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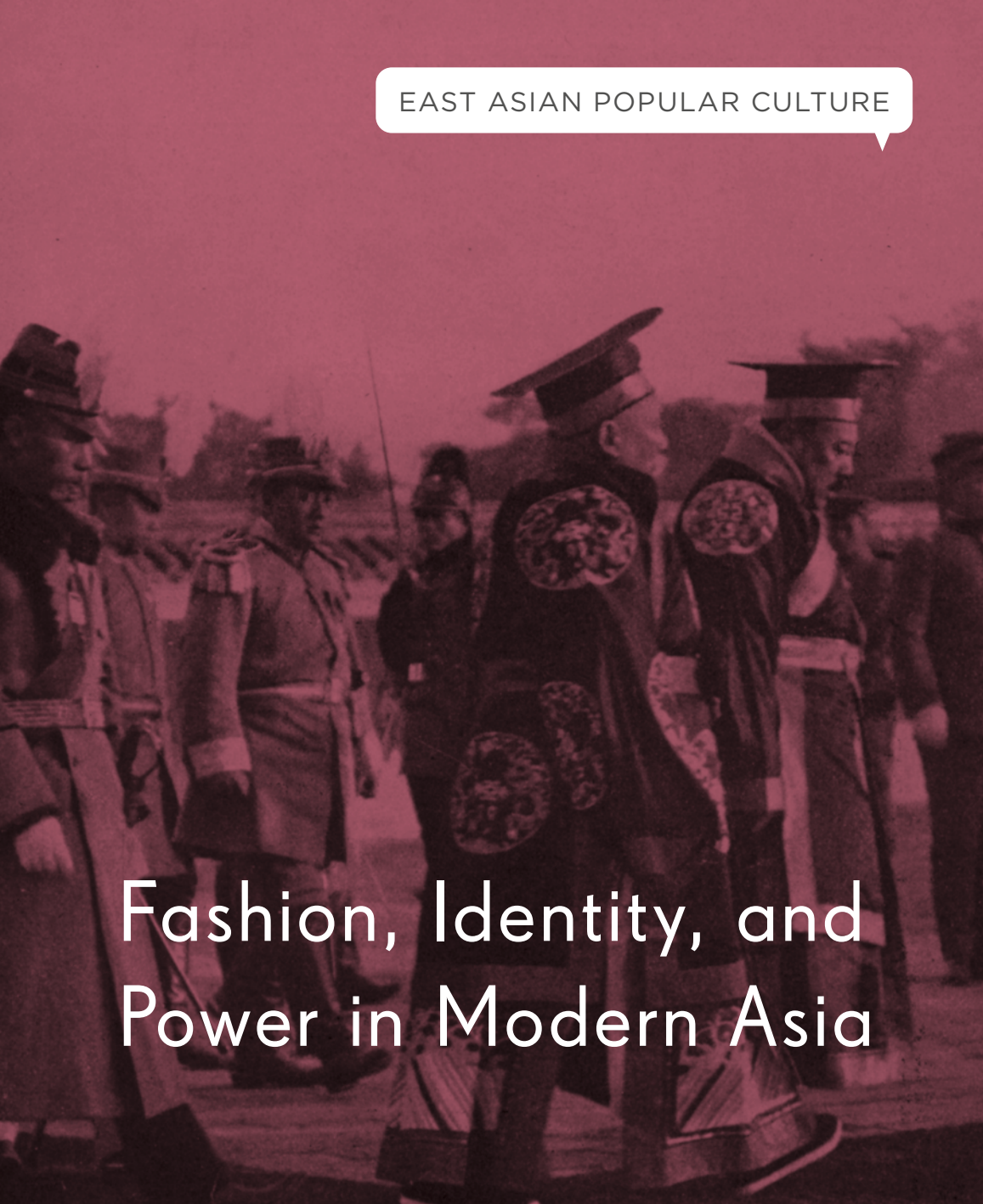

Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia

EDITED BY **KYUNGHEE PYUN & AIDA YUEN WONG**

East Asian Popular Culture

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East Asian Popular Culture
ISBN 978-3-319-97198-8 ISBN 978-3-319-97199-5 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97199-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018950049

Cover credit: Emperor Yuan Shikai's Ceremony at the Temple of the Heaven in The World's Work, Volume XXXI, Number 4 (February 1916)

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of four years of collaborative thinking and idea testing at various conferences and lectures held at the Korean Cultural Service (New York, 2014), the Fashion Institute of technology (New York, 2014), the Association for Asian Studies Conference (Seattle, 2015), the 10th International Conference on Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS) (Taipei, 2016), and Stony Brook University (Long Island, 2017). Besides those participants who were also contributors to this volume, we would like to thank the co-organizers (with Kyunghee Pyun) of the FIT lecture series ("Primary Sources in Costume/Textile History and Design", http://pscth.tumblr.com/), Lourdes Font and Justine De Young, as well as the student coordinators Ester Kwon, Yilin Chen, and Michelle Porrazzo. Lourdes and Justine were kind enough to keep Pyun informed of the scholarship on costume history and provide valuable guidance on the project.

Staff at the Fashion Institute of Technology worked tirelessly behind the scenes, providing archival and image assistance. We are especially indebted to Molly Schoen (Visual Resources Curator), Nanja Andriananjason (Technologist in the Department of History of Art), and Helen Lane (Assistant Professor-Librarian, Emerging Technologies), who was instrumental in locating a rare book and an arcane reference. Staff at the Gladys Marcus Library at FIT were resourceful in getting interlibrary loans. Anna Blume, a dear colleague, has been a thoughtful listener during the entire process of this book. Her encouragement kept Pyun on her path. Giacomo Oliva (Vice President of Academic Affairs)

has been pivotal in making this project a success. He initiated a pilot program called "Release Time for Research" along with the FIT Faculty Senate Sabbatical Committee in 2014–2015. Pyun became one of the first recipients, which enabled the reduction of her teaching load during fall 2015 in order to focus on research.

Pyun would like to thank Laura Hein, Chair of the Northeast Asia Council (NEAC) at the Association for Asia Studies, for granting her short-term research travel grant in February 2017. With this grant, Pyun visited the National Folk Art Museum and the National Palace Museum of Korea and met with curators and conservators. Pyun acknowledges Sunyoung Kim (Textile Conservator at the National Palace Museum of Korea) and Eunsoo Choi (Curator of Costumes at the National Folk Art Museum) for their guidance on clothing provenance. Hyesoon Shin, the founder and Executive Director of the Korean Museum of Modern Costume, was enormously knowledgeable about trade organizations and pioneers of modern dress in Korea through her mother, Choi Kyung-ja (1911–2010). Minjung Lee, a costume designer and Professor of Fashion Studies at the Korea University, provided optimism and encouragement.

In addition, we are indebted to the following colleagues for encouraging this project at various stages: Yunah Lee, Sarah Cheang, Elizabeth Kramer, Antonia Finnane, and Jan Bardsley. They share our faith in the significance of in-depth research on dress reforms in East Asia from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

Furthermore, Pyun is grateful to Jinyoung Kim Jin, the Director of Cultural Programs at the Charles B. Wang Center, Stony Brook University. She was not only helpful in locating photographic sources of modern clothing in Korea but was also instrumental in bringing experts of costume history to New York. Director Jin and Pyun co-organized an international conference, *Documenting Korean Costume: Primary Sources and New Interpretations*, which was funded by the Academy of Korean Studies and hosted at the Charles B. Wang Center, Stony Brook University in March 2017. Minjee Kim and Curator Hyonjeong Kim Han were resourceful in helping identify museum collections that hold Korean dresses and costume accessories. Kim was especially influential on Pyun's research and interpretation. She not only read early drafts of Pyun's essay but also introduced her to costume historians teaching at major universities in Korea. Similarly, Kyungmi Joo provided critical advice on the scope of research in this volume. Wen-chien Cheng,

Curator of Chinese art at the Royal Ontario Museum, has also been supportive of this project since 2016.

Yuka Okanda and Anne Ishii provided essential service in the translation of Osakabe's essay and ongoing communication with him in Japanese.

This project would not have been possible without the support from Aida Yuen Wong's colleagues in the Department of Fine Arts and the Theodore and Jane Norman Fund for Faculty Research and Creative Projects at Brandeis University.

A special thank you goes to Nick Hall for his expert editorial eye and historical knowledge. His suggestions have greatly improved the flow and content of the book. In the final stages of the manuscript preparation, Stella Sohyun Kim (MA in Classical Studies, Brandeis University) provided a range of valuable assistance, from formatting to reference checks, from multiple communications with authors to image preparations. She tackled every task with great passion and attention to detail. Nick and Stella deserve our deep appreciation.

Most of all, thank you to all our contributing authors! Your knowledge has enabled the realization of an ambitious concept of writing a multi-centered history with many intersecting issues across the East Asian region. We are grateful for your scholarship, patience, and professionalism. It is hoped that this book will spark further research in the relatively neglected but critical topic of dress history in Asia.

It was a pleasure working with Shaun Vigil, Glenn Ramirez, and their team at Palgrave Macmillan. Their receptiveness, enthusiasm, and guidance from concept to publication were most reassuring.

We would like to express our gratitude to the individuals and institutions who granted the image copyrights. Every effort has been made to reach rights holders, but where this has not proved possible to date, the authors and publisher will be happy to hear from any copyright holders who wish to get in touch.

Finally, Pyun would like to thank her husband, Jin and children, Justin and Alex for sharing her enthusiasm and enabling her to focus on this project. Wong would like to acknowledge her husband, Alfred, for providing a caring, incomparable environment conducive to reflection.

Kyunghee Pyun
Aida Yuen Wong

Contents

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Yoshinori Osakabe is Professor of History at Nihon University, Japan, in the College of Commerce. He is author of the *Meiji Restoration of Clothes, Haircut and De-Sword System* (2010). That book was translated into Korean by Kyungmee Lee and Michiyo Nomura. He received his Ph.D. in Japanese history from Chūō University, Japan.

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Gary Wang is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History and Jackman Junior Fellow in the Humanities at the University of Toronto, Canada. He received an MA degree in Asian Studies from the University of British Columbia, Canada. His main area of research is the art, visual, and material culture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China with a focus on shifting notions of art, beauty, and the body, all of which are considered in relation to issues of gender, sexuality, and class. These themes were explored in his MA thesis and publication, "Making 'Opposite-Sex' Love in Print: Discourse and Discourse in *Linglong Women's Pictorial Magazine*, 1931–1937," *NAN NÜ: Men, Women and Gender in China* 11.2 (November 2011). They are being explored further in his Ph.D. dissertation, tentatively titled "Modern Girls and Musclemen: Body Politics and the Politics of Art in China's New Culture, 1917–1954."

Aida Yuen Wong is Nathan Cummings and Robert B. and Beatrice C. Mayer Professor in Fine Arts at Brandeis University, USA. She is a scholar of Asian art history who has written extensively on transcultural modernism. Among her major publications are *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China* (2006), the edited volume *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia* (2012), and *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (2016). She is the author of the essay on "Modernism: China" in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (2014). Her areas of research include painting, calligraphy, seal carving, fashion, institutional history, and historiography.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Kyunghee Pyun and Aida Yuen Wong

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Fashion history is a fertile terrain for encapsulating issues of gender and the body, power and control, commerce and manufacturing, and art and popular culture. This collection of fourteen essays on East Asia ca. 1880s–1960s presents not only the familiar kimono, *qipao*, and *hanbok*, but also lesser-known developments in military and school uniforms, religious vestments, ritual garments, accessories, and textile trades. Fashion—whether referring to its neutral synonyms of garments/clothing/dress or to the embodiments of change and allure[1]—is presented here as a heterogeneous medium to which East Asians widely and repeatedly turned to assert allegiances, influence behaviors, and reshape society. For our purpose, fashion (including clothing, hair, accessories, and fabrics) was not limited to the pursuit of chicness among the moneyed class. Prevalent struggles, such as whether and to what extent Western styles should be adopted, fired up debates on a national, even

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K. Pyun and A. Y. Wong (eds.), *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia*, East Asian Popular Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97199-5_1

international, level. Who could wear what was seldom a one-person decision. Modernizers, colonizers, and sovereigns privileged certain fashion practices to their own goals, and others followed. In volatile times, the maintenance of traditional attire and accouterments could represent a form of resistance across the political spectrum, but it could equally be made to serve authoritarianism. *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia* focuses on the transitional states of late Qing to early Republican China, Meiji to Taishō Japan, colonial Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, where imaginations collided.

Asian fashion history has a robust material foundation in the West. Chinese dragon robes, Japanese kimono, and Korean *hanbok* have long been collected by institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History and the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM, renowned for maritime trade arts) and by mainstream fine arts museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. For a long time, however, items of Asian clothing were largely seen by non-Asians as ethnic costumes, classified under textiles and the decorative arts. This background does not take away from the related scholarship produced on materials, dyes, motifs, and production processes,[2] aspects to which contributors to this book pay close attention too. In the West, Asian clothing articles were first marketed as curiosities—in Chinatowns, for example. While certain clothing types, such as costumes of the Noh theater, eventually garnered attention as objects of art with complex histories, many Asian historical garments including the kimono first encountered Western viewers at souvenir boutiques or world expositions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] In these contexts, the deeper significance of garments as markers of rank, wealth, marital status, metaphysics, cultural nationalism, and so forth tended to be poorly accounted for.

More problematic is when museums in the twenty-first century still subject Asian fashion to superficial, Orientalizing readings. It is not uncommon to see kimono being exhibited with Japanese swords and armors, reflecting the parochial fascination with samurai culture. But audiences are becoming more critical. In 2015, controversies rose up around Claude Monet's 1876 *La Japonaise* (Camille Monet wearing a blond wig and a bright red kimono), when the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, invited visitors to don a replica kimono and stand in front of the painting to have their pictures taken.[4] This type of presentation

reinforces certain Asian stereotypes also seen in movie characterizations such as the kimono-clad assassin O-Ren Ishii in *Kill Bill* (2003), which also features the *qipao*-clad Sofie Fatale. Fortunately, scholarly research on kimono is increasingly available in English, such as, recently, Anna Jackson's *Kimono: The Art and Evolution of Japanese Fashion* (2015) and Terry Satsuki Milhaupt's *Kimono: A Modern History* (2014).[5]

In recent years, blockbuster museum exhibitions in honor of Western fashion designers or celebrity wearers at Fine Arts museums have gradually helped to widen the discourse. Inquisitive curators want to tell alternative stories about creativity and agency. A representative recent exhibition was "Georgia O'Keeffe: Art, Image, and Style" at the Peabody Essex Museum where O'Keeffe's clothing was presented as reflecting her modernist aesthetic and reinforcing the austere public persona she so keenly cultivated.[6] The performative aspect of fashion as integral to the larger oeuvre of an artist will also be the theme of a major show on Frida Kahlo at the Victoria and Albert Museum (June–November 2018). While delving into overlooked connections, these exhibitions seek to inscribe new significance to fashion and self-fashioning.

Asian clothing history appears to be on the cusp of similar revisions. In the past decade or so, for example, museums have attempted to re-narrate the history of Chinese textiles from scholarly perspectives.[7] A more notable accomplishment is *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (2008) by Antonia Finnane, who excavates dresses from printed sources from the late Qing dynasty to the Cultural Revolution of the People's Republic of China.[8] Taking a specific view on "fashion," Finnane tightens the links between the shifting nature of people's dress to major sociopolitical events. The present volume is aligned with Finnane's approach. Similarly emphasizing a sociopolitical framework is *Visualizing Beauty: Gender and Ideology in Modern East Asia* (2012) edited by Aida Yuen Wong. While focusing on the constructs of "traditional women" and "new women," essays in that volume draw upon a diverse range of sources such as fashion journals, interior design magazines, newspaper illustrations, and paintings of and by women. Concepts of beauty and womanhood in changing societies did impact the way women dressed themselves. And, like *Visualizing Beauty*, the present book brings together materials on China, Japan, and Korea. This opens up a broader transcultural perspective than attempted previously on the topic of Asian fashion.[9] Another distinguishing feature of this book is the

special efforts made by leading dress historians to treat fashion items as primary sources, adding new insights to information derived from visual analyses and textual descriptions. But in the end, this collaborative volume seeks to break the artificial boundaries between art history, fashion history, visual cultural studies, economic and political history, and gender studies. Woman's history has evolved since the fall of the Qing in 1911, the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), or the fall of the Joseon dynasty and the Korean Empire or the Daehan Empire (1897–1910). The 1910s marked the beginning of women's suffrage activities in China, while the 1919 March First Movement in colonial Korea had many female supporters. Although modern dress reforms impacted both males and females, their evolution could not be divorced from women's participation in social reforms.

Dress reform was not a uniquely East Asian phenomenon. Patricia Cunningham has placed new fashions in relation to the promotion of women's health and their social role in Europe and America at the turn of the twentieth century.[10] Several scholars define dress reform movements in the West in conjunction with women's suffrage.[11] From the 1850s to the 1890s, women in Victorian England called for liberation from opulent or irrational fashion styles, which continued into the Progress Era in the USA from the 1890s to the 1920s. Social activists proposed a rational design for women's dress, covering the body comfortably without restricting daily activities. Nonetheless, women's dresses remained largely decorative and not conducive to active lifestyles. For example, Gayle Fischer demonstrates how women wearing pantaloons were judged rebellious or unconventional.[12] Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818–1894), an advocate of women's rights and temperance, was associated with the so-called Bloomers, referring to those women who favored loose-fitting trousers instead of a skirt worn with a short jacket. Emancipation from corsets, crinolines, or bustles was a long and laborious process. Less-restrictive wear was sanctioned for women who worked in the fields, but women like Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919) were arrested for wearing pants in 1866.[13]

Historically, extensive dress reforms tended to go hand-in-hand with forced political changes. The second half of the nineteenth century, the starting point of this book, was a tumultuous time not just for Asia but also for Europe and North America. The Civil War in the USA had just ended in 1865, while Japan entered a new era with the demise of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868. A little over a decade before,