The Evolution of Korean Costume: Urban Korean Women’s Shift From Traditional to Western Clothing in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945

A Capstone Submitted to the University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Honors

Department Of

History

By

Keeley E. Shoudel

DeKalb, Illinois

Fall 2019
University Honors Program
Capstone Faculty Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type):

The Evolution of Korean Costume: Urban Korean Women’s Shift From Traditional to Western Clothing in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945

Student Name (print or type): Keeley Shoudel

Faculty Supervisor (print or type): ____ Natalie Joy ___________________

Faculty Approval Signature: _______________________

Department of (print or type): History

Date of Approval (print or type): December 8, 2019

Date and Venue of Presentation: December 5, 2019, Honors Celebration Day

Check if any of the following apply, and please tell us where and how it was published:

☐ Capstone has been published (Journal/Outlet):

_____________________________________________________________________________

☐ Capstone has been submitted for publication (Journal/Outlet):

_____________________________________________________________________________

Completed Honors Capstone projects may be used for student reference purposes, both electronically and in the Honors Capstone Library (CLB 110).

If you would like to opt out and not have this student’s completed capstone used for reference purposes, please initial here: _______ (Faculty Supervisor)
This paper is about the fashion shift urban Korean women made from the traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing in the colonial period (1910-1945). In this paper, I argue that urban Korean women shifted their fashion from traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing because of American missionaries and internal social changes rather than influences from Japan. For this paper, I looked at translated primary sources as I do not read Korean. These sources include magazine articles, cartoons, pictures, interviews with Korean women who were in colonial Korea at some point in their life, and missionary books that were written about colonial Korea. In addition to these, I looked at secondary sources that dealt with Japanese influence, American missionaries, and internal social changes. This paper is significant because understanding a population’s fashion and the changes it undergoes can give us insight into their lives and how they felt about certain topics like religion, politics, and new ideas, which are all discussed in this paper. This paper also highlights the significance of learning about the history of women, a subject that is too many times dismissed, belittled, and ignored.
In 1910 the Joseon dynasty ended as Japan took control of Korea, still one country at this point in time, and made it a colony of the Japanese Empire that was expanding more and more. It would not be until Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in 1945 during World War II that Korea would be out of Japanese control. However, before this, the Japanese were a driving force of change in Korea, including through language, religion, and, possibly, fashion. Like most fashion, Korean fashion has evolved and changed substantially in the last one hundred years. Movies like *The Great Gatsby* and *Grease* can show you the monumental fashion evolution in America within just thirty years, no matter the complete accuracy, or lack thereof, in the costumes. However, unlike America’s drastic fashion changes in the early 1900s, Korea’s fashion shifted only slightly in the first forty-five years of the 1900s. While this has been thought of and talked about plenty of times, there seems to be a section of the population in Korea, like most of the world, that gets forgotten. This section is women. The history of women is always downplayed in favor of the history of men, as this topic usually has more sources and scholarly work on it. However, this paper will be about women. Specifically, this paper will focus on urban Korean women in the colonial period (1910-1945) and the shift in their fashion from the traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing.¹

Fashion has been a topic that has been written about in many different cultures, eras, and more. There is even a focus on it for historians. Fashion historians are one of the few historians the public has consistent contact with. This is because of fashion historians’ role in multimedia projects and costume design. This topic is one of the few fashion eras that has not been written

---
¹ Romanization of Korean words is done in many ways, but I will be using the Revised Romanization of Korean system which is the official Korean language Romanization system in South Korea. Any cited material that uses a different Romanization system will be shown as the way the author Romanizes it.
about a lot. This is a shame because learning about Korea’s fashion history can not only tell us about their societal change and why their society functions the way it does today, but it can also tell us about how the country responds to outside forces. In this paper, I will be focusing on why colonial urban Korean women decided to start wearing Western-style clothing instead of the traditional *hanbok* (한복) clothing, and what the main reasons for this change were.

When all of this is combined, an argument of this or that being more influential when it came to the shift of fashion for urban women in colonial Korea comes to light. While different people have come up with different combinations of reasons as to why this shift happened, I have created my own. I argue that while the outside influence from Japan was a driving factor for the change in urban Korean women’s clothing, American missionaries and internal social changes were the main reasons why these women changed their clothing from traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing.

This paper is significant because understanding why women in the colonial period were hanging up their *hanbok* (한복) in favor of western-style clothing is important in learning how Koreans today think about their own culture and how they express being Korean through other actions. One of the main arguments against school uniforms in schools around the world is that it stifles the ability of children and teenagers to express themselves through their clothes. This can be translated as fashion being not only the threads you wear on your body, but also its bigger meaning and significance. By knowing how a population’s clothing style has changed, why this change might have happened can be investigated, giving us insight into their religion, economic problems or growth, and even their societal makeup.

For instance, Christianity in Korea emerged in the 17th century, and later introduced women to a newfound love of making choices for their bodies, being open to going out into the
public sphere, and even the possibility of getting a job. Economic growth made textiles better and more extravagant, introducing more color and smaller details in fabrics. Economic problems can be seen through the amount of new clothing a family or person gets and the quality of the fabrics being bought. The change of the tight bodice of the hanbok (한복) to a looser blouse can tell us about the change from private duties to public jobs for women.

The clothing a certain group wears can show us more than what they see as beautiful and attractive. Learning about the reasons for the change of traditional clothing to Western can explain why Korea wanted or needed to change. In addition, a new wave of “updated” casual hanbok (한복) is coming onto the fashion scene in Korea recently. For both men and women, the Korean public has looked into their traditional clothing for new ideas about fashion. Modern women have been changing the hanbok (한복) to reflect new styles like blouse-like tops that are tucked into a skirt that goes above the knee. While these updated styles are popular and trendy, the traditional style for times like first birthdays, holidays, and special occasions has not changed. With a shift in nationalistic and traditional values and with the overwhelming popularity of Korean media, Hallyu, the Korean public feels like it is time to bring the hanbok (한복) back into popular fashion. This time, however, it is an updated version that suits the needs and wants of the 2019 market.

In order to make a convincing argument about this topic, I have looked at magazine articles, cartoons, pictures, interviews with Korean women who were born or lived in the colonial period in Korea, and missionary books that all are about or from the colonial period in Korea. One of the main sources I am using is Hyaeweol Choi’s book New Women in Colonial
Korea that was published in 2013. In this book, Hyaeweol Choi compiled and translated key archival material, including cartoons and magazine articles, concerning the development in Korea during the late 19th century and the early 20th century of the New Woman, a term given to women who were considered “modern” and focused on education. These cartoons and magazine articles were written by women and men and range in topics from gender equality and chastity to fashion and even hygiene. In addition to Hyaeweol Choi’s book, I have looked at Sunae Park’s dissertation titled, “Reactions of Korean Women Who Adopted Western-Style Dress in the Acculturation Period of 1945-1962: An Oral History,” and completed in 1988. In her dissertation, Park conducted a series of interviews with women who lived in Korea during or after the colonial period. In the beginning of Park’s dissertation, she says that her study consisted of interviewing twenty-four Korean women over the age of fifty who used to live in Korea, but now live in the United States. The focus of these interviews is the clothing these women wore, saw, and were expected to wear from society. This dissertation is a good source of direct answers and thoughts on fashion at the time from women who lived and experienced the shift in fashion from traditional to Western-style.

The historiography that I looked at for this topic can be put into three categories based on the cause of the change from *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing. These categories are Japanese influence, American missionaries, and internal social change. The effects missionaries had on Korean fashion can be seen in some of the secondary sources I encountered, but the influence the missionaries had is downplayed. Sunae Park, Patricia Warner, and Thomas

---

Fitzgerald’s article “The Process of Westernization” published in 1993 argues that the change from *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing came about after World War II. However, Park, Warner, and Fitzgerald also say that this change was possible because of the social changes that emerged from the occupation of Japan and American missionaries.⁵ Along with this piece, there are multiple scholars that suggest that missionaries and their ideas of freedom and modernity had an effect on women and the way they saw themselves in society. Along with this comes the changing of fashion, or as Theodore Jun Yoo said in his 2008 book, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea*, the right for women to choose their physical appearance instead of the society or the powerful figures in their lives choosing what they are supposed to look like.⁶

Along with the missionaries, Japanese influence is a factor to consider when it comes to the changing of women’s fashion in colonial Korea. Park, Warner, and Fitzgerald’s article aforementioned also looks into the Japanese influence of industrialization and how the labor force shifted because of this.⁷ In E. Taylor Atkins’ *Primitive Selves* book published in 2010, he includes a review on a Japanese ethnographic writer who published a book about Korean clothing in 1927. In this book, Murayama, the writer, is baffled over the Koreans and their unwillingness to drop their *hanbok* (한복) and go to Western-style clothing. He admits that Western-style clothing is more expensive, but he says that they, the Koreans, must keep in mind things like “evaluations of resilience, ease of manufacture, and, most importantly, labor wasted

---

in constant laundering” when it came to the *hanbok* (한복). This not only shows the Japanese perspective of the *hanbok* (한복) still being worn, but it could also be some of the reasons why Koreans chose to start wearing *hanbok* (한복) less and less, especially with the Japanese occupation.

Social change in Korea is also a factor for the change of the *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing. In his article “Fashioning Modernity” published in 2004, Hyunggu Lynn argues that Western clothing did not become normal for the vast majority of Koreans in the colonial period. Instead, Lynn argues that instead of saying the majorital change from *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing happened in the colonial era, it is more accurate to say that the social changes and the new “language” of clothing spurred on the change of fashion in the colonial time period. This can tell us that Lynn thinks that the social changes, like Christianity bringing forth higher education for women, freedom to wear what women want to wear, women joining the workforce, popular culture influence, studying abroad and bringing back Western culture, etc., in Korea might have changed the thought process of a lot of colonial Korean women when it came to fashion, but the vast majority of Korean women did not wear Western-style clothing until later in the country’s history. Along with this, Samuel Songhoon Lee’s book *Hanbok: Timeless Fashion Tradition*, published in 2013, argues in a chapter that the change of women’s fashion from *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing was mostly because of the inconvenience of the

---

hanbok (한복) and the need for a style that fit their social activity needs, work, going out in the public sphere in general, etc., that were changing and developing in the colonial period.¹⁰

Unlike the scholars aforementioned, my paper highlights the importance of missionaries and the overall societal change that happened in Korea in the colonial period. The missionaries played a larger role in the shift in urban Korean women’s clothing than what some of these scholars say. In addition to this, I also highlight the ideas and beliefs that the Korean public started to adapt. These ideas and beliefs include rights of women, freedom, and gender equality. The scholars I mentioned discuss these ideas and beliefs as well, but I argue that they play a main role in the fashion change of urban Korean women in this time period.

In order to understand certain changes in the fashion of the urban Korean woman’s wardrobe from hanbok (한복) to a more Western-style, what Korea as a country looked like in the colonial period must be established. The colonial period of Korea refers to the time in Korean history when the country was under the control of the Japanese Empire. This time period ranges from 1910 to 1945 when the Japanese surrendered to the Allies in World War II. One of the main reasons the Japanese annexed Korea and made it a colony was because of the massive debts the Korean government owed them.¹¹ In addition to this, a Korean nationalist assassinated Itō Hirobumi, Japan’s first prime minister and the “first resident-general in Korea,” in 1909.¹² In 1910, Korea became an official colony of the Japanese Empire.

¹² Ibid.
The first decade of Japanese rule was categorized as “ironfisted” by historian Charles Holcombe.\textsuperscript{13} This is because of the overwhelming number of Japanese colonists in Korea along with the harsh anti-Korean laws that were enacted. One law in particular made it hard for native Koreans to live their everyday lives. This law said that newspapers that were run by Koreans could not be written or published.\textsuperscript{14} In the early 20th century, magazines and newspapers were some of the most used products in day to day lives. The spreading of information through these texts was fast and accessible to the public. By banning Korean-owned magazines and newspapers, the Japanese stifled Korea’s population culturally and intellectually. By 1919, the Korean public had had enough. On March 1, 1919, the Korean public decided to fight back and protest.\textsuperscript{15} They were met with violence.\textsuperscript{16} However, the Japanese did see the advantage of ruling with a gentler approach and started cutting back on laws and practices that Korean natives hated. Korean-owned magazines and newspapers were allowed, Japanese “military soldiers” were switched out for untrained civilians who would no longer carry weapons at all times, and Korean businesses or companies could acquire subsidies if they met certain criteria.\textsuperscript{17} However, Holcombe mentions that while the Japanese police’s threats and violence seemed to have decreased, the police’s numbers increased, making it harder for native Koreans to go about their days without feeling as if they were being watched and monitored.\textsuperscript{18}

Fast forward a little over a decade, the Japanese Empire decided to start controlling Korea with harsher laws once again. In 1935, Holcombe says that “Korean worship at Japanese-style Shintō shrines became mandatory …” and by 1939, “all Koreans were required to take

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 246-247. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 247. \\
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Japanese-style names.”19 In addition to this, the Korean language started to become banned in certain areas of life between 1937 and 1939.20 These areas were the “government, public schools, and finally in the private press.”21 According to Hongyung Lee, Ha Yongchool, and Clark Sorensen, the Japanese officials even created evening classes to teach Japanese to the Korean public.22 While these tactics were enforced heavily by the Japanese, Holcombe reports that by 1942, “only about 20 percent of the Korean people could actually even understand the Japanese language.”23 These laws were a problem for the Korean people for multiple reasons. The mandatory worship at Japanese-style Shintō shrines would have been extremely upsetting for the majority of the Korean public since there was a large amount of Christians among the Korean population along with the native shaman religion. Taking Japanese-style names was dismaying since family names and the naming system in Korean is tied together very closely with identity within a community. Finally, taking away the Korean language in important areas like the government, public schools, and the private press would have taken away the feeling of a national identity. When a nation’s politicians, youth, and media are required to speak the language of the country that more or less owns them, its national identity is stripped away.

At the tail end of the colonial period, the Japanese Empire entered World War II after they attacked Pearl Harbor on December 9, 1941. In 1943, according to Holcombe, “Koreans could be drafted into the wartime Japanese imperial army.”24 In addition to this, thousands of Korean women, along with other nationalities, were forced to become sex slaves, also known

19 Ibid., 248.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
23 Holcombe, A History of East Asia, 248.
24 Ibid.
formally as comfort women, to the men of the Japanese imperial army. The women were forcibly
removed from their lives in Korea and sent to a base to be sexually assaulted, raped, and
physically abused every day. These women were usually aged thirteen to sixteen, which arguably
would make the term “girls” more appropriate than women. According to Holcombe, “By the
dead of World War II, perhaps 20 percent of the entire Korean population had been uprooted and
moved away from their native province or even beyond the borders of Korea itself … ”25 The
lasting impressions of Japanese rule in the colonial period still lingers in Korean and Japanese
relationships today. There is remaining resentment from Koreans towards the Japanese and what
they did to the Korean people, especially the comfort women who the Japanese never formally
apologized to or even acknowledged existed.

Now that some background on the colonial period in Korea has been established, our
focus can shift towards urban Korean women and how their fashion changed in this period. To
start off, the clothing which Korean women were wearing before the shift to Western-style
clothing occurred must be established. According to Sunny Yang, the traditional clothing style of
hanbok (한복) has been worn by Koreans “[a]t least since the Three Kingdoms period …” which
spans from 57 BCE to 935 CE.26 Since the style of specific hanbok (한복) has shifted through

25 Ibid.
time, I want to clarify that I will be talking about the Joseon (조선) period (1392-1910) style of hanbok (한복). According to Lynn, the Joseon (조선) style of hanbok (한복), illustrated to the left, is “composed of ch’ima (skirts) and chògori (blouses) …” that closed by tying together the otgoreum (ribbons).\textsuperscript{27} Both the jeogori (저고리) and the chima (치마) can be loosened or tightened to the wearer’s shape with the sash that is attached to them.\textsuperscript{28} Underneath the main articles of clothing, Yang says that women would wear “sok-chima (slips), sok-baji (culottes) or dan-sok-ot (pantaloons) and/or gojaeng-ee (a kind of petticoat).”\textsuperscript{29}

Similar to the United States, Korea has four distinct seasons that require its inhabitants to wear certain clothing during certain seasons. The hanbok (한복) was still worn in all four seasons, but the material and amount of undergarments worn would be adjusted to fit the weather.\textsuperscript{30} For example, during the winter, Korean women would wear jackets called gatjeogori (갓저고리).\textsuperscript{31} These special jackets were lined with “marten, lamb or rabbit fur” in order to

\textsuperscript{27} Lynn, “Fashioning Modernity,” 77.
\textsuperscript{28} Yang, Hanbok, 60.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{31} Lee Kyungja, Hong Nayoung, and Chang Sookhwan, Traditional Korean Costume, trans. by Shin Jooyoung (Folkestone, UK: Global Oriental, 2005), 186.
retain heat.\textsuperscript{32} Similar to the \textit{jeogori} (저고리), the \textit{chima} (치마) could also be lined with certain materials to make it warmer or cooler, depending on the season.\textsuperscript{33} Specifically to the \textit{chima} (치마), “padded” material was the main component to the item to make it warmer instead of fur as was used for the \textit{jeogori} (저고리).\textsuperscript{34} In addition to this, certain fabrics were used between seasons. In summer, “ramie, linen and sheer silk fabrics” were used.\textsuperscript{35} On the other hand, winter saw \textit{hanbok} (한복) made of “[c]otton and thick silk fabrics, such as satin …” being used.\textsuperscript{36}

Setting aside specifics for seasons, this style of \textit{hanbok} (한복) with the \textit{jeogori} (저고리) and the \textit{chima} (치마), except the undergarments, is the style worn by Koreans today for special occasions and holidays. Instead of the traditional undergarments, modern Korean women wear their normal clothes under the \textit{hanbok} (한복) in the winter time for extra warmth. In the summer, they can wear either no undergarments or put on a protective layer like a tank top and shorts. This is done since washing \textit{hanbok} (한복) is tedious and not recommended to do often in order to keep the color and embellishments. Some places, like the Gyeongbok Palace (경복궁), built for the royal family in the Joseon (조선) period, in northern Seoul offers free admission to people who wear \textit{hanbok} (한복) when visiting. This style of \textit{hanbok} (한복) was the main clothing worn by Korean women until the colonial period. When I talk about the shift of the traditional \textit{hanbok} (한복) to Western-style clothing, I am talking about this specific type of \textit{hanbok} (한복).

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 231. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 186. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
When talking about urban Korean women in the colonial period, why the majority of these women shifted their fashion from traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing must be understood. As aforementioned, Korea was under the control of the Japanese Empire in their colonial period of 1910 to 1945. Scholars like Park, Warner, and Fitzgerald say that the influence of the Japanese and their culture and the increasing Westernization of Japan was one of the main reasons why fashion for urban Korean women changed during this period. Some examples of Westernization in the culture of colonial Korea can be found in the terms New Woman and Modern Girl.

The New Woman was a term used for women who upheld the standards of what it meant to be a woman who practiced “new” or “modern” ideals. This included having an education and going into the public sphere for work. While this may seem like a positive term, this was not the case in colonial Korea. According to Hyaeweol Choi, “… the emergence of the New Woman fascinated the public but, at the same time, invited anxiety about the increasingly unstable private sphere ….” In addition to this, Hyaeweol Choi also adds that New Women were “simultaneously perceived as a bad example to Confucian gender norms, the promotion of gender equality, and a threat to traditional family structure.”

Not only was the New Woman educated, but she also forced her way out of the private sphere that trapped her ever since the beginnings of Korea. However, this made the public nervous, and they ended up thinking that New Women “rejected” motherhood. If the New Women were off getting an education and working a job in the public sphere, what would

---

38 Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea*, 3.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
happen to their children? Writer Yi Kwangsu focused on this issue in 1925 in a piece in the magazine *Sin yeoseong* entitled “Mosŏng chungsim ŭi yŏja kyoyuk” or “Centering women’s education on motherhood.”\(^{41}\) In this piece, Yi wrote, “The central duty of a woman’s life is to become a mother. One half of a woman’s life is devoted to giving birth to children and raising them … .”\(^{42}\) Here, Yi was saying that the New Woman was a direct threat to what he thought the role of women was in Korean culture. Another writer, Chu Yoseop, wrote a piece in the same magazine in 1933 entitled “Sin yŏsŏng kwa ku yŏsŏng ŭi haengno” or “Characteristics of New Women and Traditional Women.”\(^{43}\) In this piece, Chu writes that New Women have not really become educated.\(^{44}\) Instead, he argues that “their understanding is not in the areas of political or scientific modernity, and they understand only a little bit about social and religious modernity.”\(^{45}\)

These two men believed what most men in the Korean population thought of when it came to New Women. To have a public sphere job and go to school and get an education would make women ignore their children or even stop having them. In addition to this, according to Theodore Jun Yoo, “One public response to the threat of the new woman was to denigrate them by portraying them in sexual terms, as promiscuous nymphomaniacs who seduced married men or as lesbian lovers.”\(^{46}\)

This idea of a New Woman stemmed from the Japanese and their want to become more Westernized, but it had little to do with fashion. These New Women focused on their education


\(^{42}\) Ibid.


\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea*, 60.
and their jobs and only paid attention to fashion when it got in the way or improved their way of life. The cultural bombshell in fashion was the Modern Girl. According to Hyaeweol Choi, the New Women and the Modern Girl were inherently different because “they embodied different cultural, symbolic, and economic realities.” The term Modern Girl came to Korea in the 1920s from Japanese, Chinese, and American ideas of what a woman should be in the modern era.

In Korean media, the Modern Girl was portrayed as “frivulous, vainglorious, and promiscuous …” Cartoons printed in magazines and newspapers ended up rejecting the idea of the Modern Girl and made it so the women who identified themselves as such, or even a New Woman, would feel as if they were doing something wrong. One such cartoon, shown on the right, entitled “Kkori p’i nün kongjak” or “Peacock with its tail feathers on display” was published on February 9, 1928 in Choseon ilbo, a famous Korean newspaper in this period. This cartoon is of a woman who is dressed in Western-style clothing. She has on a fur-lined coat, high heels, and stockings. She adorns a hat on top of her bob

---

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
cut and she has on heavy makeup. She is exiting a hut. According to Hyaeweol Choi, “The intention of the cartoon is to ridicule women who wear expensive clothing beyond their means.”\(^{52}\) This cartoon shows the public that these New Women and Modern Girls are going to be the end of a family’s economy because of their want to look more Western and pay obscene amounts of money to do so. Another cartoon that depicts New Women and Modern Girls in this way was published in *Pyeolgeo’gon* in December of 1930.\(^{53}\) The cartoon, shown to the left, is entitled “*Pulgyŏnggi p’unggyŏng*” or “A scene from the economic downturn.”\(^{54}\) In this cartoon, the artist depicted a family that had a New Woman or a Modern Girl in it. A man, dressed in Western-style clothing, is pulling a woman in a cart.\(^{55}\) The woman is also dressed in Western-style clothing and is powdering her face while looking into a compact hand mirror.\(^{56}\) At the back of the cart, a child hangs off and is “ignored and untended.”\(^{57}\) This cartoon makes the New Women and Modern

\(^{52}\) Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea*, 83.


\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
Girl feel like they are damaging the future of Korea by not only ignoring their child, but also making their husband roll them around while they are at leisure and in luxury.

These cartoons were made to specifically influence the men and the traditional women of the Korean public to not accept these new changes in their culture. This being said, there is an obvious connection with the New Women and the Modern Girl when it comes to the evolution of fashion. Many women hesitated to buy Western clothing because of its association with New Women and Modern Girls. Even in the center of fashion and “trendy, modern things” of Chongno, women were hesitant to be affiliated with these terms that had come to be associated with anti-motherhood, lack of economic responsibility, and sexual freeness.58

While it is true that Japanese influence caused some changes in Korean culture, like the want to become less agriculturally dependent and focus on industrialization, the anti-Japanese sentiment during the colonial period made it easy for the native population of Korea to opt for keeping and developing their own culture. According to Hewon Kahng, “As a result of [the rejection of the Japanese kimono], there is no Japanese influence in the costume of the new epoch, the Modern Korea.”59

What does this mean when it comes to the evolution of urban Korean women’s fashion? Since the terms New Woman and Modern Girl stemmed from Japan and the glorifying of Westernization, the Korean public, as aforementioned, was not quick to adapt the Western-style clothing because of these terms. The cartoons and Korean media in general had successfully associated the clothing these women wore with attitudes of anti-nationalism and gender role

---

58 Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea*, 213n7. Chongno is often Romanized as Jongno today and resides in downtown Seoul. The area is still known today to be important in cultural advancement.
defying behavior that was not to be accepted. The New Women and Modern Girls were the guinea pigs of fashion’s evolution in the early years of the colonial period. They showed that the Korean public was not only not ready for a change in the way their society ran, but also the way in which the women held themselves in the public sphere. Education, work, and new fashion for women was blasphemous, and we can see this by the cartoons and the magazine articles written by the Korean public. Japanese influence did not have a place in fashion in the urban Korean woman’s life.

If Westernization and the influence of culture from Japan did not influence a shift in urban Korean women’s fashion, what did? One of the main reasons why fashion shifted in the colonial period was the influx of missionaries and the overall influence of Christian thoughts and beliefs. The Korean public disliked and resented the Japanese culture that took its influences from Western countries because of the occupation. Christianity was one of the few ways in which the Korean public accepted certain changes in their culture that were Westernized and foreign. Missionaries were a large part of this acceptance of Christianity. While there are certain groups of Christians that went to Korea in order to spread their doctrine, I will call all of them Christian and will not specify their form of Christianity. I am not specifying the denomination of the missionaries as almost all denominations sent out missionaries that did similar work. This being said, multiple forms of Christianity came to Korea and still exist today.

To start off, Christianity and missionaries in Korea go back to the 17th century.\textsuperscript{60} However, the missionaries’ influence in the colonial period will be looked at here. This being said, missionaries from America were adamant about coming to Korea. According to Hyaeweol

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 11.
Choi, this is because of the pagan-like way rural communities lived and presented themselves.\footnote{Hyaeweol Choi, “The Visual Embodiment of Women in the Korea Mission Field,” \textit{Korean Studies} 34 (2010): 104.}

This was especially true when it came to the clothes of the rural women in colonial Korea as they were slightly different from that of urban Korean women. As aforementioned, the traditional \textit{hanbok} (한복) consists of a \textit{chima} (치마) and the \textit{jeogori} (저고리), or skirt and blouse. The \textit{jeogori} (저고리) is particularly short while the \textit{chima} (치마) is usually longer to cover what the \textit{jeogori} (저고리) does not. However, rural women in colonial Korea who worked in agriculture (Korea was an agriculture-based economy during this time period) would have worn a shorter \textit{jeogori} (저고리), but not a longer \textit{chima} (치마).\footnote{Choi, \textit{New Women in Colonial Korea}, 7.}

A picture taken by a Christian missionary shows a rural woman wearing a \textit{hanbok} (한복) while in the streets.\footnote{Hyaeweol Choi, \textit{Figure 7} (photograph), in “The Visual Embodiment of Women in the Korea Mission Field,” \textit{Korean Studies} 34 (2010), 105.} The woman is balancing something on her head, and, as a result, her \textit{jeogori} (저고리) has risen above her chest and her breasts were exposed since summer weather would not require layers of undergarments to keep warm.\footnote{Ibid.} This horrified the Christian missionaries, and they thought of it as “beyond the bounds of acceptable bodily presentation.”\footnote{Choi, “The Visual Embodiment,” 105.}

One Christian missionary, however, realized that this type of clothing was a way for women to be more efficient when it came to being a mother. A book written in 1913 by Annie Laurie Adams Baird, a Christian Bible Woman stationed in Korea, accounts that before Christianity, the main reason a woman existed was to reproduce and that her clothing represented
this. With Christianity, Baird and other female missionaries believed that Korean women could rise to other roles in society that were in the public sphere and that were inherently good for the women.

Along with this, the American Christian missionaries believed that Korea could become a better political ally and friend, and the missionaries focused more on bettering Korea than conquering the country with their faith. Instead of pressuring Koreans into automatically switching their faith from their native shamanism and ancestor worship practices to Christianity, the American missionaries “emphasized good works, the founding of schools, hospitals, and welfare centers” that the Japanese could not refuse, fearing the Americans would be lost as an ally. In addition to this, Christian missionaries were the first to introduce the Korean population to “the rights of women,” like to be educated and to have the rights to their own bodies, “releasing them from the dead weight of Confucian tradition,” according to Hewon Kahng.

Samuel Songhoon Lee adds that American missionaries also introduced the concepts of equality and freedom for women in Korea. These were new concepts and ideas to the Korean public as the popular Confucian tradition that stemmed from China and was adopted into Korean culture was inherently patriarchal and against these rights for women.

---

67 Ibid., 20-21.
68 Ibid., 18.
69 Kahng, “The Evolution,” 64.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 65.
72 Lee, Hanbok, 73.
73 Yoo, The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea, 56.
In addition to spreading new ideas and concepts to Korea, the missionaries had a strategy that was different from the Japanese who tried to spread their own culture through violence and politics. The missionaries were different because of the Korean Bible women. The Korean Bible women were Korean women who were a part of a church and wanted to spread Christianity to other people in Korea. They were recognized by the church as the women who made the Bible accessible to the Korean public since most of the women who were accepted as Bible Women were able to speak English because of their education with the American missionaries at Bible schools. These women could translate the Bible and be a translator for American missionaries.

The Korean Bible women system of the church first came about in 1888 by a female missionary by the name of Mary F. B. Scranton, according to Lee-Ellen Strawn. According to Strawn, there were 1,215 Korean Bible women in practice “from the late 19th century until 1945.” This overwhelming amount of women helped spread the ideas of Christianity through a Korean lens. When it came to Japanese culture, it was being transmitted from a Japanese person, media outlet, or law. As a colony, Korea was hanging on to any shred of individuality and nationalism that it could. The missionaries took a different approach to spreading their culture and faith by teaching the natives to teach each other. By separating a group of natives and teaching them, the missionaries were able to reach more Korean people since the people teaching the natives would be other natives who had already converted.

---

76 Strawn, “Korean Bible Women's Success,” 120.
77 Ibid., 118.
78 Ibid.
One prime example of the missionaries’ impressive tactics was that of Ms. Gertrude Snavely and her Korean Bible women in training. Unlike other ways of culture transmission, like the forced worship at Japanese-style Shintō shrines aforementioned, Snavely bonded with the women she was teaching. In an undated photo, shown to the left, printed in Hyaeweol Choi’s article “The Visual Embodiment of Women in the Korea Mission Field,” Snavely is sitting in the middle of a semicircle of seven Korean women and one white woman on the far right. She sits with the Bible in her lap and is touching knees with the Korean women next to her. Instead of making the Koreans feel as if she is there to push out their traditions and way of life, Snavely presents herself as a friendly face that has new ideas and beliefs to give the women, but will not force upon them.

After the Korean Bible women learned the faith from the missionaries, they set off to persuade the Korean public to join them. In order to spread Christianity, the Bible Women taught the public to read and write so they could read the Bible. In a country that did not have women reading in the early 1900s, Korean Bible women were some of the main advocates for literacy and education for women. According to Strawn, by 1930, the Korean Bible women had taught

---

80 Choi, Figure 7 (photograph), in “The Visual Embodiment,” 113.
81 Strawn, “Korean Bible Women's Success,” 120.
82 Ibid.
12,756 women to read.\textsuperscript{83} In fact, Lulu Frey, a teacher at Ewha Girls' School, the first school for girls in Korea established by a female missionary in 1885, “declared that ‘the Bible Woman seemed to be regarded as the most important factor in the work among the Korean women in Korea.’”\textsuperscript{84} These Bible Women were undeniably a large part of why Christianity quickly took off in Korea.

On the other side of things, American missionaries were the ones that helped these Korean Bible women spread change for Korean women and the Korean public in general. In fact, in a book edited in 1934 by Harry Andrew Rhodes, a Christian missionary stationed in Korea in the late 19th to early 20th century, includes a quote from a Korean woman which says, “‘If the Christian missionaries had accomplished nothing else in Korea, the introduction of female education alone, deserves our lasting gratitude.’”\textsuperscript{85} This Korean woman is stating that one of the American missionaries’ main accomplishments was driving forward change for women, especially in education. In addition to this, with the last phrase, we can see that this woman believes that what the American missionaries did, in terms of education for women, will not be short-lived and will continue to develop and grow.

The American missionaries were essential to the change from traditional to Western-style clothing in urban Korean women. Not only did they plant the seeds of thought for women’s rights, freedom, and equality, but they also helped influence the thought that education for women was not a negative to Korean society. As the missionaries built roads, schools, and hospitals, the Korean public saw that the missionaries had great ideas and beliefs. This idea that missionaries had beneficial ways of living was transferred to radical concepts like women’s

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Choi, “The Visual Embodiment,” 110.
rights. On top of this, we see that the missionaries along with Korean Bible women influenced the public to think that female education was a positive thing. The Korean Bible women were the ones who sparked a literacy boom in Korean women. In fact, they encouraged many Korean women to attend school after they showed them that reading was beneficial to them and their future as some public sphere jobs would require them to read and write.  

As I will talk about in the next section, Western-style uniforms were the norm in female schools that were founded by missionaries making it so younger girls associated an education and a better life with Western-style clothing. Unlike the New Woman and the Modern Girl, the missionaries were associated with positive things like building schools and enforcing education along with building hospitals and bettering the Korean peninsula as a whole. With this in mind, we can conclude that Western-clothing had shifted from the negative connotations the New Woman and the Modern Girl had produced to the positive connotations the American missionaries made while in Korea. This meant that urban Korean women were willing to go out and buy Western-style clothing because it showed people that they were associated with good things like education and the bettering of the community.

As you can see, the Christian missionaries played a huge role in the shift of fashion in the urban Korean woman’s life in colonial Korea. While they did play a huge role in this, the Christian missionaries admitted that the change in Korea’s social environment was not all thanks to them. In Rhodes’ book, he explains that the missionaries did not claim “that all this transformation was brought about by Christianity,” but that it certainly was a large part of bringing necessary ideas of change to Korea.  


87 Rhodes, History of the Korea Mission, 263.
the one to implement change in their society and overall environment. Unlike the Japanese who were adamant about forcing change in Korea, the American missionaries knew that in order to spread their ideas and beliefs, giving the Korean natives the tools to improve their society was the best approach.

In addition to Christian missionaries, the internal social changes of the urban Korean woman affected the change of fashion from traditional *hanbok* (한복) to Western-style clothing. These internal social changes came from the exceeding desire from women to work in the public sphere since, according to Yoo, “there was no hope of gender equality in marriage and the family” if women had no money of their own and were tied to men economically.⁸⁸ As aforementioned, these women were sometimes called New Women or Modern Girls. However, there became an increasing amount of want from women to explore the public sphere and jobs where they could make their own money. On top of this, with more and more children being sent to school, including boys and girls, mothers had the time to take on a public sphere job.

Public sphere jobs for women could range from fancy hostesses and elevator girls all the way to factory workers. One of the reasons I am limiting my paper to urban women is because rural women were already working in the fields as their families needed them to do so. Within these public sphere jobs, urban women found it increasingly difficult to work when they wore their *hanbok* (한복). Samuel-Songhoon Lee says, “Women’s organizations and the media said that despite the traditional beauty of the *hanbok*, it was often impractical for social activity.”⁹⁹ In addition to this, according to Sunae Park, Patricia Warner, and Thomas Fitzgerald, as these

---

Korean women entered the labor force, the *hanbok* (한복) that they were wearing became “burdensome” to wear.\(^90\)

*Hanbok* (한복) was not made for the public sphere working woman. The *chima* (치마) needed to be tied extremely tight above the bust in order to keep it from falling down, making the woman feel suffocated in most stances.\(^91\) The *jeogori* (저고리) is made of stiff material that did not allow ample movement of the arms which is needed in public sphere jobs. In fact, because of the inconvenience of the way the *hanbok* (한복) was to be put on, an American woman, Jeanette Walter, who worked at Ewha Girls' School “designed a new skirt with straps and sewn seams.”\(^92\) This way, the women could get dressed faster and have more breathing room. However, this still was not enough to make the *hanbok* (한복) work friendly and women opted to wear Western-style clothing instead.

On top of women working in the public sphere, education was spurred on after American Christian missionaries focused a lot of their energy on promoting educating girls. This being said, as aforementioned, the uniforms in most schools were Western-style clothing by the 1920s. When girls, in particular, came home and had to change into their *hanbok* (한복), they found it unflattering to their figure and disliked the traditional costume as it felt stuffy and restricted their movement.\(^93\) This was the case for Sunghee (성희), a woman interviewed in Sunae Park’s PhD dissertation.\(^94\) Sunghee (성희) was born in 1932 and had a Western-style uniform in middle

---


\(^{91}\) Lee, *Hanbok*, 76.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.


\(^{94}\) Park, “Reactions of Korean Women,” 58.
school. However, when she came home, she put on the hanbok (한복) that her mom had made for her. Another woman, Soojung (수정), was born in 1931, but had a different experience. While Sunghee (성희) was born in the Joseon (조선) province of Chungcheong, a more southern and rural part of Korea, Soojung (수정) was born in Seoul. Soojung (수정) was exposed to more Western influences in Seoul as it attracted the newest fashions. On the other hand, Sunghee (성희) would most likely only see Western-style clothing on girls who were going to school. This is another reason why the urban and rural divide is important in this paper. Urban women were simply exposed to more Western-style clothing which prompted them to change faster than that of their rural counterparts.

On the right is an illustration of a typical winter school uniform from 1931 to 1944 that the women in the interviews discussed. Notice how the uniform is very Westernized and has a more relaxed design than that of hanbok (한복). The jacket would be of looser material than the jeogori (저고리) and the skirt would not come

---

95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 58-59.
98 Kyungja Choi, Winter Uniform, 1931-1944 (illustration), in 50 Years of Fashion (Seoul, Korea: Kook-Je Institute of Fashion Design, 1981), 264. The caption in the photo was translated by Hugh Park. He is not a professional translator, but he was able to read the caption.
up as high as the *chima* (치마). Because of these factors, the Western-style uniforms would not only increase the movements the girls could make, but it would also be easier to get on and off by themselves compared to the intricate tying of the *hanbok* (한복). Even today, many women find wearing the *hanbok* (한복) on special occasions annoying because of the work it takes to get in and out of the traditional dress.

As you can see, the internal social changes that urban Korean women went through influenced the shift of their fashion from traditional to Western-style. The growing desire and need for women to have a job in the public sphere made urban Korean women realize that the *hanbok* (한복) was not suited for a lot of the public sphere jobs they were taking on. What else was there to do than to change their fashion? There was the option of simply not taking on these public sphere jobs, but with education coming to a climax, urban Korean women had the time and the desire to take on a job of their own. No longer would they just be the reproducer and caretaker of the house.

On top of this, we can see how education forced the change of fashion through school uniforms. Unlike the women who had the time to take on a public sphere job, younger urban Korean females were getting an education. Just like Sunghee (성희) and Soojung (수정), girls in school were wearing Western-style clothing daily, making it the norm for them. As school days could last around six hours, the majority of these girls’ days were being spent in Western-style clothing, not *hanbok* (한복).

---

99 Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea,*” 53. Six hours comes from Yoo’s statement that there was thirty-one hours of instruction in a school week in an all-female school around 1911 to 1921.
In conclusion, Japanese influence did introduce certain social changes in Korea, but they did not do so in a positive or successful way. The terms such as New Women and Modern Girls not only tore down Western-style clothing because of the negative connotations the Korean public put on them, but they also forced women who wanted to wear Western-style clothing to either keep wearing their hanbok (한복) or wear the Western-style clothing and be associated with all of the negative attributes of the New Women and Modern Girls. Just as it is today, the reputation you have in society matters. Urban Korean women were not going to risk being labeled as “frivolous, vainglorious, and promiscuous … .”\(^{100}\) Especially in a patriarchal society, women have to be careful when it comes to how they are seen in the public sphere. If you are seen as a woman who prioritizes your looks over your family or money over your values, you can be written off as a woman who does not deserve anything. The man has the power and these urban Korean women had to be careful about what they associated themselves with.

In addition to this, anti-Japanese sentiment made it so the Korean public did not want to be associated with anything the Japanese were doing culturally. As a country that was beaten, broken, and stolen from, Korea was in no way ready to accept anything that came from the Japanese. With the laws that were aforementioned, the Koreans felt as if their national identity was being stripped from them. Their precious naming systems were discarded along with their freedom to practice whatever religion they pleased. Along with this, their citizens were taken at a young age to act as sex slaves to the imperial army. Girls who had not yet reached adulthood and maturity were raped, sexually abused, and physically assaulted multiple times a day. In light of this, Korean natives, male and female and rural and urban alike, would not be excited or pleased with the thought of taking on culture from their oppressors.

\(^{100}\) Choi, *New Women in Colonial Korea*, 10.
Instead, American Christian missionaries who came in as friends and as allies were more influential in the change of urban Korean women’s fashion. They not only did not force change on the Korean nation, but they built things Korea needed such as roads, hospitals, and schools. American missionaries did not want to change the Koreans completely. They simply helped the Koreans flourish and become better people with new ideas and resources.

The Korean Bible women who were taught by American missionaries were able to spread the thoughts, ideas, and cultural norms of America, including fashion, but in a way that felt inherently Korean, not foreign. These Bible women were essential in the spreading of this knowledge and the literacy of women. Unlike the Japanese, the missionaries encouraged Koreans to speak, read, and write in their own language. The Korean Bible women learned and taught in Korean which made the ideas and beliefs the missionaries had seem not so foreign. The missionaries introduced new concepts like women’s rights that spurred on more education for women and the freedom to want a public sphere job which would inherently create a major shift in urban Korean women's fashion.

Finally, internal social changes, such as wanting more freedom for themselves in the shape of public sphere jobs and education, made it so Korean women were the ones in control of their bodies and their futures. While the Christian missionaries did put the seed for success and progression into the Korean public, Korean women were the ones who acted on these ideas and concepts and forced change in their society.

The bold females of the colonial period made it so Western-clothing did not seem so foreign or wrong. The intellectual females of the colonial period made demands to be further educated and to have a job that meant something more than reproducing and being a mother. The majority of Korean women in the colonial period wanted change, and the missionaries gave them
the tools and ideas they needed to enact and produce the Korean society they wanted. While the hanbok (Hanbok) will forever be the national costume of Korea, colonial urban Korean women needed Western-style clothing to flourish and become the driving force of culture and prosperity that they are today.
Bibliography

Primary


**Secondary**


Journal of International and Area Studies 11, no. 3 (2004): 75-93.


