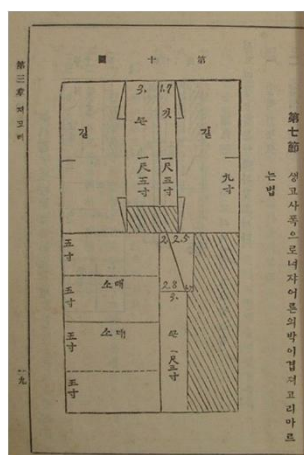


Figure 1.
Pattern making for women's *jeogori* from
Joseon Jaebong Jeonseo

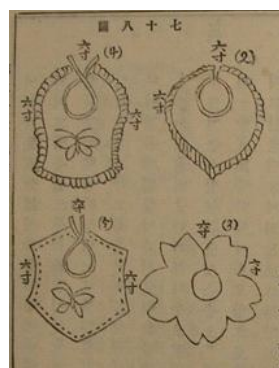


Figure 2.
Patterns for babies' bibs from
Joseon Jaebong Jeonseo

The contents of those textbooks concerned with dressmaking included instruction on Western-style dressmaking, undergarments, and children's wear popular in East Asia. It is difficult to find any specific emphasis on Western dressmaking (Yim, 1937, p. 88, see Figure 3) (Monbushō 文部省, 1932, p. 42, see Figure 4). Rather, women generally accepted the basic concepts of Western dressmaking more than the dressmaking techniques themselves. Thus, women in East Asia adopted Western undergarments even as they maintained traditional Asian dress on the outside. As Uno Yasako argues, Western dress was not as widely adopted as was the knowledge of Western dressmaking (Uno, 1997).

Interestingly, an early focus of adopting Western styles was in children's dress. Traditionally, garments in Korea and Japan were taken apart to be washed. Adopting Western-style children's dress for their children enabled mother's to save time and effort in washing their clothing (Nam, 1992).

However, by the 1940s, following the onset of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Japan began a campaign of encouraging national uniforms (*kokumin fuku*, 國民服) for men and standard garments (*fujin hyōjunfuku*, 婦人標準服) for women, including in colonial Korea and Taiwan. In textbooks published by Japan's Government General in Korea, *Joseonchongdokbu* (朝鮮總督府), in 1944, national uniforms joined the ranks of other types of clothing, such as aprons, nightgowns, and underskirts, as part of ele-



Figure 3.
Western-style undergarments in a Korean textbook;
chemise, bloomers, brassiere

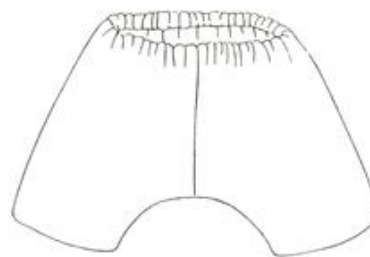


Figure 4.
Western-style undergarments in a Japanese textbook;
drawers

mentary school instruction. At the same time, students were increasingly taught how to use sewing machines (Joseonchongdokbu, 1944). In this way, colonial ideology was promoted through colonial education policy toward female students.

Women's Daily Wear

In contrast to men's clothing, women's clothing was not officially dictated by government policy, except in the somewhat tangential area of traditional foot binding in Taiwan. Rather, women's fashion was the result of voluntary adoption.

Even by the late 1930s, Western dress had not yet become a major part of daily life in Japan, at least not for Japanese women. According to a survey by the Japanese women's magazine *Fujinotomo* (婦人之友) in 1937, only a quarter of Japanese women regularly wore Western-style dress, and even this was largely limited to Japan's bourgeois class and to working women (Fujinnotomosha, 1937). Western-style dress was introduced to Japan in the late 19th century and gained some popularity in 1910s, but it was not truly integrated into everyday dress until the late 1940s. Examples of this early adoption of Western-style clothing include *apapa* (アッパッパ), or *kantanfuku* (簡単服), a loose, tunic-style dress popular in the 1920s, as well as other, standardized garments popular by the early 1940s (Koizumi, 2004). Most Japanese women, however, continued to wear Japanese-style dress (*wafuku*) during this period even as they adopted individual features of Western dress, the knowledge of which was

spread through the education system.

This pattern was also true in colonial Korea. Photos of Western dressmaking classes taken at the time depict Korean women in Korean-style dress, and those wearing Japanese-style dress often became the butt of satire and caricature (Chosunilbo, July 1935, see Figure 5) (Hwang, Jeongsu 黄貞秀, 1933, see Figure 6). In contrast, in Taiwan, Western, Japanese, and Taiwanese-style dress coexisted at the same time, with women actively adopting Western dress to avoid Japanese suppression, intellectuals adopting Chinese dress to preserve tradition, and those interacting with Japanese authority adopting Japanese dress to placate their colonial masters (Ye, 2005) (臺灣婦人界, 1934, 11, p. 7, see Figure 7).



Figure 5.
A group of Korean women in Korean-style dress after a western dress making class in Korea

School uniforms, too, had their own history, particularly for female students. Japan adopted Western-style school uniforms in 1919. In Korea, Sookmyung Girls' School was the first to adopt a Western-style uniform, in 1907, but it subsequently switched back to a Korean-style uniform. Most schools, though, adopted a modified Korean-style dress as their uniform, which later became a symbol of the "new woman" in Korea, before eventually adopting Western-style uniforms (fashioned in the Japanese style of the time) mandated by the colonial government in the late 1930s.

Interestingly, when the colonial government instructed that the baggy trousers developed for laborers known as *monpe* (もんぺ) could be worn as school dress, some schools adopted Western-style trousers just to avoid it. *Monpe* were initially developed in 1924 to provide functional work clothes in farming and became particularly widespread during the Sino-Japanese War in the late 1930s. They were later distributed in colonial Korea and Taiwan as functional wear for outdoor work and as a quick garment in the case of airraids or fires (Inoue et al., 2011).



Figure 6.
A caricature satiring Korean people in Japanese clothing or eclectic style



Figure 7.
The Women in Japanese-style dress at a western dress making research group in Taiwan

Dressmaking Classes Outside the Classroom

class women, with instruction provided by foreign instructors and a cache of cosmopolitan sophistication. Some elaborate illustrations witness this early period as shown below. (Ginkgo 松齋吟光, 1887, see Figure 8). Before long, however, dressmaking was taken up by male craftsman as a vocation and became part of public education for all classes (Koizumi, 2004).



Figure 8.
Illustration of ladies sewing (貴女裁縫之圖)

As Japanese came to understand the relative virtues of Western dress, several private institutes specializing in Western dressmaking opened in Japan. Bunka Gakuen is a good example (Bunkagakuen, 1984, see Figure 9). In addition to the general public pursuing the simple and functional features of Western dress, these institutes saw the industrial potential for such clothing. These schools were often run by graduates of foreign schools, while distributors of sewing machine companies such as Singer organized dressmaking classes for the public in order to promote the new technology.

In Korea, private institutes and women's groups began becoming popular in the 1920s, and from the late 1920s to early 1930s, classes on Western and Japanese dressmaking, handicrafts, and dyeing became widespread. Classes and events were held all over Korea and were often organized by sewing machine distributors and sponsored by paper companies (Chosunilbo, June 1935, see Figure 10). There were also classes and campaigns for colored clothing and fabric dyeing, which were not yet popular in Korea.

These developments were even more active in Taiwan, where the first school for Japanese and Western dressmaking, *Heyang caifeng jiaoshouhuo* (和洋裁縫教授所) was established in 1906, while other dressmaking schools, such as *Jijian caifengxueyan* (私立吉見裁縫學園), not only offered classes on Japanese and Western dressmaking but also had students who had already adopted these styles as their own fashion (Chen, 2009, see Figures 11 & 12, from *Sili jijian caifeng xué yuán zúyè jìniàn xiězhēn jí* 私立吉見裁縫學園卒業紀念寫真集 [Memorial Photo Album for Graduation: Jijian Dressmaking School],

requoted from Chen, 2009, pp. 62-63.)



Figure 9.
Bunka dress making school in the mid 1920s, Japan



Figure 10.
Public western dress making class arranged by Singer sewing machine company in Korea; women are wearing Korean clothing



Figure 11.
Japanese dress making class; students are wearing western clothing, Jijian Dress Making School, Taiwan



Figure 12.
Western dress making class; students are wearing either western or Japanese clothing, Jijian Dress Making School, Taiwan

The Education of Dressmaking and National Identity

During this period, much was forgiven for the sake of “modern” values. For instance, the campaign to adopt colored clothing in Korea, which was part of colonial Japan’s Life Improvement Movement, was not simply an effort to promote local dyeing techniques, but rather was part of a colonial policy of modernization. The campaign began in the early 1920s but the controversy over the campaign and its promotional advertising for dyeing classes did not ease until the late 1930s. The controversy was over Koreans’ traditional preference for natural or white fabric and the perception that colonial Japan was imposing the use of dyed clothing as a means of promoting “modern” virtues such as saving time and energy from frequent washing. This was seen as an extension of colonial ideology disguised as modernity, as a means of oppressing Korean national identity by replacing traditional white dress with new, rationalized dyed fashion. Not surprisingly, just as dressmaking classes were promoted by the distributors of sewing machines, so, too, were dyeing classes promoted by dye-making companies (Chosunilbo, 1938).

In colonial Korea, clothes were an important aspect of national identity. In 1927, teachers at Sookmyung Girls’ School went on strike against the Japanese faculty. One of the reasons for the strike was that a Japanese teacher had been assigned to teach Korean dressmaking (Sookmyunggusipnyeonsapyeonchansil, 1996). After the conflict, these teachers also dared to use *Joseon Jaebong Jeonseo* (see above) as their textbook for dressmaking classes. This book, written in 1925 by Gim Sookdang, a former teacher in dressmaking at Sookmyung, focused on Korean dressmaking and was not approved by the colonial Government General.

Compared to Korea, however, Taiwan was rather generous in adopting Japanese-style dress, which appears to have been a particularly Taiwan phenomenon (Hansen, 2010). (According to Hansen, “...when Korea was a Japanese colony (1910 - 1945), all markers of Korean cultural identity, including the use of the spoken and written Korean language and the wearing of the national hanbok costume, were ruthlessly suppressed. In contrast, in the Japanese colony of Taiwan (ruled 1895 - 1945), there was no readily identifiable national dress, and so the Japanese authorities did not pay particular attention to what Taiwanese people wore.” However, in Taiwan, many Taiwanese were also reluctant to adopt Japanese dress.)

This can be seen in the photos of Taiwanese women in Japanese clothing, as shown above. This development is partially the result of the unique composition of the mix of Taiwanese ethnicities and their conceptualization of “national” dress during this period. Without the strong nationalist loyalty to the old Qing dynasty, Taiwanese would likely have preferred to keep the legacy of the Han people (Yang, 2007). This conceptualization of what constituted “national” dress actually provided more options to adopt new styles of the era, including Japanese clothing.

Conclusion

In the first half of the 20th century, dressmaking became a central component of women’s education throughout East Asia and was solidly based on the ideology of the “good wife.” Politically, this was re-

inforced by Japan's Kokuminka Movement and its colonial assimilation policy toward Korea and Taiwan. Japan also directed its colonial policies toward women using the "good wife" ideology to strategically integrate its male subjects into the colonial experience.

Japan's colonial Government General had complete control over colonial education administration, and both school curricula and textbooks were heavily regulated and required approval for publication. The content of education was seen as a delicate matter, with national dress a visual symbol of national identity.

In the colonial context, curricula and textbooks for dressmaking-related subjects were a powerful control mechanism for women's education and a means of colonial governance and expansion. Regulation of dress was also a form of control over national identity. However, this did not lead to complete control. There were varying responses to this effort in Korea and Taiwan. Koreans largely tried to maintain their national dress; Taiwanese witnessed a growing diversity of styles, including both Western and Japanese dress. But in both countries, as in Japan itself, female education was a means for negotiating modernity and colonial ideology in terms of curricula, textbooks, and uniforms.

In Korea, Western dress did not become widely popular through the education system alone, because Western dress shared the stage with Japanese and traditional dress throughout the colonial period. However, during this period Korean students learned basic concepts of Western clothing and adopted Western dress in the form of children's wear and undergarments, even if Western-style dress itself was still not widely worn.

Nevertheless, dressmaking within the educational system in East Asia during the colonial period was a focus of conflict in the context of modernity, colonialism, gender politics, and industrialization.

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