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CHAPTER 3

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS AND FASHION HISTORIES: EAST ASIAN EMBROIDERED GARMENTS¹

Sarah CHEANG and Elizabeth KRAMER

Introduction

This chapter explores Asian/American/European fashion interactions across the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. It seeks to avoid a simplistic narrative of 'exotic' components in European fashion, or interpreting fashion globalization in broad strokes as the adoption of European dress styles by non-European societies in cultural flows from 'the West' to 'the Rest'. Instead, it focuses on the complex fluidity of two particular garment types within global movements of fashion that have created multi-centred and multi-directional stories: the sukajan, also known as the souvenir or tour jacket, and the embroidered shawl (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

Sukajan were originally created by the Japanese as souvenirs for American troops serving in Occupied Japan (1945–52). As their popularity grew, sukajan became available at military bases around the world to commemorate further tours of duty in both peace and wartime. From the 1960s onward, its use in subculture and celebrity style, both in Japan and outside of Japan, ensured its longstanding popularity as a fashionable garment.² These developments, coupled with a shifting production base, demonstrate the ways in which the garment's production, marketing and consumption are embedded in global flows between (but not limited to) Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam, North America and the United Kingdom. This results in a multiplicity of agents in the garment's fashionability, including wearers and entrepreneurs across many State and counter-cultural agendas.

Such complex transnational lives for East Asian embroideries are far from unique, for fashion stimulates the mixing of cultures, links local and global, and has allowed travelling objects to be many things at once. In 1920s Britain and North America, large colourful shawls with silk tassel fringes became highly fashionable for women. Made of silk crepe, and covered in Chinese embroidery motifs, especially flowers, these shawls were sometimes called Spanish, and sometimes called Chinese, according to fashion. Depending on the place and time, this type of shawl was termed a mantón de Manila, a Spanish shawl, a Flamenco shawl, a Mexican shawl, a Chinese shawl, and a piano shawl.³ With a history of trade linking Europe, China, the Americas and the Philippines, these shawls draw our attention to ambivalence in the ways that fashion exploits ethnic identities and colonial encounters.



Figure 3.1 Tailor Toyo sukajan gifted to Elizabeth Kramer by TOYO Enterprise in 2019. Photograph by Elizabeth Kramer.



Figure 3.2 Silk crepe shawl with silk embroideries showing flowers, birds, insects, and animals, made in China for European markets c.1870–1920. 170.8cm x 167cm (excluding fringes). Victoria and Albert Museum T.316-1960. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Definitions of fashion that are rooted in a European framework are also rooted in European constructions of modernity. That modernity, its ideological and social frameworks, subjectivities and effects in the material world, has been formed in and through conditions of coloniality. Whether the term ‘modern’ is taken to mean the world since the 15th century when Europeans began to build empires in the Americas, the world since the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, or the world since the Industrial Revolution, these are Eurocentric models of what it is to be modern, and world-views that were conditioned by coloniality. Decolonial thinkers have therefore highlighted the way that modernity/coloniality are not just intertwined or inseparable terms, but a confluence; modernity and coloniality are one.⁴ Thinking decolonially therefore implies certain shifts in thinking about fashion and the assumptions that are made about concepts of modernity, newness and identity. Questions such as ‘when is fashion?’ or ‘what is fashion?’ seek to pin down the conditions under which a culture’s clothing can or cannot be defined as fashion. But these questions are posed because of the inseparability of modernity/coloniality which makes ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ into opposing terms.⁵ As scholars of African fashion have made clear for some time now, studies of dominant, capitalist mass-market fashion networks have failed to grasp a much bigger global picture of transnational culture, for which a greater investment in the logic of contradiction and blurred meanings is essential.⁶ Part of the work of this chapter is to explore the degree to which the study of fashion enables historians to pursue a decolonial agenda of delinking from Eurocentric structures of knowledge, or whether thinking about fashion merely exposes the contradictory and conflicted nature of the

colonial condition. We ask if Chinese embroidered shawls and Japanese souvenir jackets require fashion scholars to think differently about the ways that fashions achieve 'global' significance. We hold the colonial and the fashionable in a 'single analytical phrase', as we explore the impossibility of grasping and defining globalization, and the ambivalent and contradictory values that fashion exploits.⁷

Creating the Chinese/Spanish Shawl

Embroidered garments have certainly played a key role in the global spread of Japanese and Chinese fashions in which the Japanese kimono and the Chinese robe have had global influence as distinctive garment forms crossing over into many cultures.⁸ There is, however, an important flexibility about embroidery as a locally rooted practice that can be applied to any garment or set of motifs, and as a technique that can be moved or transmitted from culture to culture and respond to technological changes.⁹

Embroidered shawls were not part of fashion cultures in China before the 20th century. This places the 'Chinese shawl' firmly within the context of Chinese export industries that created objects to fulfil foreign requirements. Chinese motifs, cultural references, materials and making techniques were used to create goods, such as painted wallpapers, that had no use within China, but that could be sold abroad.¹⁰ From the late 16th century, the Spanish were trading Chinese goods through the Philippines after they had invaded the archipelago and established colonies and fortifications. In the 18th century, Spanish traders ordered shawls in Canton, and they were traded via Manila in the Philippines to the Pacific coast of Mexico, where the China trade was integral to the development of the sea port of Acapulco in what the colonizers called New Spain.¹¹ From there, the shawls were imported into the south of Spain through the port of Seville. This linked Chinese production to Latin American colonial cultures, and European garments and aesthetics to Chinese motifs, materials and manufacturing techniques.

During the 19th century, Chinese shawls were highly prized on the Spanish market, products of the Canton export embroidery industry which was characterized by vivid colours, compact stitches and pictorial content. They spread from the elites to become a more widely fashionable garment for women, but were especially identified with the south of Spain and the Flamenco dance, even though they featured Chinese bats, butterflies, flowers and even Buddhist symbols and pagodas. The Spanish silk making and silk embroidery industries were well established by the 18th century, and in order to compete with the Chinese imports coming into Southern Spain, they copied the Chinese motifs (Figure 3.3). In 1898, Spain ceded the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States. This final dwindling away of the Spanish Empire created a crisis of Spanish identity. With the loss of Manila, a new 20th-century emphasis on local shawl making in the Seville region created Andalusian traditions out of former Chinese designs, and Spanish-made Chinese shawls became a focus of Spanish national pride.¹²

Another set of colonial/trade relations were those between China and Britain. At the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, embroidered and plain Chinese crepe shawls



Figure 3.3 Detail of a Spanish shawl. According to family stories, this shawl was acquired sometime between 1899 and 1920 by John Swan Tindale while on business in the dockyards of Barcelona. Tindale brought the shawl back to his wife in Lancashire, England, and it has now been worn by several generations of the family. Reproduced by permission of the Newell family. Photograph: Sarah Cheang.

were displayed alongside handkerchiefs and scarves as examples of the goods that China could provide the British people. Significantly for their encoding as Chinese in this time and place, they were shown in the China section, but not in the section representing Spain.¹³ Both the 1851 Exhibition and the South Kensington museum collections that were founded as a result were an inextricable part of the workings of empire, from the presentation/control/possession of colonial lands, their products and the labour of their peoples, to reforms in design education that aimed to increase the power and reach of British manufacturing industries across the globe.¹⁴ The Exhibition occurred in the midst of a series of Sino-British military conflicts in China known collectively as the 'Opium Wars' (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), which were won by allied Franco-British forces. China was forced to allow foreign missionaries, businesses and travellers to travel in China, and was made to grant extra-territorial rights to certain Western nations at key diplomatic and trading cities, as well as the ceding of Hong Kong to the British. This began a semi-colonial status for China in European and American eyes.¹⁵ Though invited to participate in the Exhibition, in the midst of this armed struggle against undisguised British imperial aggression, the conditions of Chinese self-representation within a celebration of British industrial pre-eminence were clearly impossible. The Chinese government therefore refused to take part, and the Chinese section was instead organized by a group of British importers who created 'China' within the Exhibition's empire of things.¹⁶

It is claimed that one of the Chinese shawls in the collections of the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, came from the Exhibition of 1851, giving an indication of the styles that were being promoted to mid-Victorian consumers in Britain (Figure 3.4).¹⁷ The large size, around 2 metres along each side, matched a mid-century trend for Kashmiri and Paisley shawls that often used fringing and were folded and worn on the diagonal to create an expanse of colour and pattern that covered the shoulders, back and most of the crinoline-enhanced skirt, finishing in an attractive point.¹⁸ The colours and decoration – white embroidered flowers on cream crêpe silk ground – show the uses of whitework (white on white embroidery) that was part of Chinese export production alongside pastels for the European palette, as well as the brighter colours more associated with the Chinese domestic market.

The shawls displayed at the Exhibition occupied a middle ground between the everyday and the spectacular. Chinese silks such as Shantung Pongee and Shanghai silk were raw textile imports that were used to create a wide range of familiar clothing, such as dresses and undergarments.¹⁹ At the other extreme, the looting and immense social upheaval in the course of the Opium Wars, Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864/71), Boxer Uprising (1899–1901), and the fall of the Qing dynasty (1911), each created new opportunities for foreigners to obtain second-hand or stolen Chinese embroidered robes, skirts, jackets and hangings. These lavish and colourful Chinese embroidered garments and hangings were often cut up to provide trimmings and decorative details for British clothing and interior design schemes.²⁰

The British department store of Liberty & Co were advertising Chinese-made shawls from the 1880s onwards. These came in a range of shapes, sizes and price points depending on the amount of embroidery, and were marketed as fashionable accessories



Figure 3.4 Detail of white silk shawl made in China for European markets in the early 19th century. 213cm x 213cm (approx.). Victoria and Albert Museum T.105-1921. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

of artistic distinction.²¹ The Chinese origin of the shawls was constantly highlighted in the Liberty catalogue, and other UK importers also emphasized the Chinese origin of the shawls with wording such as ‘... shawls from Canton ... beautifully embroidered by skilled Chinese workmen ... just landed’, which implies that these shawls came directly from the hands of Chinese craftsmen to the shores of the UK.²²

Liberty were also a likely conduit for Chinese shawls to be consumed within elite fashion cultures in the United States. During the first two decades of the 1900s, delicately coloured embroidery on a white ground and deep ten-inch fringes were considered a ‘distinct novelty’ in the pages of American *Vogue* magazine, although pink and blue Chinese shawls were also promoted as ‘unusual, and pretty’ and selling better than ever. Readers were instructed to seek them at Liberty’s or other ‘oriental importers’.²³ The

largest shawls with floral designs were recommended as evening wraps, and these were sold alongside other adaptations to fashion, such as Chinese shoulder wraps with turned over collars and box-pleating with tassels, Shantung silk robes in pale colours, and Chinese batiste (fine cotton or linen) robes, all richly embroidered.²⁴

Another notable trend was the recycling of Paisley wool shawls. Seen as heirloom pieces, a lively trade in second-hand shawls is evidenced in the 'Sale and Exchange' advertisements placed in *Vogue* magazine by its readers, where Chinese embroidered shawls were being sold as antiques alongside Paisley and 'Indian' shawls, to be worn as they were, or as material to be cut and sewn into new garments.²⁵ These show how the value of the Chinese shawl within Western fashion cultures cannot be understood without reference to its earlier histories, the semantic flexibility of the 'orient', and the material flexibility of textile objects. A 1916 feature on the return to fashionability of the Paisley shawl for American women of all ages provides a visual and textual manifestation of this context. The article reserved the highest praise for 'heirlooms' that had been remodelled into 'something more suitable to the age', showing a design in which a Paisley shawl had been transformed into a 'Chinese cap', cape, muff and bag ensemble, all completed with dangling silk tassels.²⁶ Further possibilities are offered by a reader's advertisement in the previous issue of *Vogue* which offered an 'Indian crepe shawl, two yards square, very handsome fringe'.²⁷ While the references to crepe and fringes could make this item a misidentified Chinese export shawl, it is also possible that it was a Parsi shawl.

Chinese shawls were collected by members of the Parsi Zoroastrian community living in Gujrat province, as Chinese-style embroideries were part of Parsi women's distinctive clothing.²⁸ Parsi merchants were trading in Canton from the 1700s, as a result of close ties with the British East India Company and their extensive interests in China. In the 19th century, affluent Parsis owned fleets of cargo ships and partnered with British firms in the opium trade with China.²⁹ Some Parsis also had businesses and homes in England and were likely also aware of British chinoiserie trends. Saris made from Chinese silk, fully embroidered with Chinese motifs (the gara) were worn by Parsi women, but not by other Indian communities involved in the China trade such as the Sindhis or the Ismailis.³⁰ In the early to mid-20th century, Chinese itinerant peddlars visited Parsi communities in India, selling embroidered goods and also teaching Chinese embroidery techniques, and it is also believed that Chinese embroidery workshops were established in the town of Surat in Western India to directly supply the Parsi market (Figure 3.5).³¹

In this network of Chinese/Parsi/British trade, colonial and intra-Indian relations, it is clear that the story of Parsi traders in Canton is an inter-cultural history that not only chronologically parallels the Spanish and British shawl trade, but can also be considered a part of it. For scholars of Indian textiles, the Chinese export embroideries consumed by Parsi women are known as Parsi embroideries, not Chinese embroideries, in the same way that the Chinese export shawls were also known as Spanish shawls, named for their users rather than their makers. In addition to the web of interactions arising from the spread of the motifs, flexibility of materials and movement of techniques and people, in order to rethink fashion globalization, fashion scholars need to attend to the ways that certain areas of that history, especially those outside of dominant, White Euro-American



Figure 3.5 Detail of silk embroidery tunic made in China for the Indian Parsi community, 19th century. Victoria and Albert Museum T.87-1925. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

cultures, have been ignored.³² A focus on the history of Parsi embroidery motifs and techniques would also link 10th century Zoroastrian migration with the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279 CE), Chinese trading networks, and intercultural exchanges between India, Persia and China pre-dating European imperialism.³³

Fashion, Cultures and Categorization

Museums are forced by their cataloguing systems to select a culture of origin for every object, causing the elision of many histories. Culturally hybrid objects may be relegated to storage if they are too difficult to place within galleries arranged around geographical, ethnic or national groupings. Often, however, they can be used to tell stories of colonial contact, making transnational histories a useful area of focus for decolonial curation, because they require the questioning of many structures of knowledge. It can sometimes appear that this work has already been done by the wearers and makers of global fashion; the ways in which materials, garments and trends travel make fashion the quintessence of the transnational. Yet, we should be wary of the idea that fashion's global flows make it decolonial to any degree; the semantic flexibility and ephemerality that are a core part

of fashion's cultural dynamics are used as much to serve as to oppose the power structures encoded in racial/colonial hierarchies. Beyond fashion and cultural appropriation debates that pitch problematic claims of inspiration and respect against deeply felt and important accusations of theft, racism and disrespect, fashion's material and symbolic flexibility, global flows and fast-paced changes are sadly often used as a means to defend offensive fashion imagery.³⁴

The geographical looseness of the Chinese shawl was used as a licence for fashion creativity with respect to symbolic meaning. In a 1921 report on how Europe's elite style leaders were wearing Spanish shawls, *Vogue* informed readers that the shawls were coming from Venice, Spain, Persia and the Philippines. China was not mentioned, even though, 20 years earlier, importers of Chinese goods and travellers to China had been key sources for the shawls. This is also surprising because the 1910s had seen a marked resurgence in Euro-American Chinese-inspired fashions across clothing, interior design, furniture and even trends in Chinese pet dogs.³⁵ By the 1920s, dragons motifs, 'Mandarin' sleeves, pagoda shapes, and the British chinoiserie Willow Pattern print were recurring features in fashion, as well as the wearing of Chinese embroidered garments as evening coats. This likely stimulated Liberty to begin producing full page catalogue images of the shawls, maintaining their Chinese-ness while skirting round their place and time of manufacture by describing them as: 'clever reproductions' of antique Canton Shawls: 'Correct both in colour and needlework'.³⁶ Paradoxically though, Liberty also began offering these shawls in a colour called 'tango', making a direct reference to the wearing of these same garments in dance performances connected with Spanish and Latin American identity, and parallel fashions for Spanish themes (Figure 3.6).

The overwhelming evidence of film and print media is that Chinese shawls provided a vehicle for simultaneous fantasies of oriental and Latin excess through concurrent fashions for chinoiserie, the tango and Spanish dancing. Furthermore, the shawl's iconography in the 1920s came to include tight wrapping around the naked female body, creating a highly sensual long-fringed dress. By 1921, British and American fashion articles were advising on the 'Spanish fashion' that was being seen in three key areas of fashion practice: the latest designs of Paris fashion houses that featured fringing, tassels, shawl-like shapes and asymmetric hemlines; Spanish-themed social events such as charity balls; and the widespread wearing of embroidered, long-fringed shawls as fashionable garments in their own right (Figure 3.7).³⁷

In literature of the period, descriptions of fashionable parties featured both 'Spanish' and 'Chinese' shawls equally. Virginia Woolf makes multiple references to Spanish shawls being worn by elite fashionable women in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), set in London in 1923, while in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* (1925), Spanish shawls had a presence amidst the garish hedonism of American modernity: 'the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile'.³⁸ Whereas, in Patricia Wentworth's novel *The Chinese Shawl*, the high class fashionability of a 1920s heroine was communicated in her decision to wear a Chinese shawl and Chinese jade pendant to go dancing.³⁹ *Vogue* reported that Spanish influence could be



Figure 3.6 Dancer Beth Beri aka Elizabeth Kislingbury, who was performing in cabaret at the Piccadilly Hotel, London. *Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News*, 4 July 1925. © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.

characterized by a 'square of Canton crêpe . . . lined with jade'.⁴⁰ This lays bare the close, carefree interchangeability of Spanish and Chinese references within interwar shawl fashion, and more accurately captures the cultural in-betweenness of the shawls than any museum catalogue.

Such geographical fluidity was also rich with colonial anxiety. The threat that was posed by shawl trading networks that further reinforced the in-between is seen in a British cartoon published in the *Bystander* in 1924. It satirises tourism at Colon, an Atlantic coast port in Panama that was established in 1850 and became an important stopping off point for cruises.⁴¹ A local population, descended mainly from Black and Spanish labourers who dug the canal, are depicted as 'pirates' and 'modern coloured gentlemen of fortune from the Indies and the China seas'.⁴² They are shown preying on



Figure 3.7 Front cover illustration showing a fashionable woman wrapped in a shawl inspired by Chinese embroidery, *Judge*, 2 October 1926. Mary Evans Picture Library.

unsuspecting White female tourists from a cruise ship by offering shoddy East Asian embroidered silk garments as souvenirs, which the cartoon typifies as Chinese/Spanish shawls and kimono-like garments. The dislocations in space produced by such tourism are here used to construct the fashion consumers as disempowered dupes, who place themselves at the mercy of unscrupulous men of colour because the tourists are shopping outside of the authenticating safety zones of elite Euro-American fashion institutions.

The ability for these shawls to be simultaneously Spanish and Chinese, and belong in many places (for example Venice, Argentina, Panama and London), and at the same time in no place, affords a valuable unknowability; it creates space for something that is neither universal/global nor authentic/local, *and* both universal/global *and* authentic/local. This quality of both/*and* is crucial for understanding how fashion cultures unfix the meanings attached to textiles and garments, with the potential to challenge structures of race and confuse dichotomies such as East/West or modernity/tradition.⁴³ However, it should be stressed that there is nothing decolonial about the ways that magazines like *Vogue* or the *Bystander* and retailers such as Liberty used and redefined a multiplicity of cultural identities and imperial histories. The global sensibilities that the shawls engendered – whether as heirloom, latest fashion purchase or touristic souvenir – were underpinned by a power to define that ultimately reaffirmed the dominance of European coloniality and models of modernity; they constituted another kind of colonial violence. Pursuing and working into the further complexities of hybrid global products such as the Chinese/Spanish shawl, and recognizing how colonial power relations have generated and shaped the currents of global fashion by both exploiting cultural ambiguity and simultaneously shutting down multiple or ambiguous fashion pathways, can be the first step towards a decolonial rejection of an entire apparatus of thinking around fashion and its histories. But these power relations of fashion should not be discussed without a more direct consideration of the role of violence in the generation and circulation of transnational East Asian culture.

Fashion and Military Expansionism

Sukajan embroidery provides an example of the ways in which Japanese and Chinese cultural elements have been globally circulated between cultures and incorporated into sartorial expression in and outside of East Asia in parallel with militaristic ventures. Born out of military conflict following the Second World War, the feature embroideries on these garments allowed their wearers to 'bring back into ordinary experience something of the quality of an extraordinary experience'⁴⁴ – active military service or time spent in a culture different from their own. The flamboyant garment loudly reports unrepeatably experiences.⁴⁵ And yet while Susan Stewart has argued that this 'narrative of interiority and authenticity . . . is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor',⁴⁶ the materiality of the garment and the circumstances under which it was made and by whom tell other narratives. These multidirectional stories demonstrate the ways in which imperial expansionism and militarization, business ventures and fashion

are entangled on a global scale, in ways that complicate how scholars such as Stewart have conceptualized souvenirs as an 'exotic' in relation to modernism.

Souvenirs have long played an important role in travel, and while sometimes these were purchased in trade ports or gifted, at other times they were taken as the result of plundering or pillaging.⁴⁷ These types of acquisition need to be examined with regard to the context of colonization from which they often arose. There is an established history of embroidered souvenir production aimed at military personnel as they travelled in East Asia.⁴⁸ There is also evidence of military personnel acquiring unauthorized embroidered additions to personalize their uniforms for sartorial expression. For example, when uniforms were custom-made by civilian tailors⁴⁹ for U.S. sailors, personalized details such as hidden pockets and embroidery were sometimes added to the garments. Such embellishments included 'liberty cuffs', enabling a sailor to roll back his sleeves to reveal when he was off-duty, or 'at liberty'.⁵⁰ Since the late 19th century, liberty cuffs were formed through the addition of non-regulation embroidered patches sewn inside the garment, as demonstrated by the colourful dragons embroidered on the inside of the cuffs of the naval jumper belonging to an officer aboard the USS Austin (commissioned in 1965) (Figure 3.8). While liberty cuffs were made available all over the fleet, including from tailors based in the United States, they were most commonly made in Asian ports, and associated with China in particular,⁵¹ indicating an established history of off-duty sartorial expression on a global scale. Similar designs, such as embroidered motifs depicting sinuous dragons or those in medallions and their placement on the contrasting fabric of the sleeve cuffs, are apparent in sukajan produced during the immediate post-war period. These designs suggest Chinese inspiration, if not direct intervention, in the early production of souvenir jackets in the form of a US military issue field jacket (Figure 3.9). This is further demonstrated in the bright colouring or regular use of lustrous materials such as silk or rayon in the construction of early sukajan that calls to mind embroidered Chinese robes or other souvenirs.

In Japan, sukajan expanded upon a broad range of embroidered souvenirs offered to military men such as embroidered kimono purposely designed for the souvenir market that had long served as popular gifts to bring home to wives, daughters or other female relatives or friends after completing tours of duty.⁵² Export kimono featured elaborate embroidered designs across the upper back such as flowers associated with Japan including wisteria, chrysanthemums and cherry blossoms, a padded hemline, gussets to resemble a skirt and an embroidered and fringed or tasselled tie. These were popular with markets in America and Europe from the early 20th century.⁵³ Sukajan likewise featured stunning embroidered motifs applied to the very masculine shape of the bomber or baseball jacket (Figure 3.1). Initially tailored and embroidered ad hoc by private commission for soldiers, the Japanese fabric import/export company Kosho & Co (later TOYO Enterprise) devised a jacket featuring embroidered motifs and arranged for these garments to be manufactured on a larger scale in Kiryu and Ashikaga near Tokyo by craftspeople formally engaged in the kimono industry, which had been severely disrupted during the war.⁵⁴ As the sukajan became a popular souvenir among the US soldiers



Figure 3.8 US navy jumper with embroidered liberty cuffs, mid-20th century, collection of Elizabeth Kramer. Photograph: Allison Hedstrom.



Figure 3.9 Sukajan depicting ‘Dragon and Japan Map’ (late 1940s), collection of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd. Reproduced by kind permission of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd.

stationed in Japan, Kosho & Co., the leading supplier of souvenir jackets, expanded their operation through distribution to Post Exchanges.⁵⁵

The sukajan’s sartorial use demonstrates a bi-directional rather than unidirectional stylistic dialogue between Japan and the United States. This is important to note because globalization is often associated with a worldwide unidirectional spread of American culture.⁵⁶ While the military occupation of Japan between 1945 and 1952 was intended to Americanize Japan by radically transforming its government, economy, educational system, press, and social institutions, and “educat[ing]” Japanese citizens about “freedom”, “democracy”, and other American cultural sensibilities,⁵⁷ a close study of the sukajan allows us to unpick how, through fashion, aesthetic influence and other value systems might move back and forth between nations in unexpected ways, despite very visible, unequal power distributions.

The term sukajan draws upon two words: Yokosuka, the location of a Japanese (and then later American) naval base; and the Japanese word for jumper, ジャンパー (jyanpa). Notably jyanpa is written in katakana, a writing script used for foreign words adopted

and transformed into the Japanese language. The base at Yokosuka served an important role in the maintenance and repair of the US fleets during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. It remains the largest strategic naval installation in the Western Pacific and continues to serve as an important recreational site for US military personnel in the region. Several sukajan specialty shops still operate along Dobuita Street in Yokosuka, popular for souvenir shopping and nightlife, just minutes from the American base, as they have done since Occupation, providing US servicemen in peace and wartime with opportunities to purchase sukajan.

Although the sukajan is an off-duty garment, in addition to the elaborately embroidered scheme across the back, embroidery is a notable feature on the shoulder sleeves and breast pockets, zones usually reserved for service patches in uniform design. Object analysis of sukajan further demonstrates the global-facing nature of this garment. According to company history, an employee of the leading postwar producer of sukajan, Kosho & Co., suggested that these garments should be constructed in the form of an American varsity or baseball jacket.⁵⁸ The motifs embroidered on postwar sukajan draw on a diverse iconography referencing an 'orient' or Japan, including dragons, tigers, koi, sakura blossoms or trees, maiko or geisha, as well as maps of Japan. This strategy of self-orientalism⁵⁹ reinforced and circulated particular stereotypes of Japan and demonstrates an awareness of the marketability in, and hoped-for profitability from, such references in the desperate economic climes of postwar Japan. At the same time, such motifs were also used in combination with, or replaced by, American military phraseology and iconography such as eagles, fighter planes or Native American motifs that had long been appropriated in expressions of national identity of the United States.⁶⁰ Tailor Toyo demonstrated financial acumen and moved beyond self-orientalism by supplying tour jackets to Post Exchanges beyond that of the US Fleet activities based at Yokosuka. These jackets are also a testament to the military expansionism of the United States and related conflicts. The motifs embroidered on sukajan during this time are therefore emblematic of the other nations in which US military presence spread in the late-19th and 20th centuries. In 1898 the United States replaced Spanish colonizers in the Philippines and established a further presence in Greenland during World War II and Panama following this war, to name but a few examples.

Sukajan can be reversible, featuring alternative colour and embroidery schemes on each side of the garment (Figure 3.10). This is not dissimilar to the hidden embroidery associated with liberty cuffs, as well as a phenomenon in Japanese menswear where haori (the coat worn over kimono), can be quite reserved in design but when turned inside out reveal an intricate design on the inner lining that can relate very personally to its wearer, for example to his love of poetry or political leanings. When analyzing the reversible nature of post-war sukajan in TOYO Enterprise's garment archive, it was pointed out that reversible garments offered increased variety and were thus more profitable.⁶¹ These innovations in the design of the sukajan – its reversibility and similarity in form to American military and sport garments – demonstrate Japanese initiative to create a profitable market, which was additionally increased by adapting and transplanting further foreign motifs through local embroidery.



Figure 3.10 Reverse of Tailor Toyo sukajan gifted to Elizabeth Kramer by TOYO Enterprise in 2019. Photograph: Elizabeth Kramer.

In the souvenir jacket celebrating the Alaska Highway (Figure 3.11), the military connection at first may not be apparent. Construction on the 1523-mile highway (commenced in 1942) aimed to connect Alaska to the west coast of the United States through Canada at a time when Japanese invasion seemed a distinct possibility.⁶² TOYO Enterprise produced souvenir jackets commemorating the highway, to which US servicemen provided much of the labour, in the mid- to late-1950s. On the illustrated example, the embroidered motifs are focused on conjuring a stereotypical view of a subarctic North American landscape through its wildlife and Indigenous people. A couple in fluffy parkas with hoods drawn can be found embroidered on the breast of the garment while a large moose head features on the reverse. The former motif counts among the images that objectified the dispossessed and unfairly treated Indigenous people of the Americas. These highly romanticized images became prolific at the end of the 19th century when Native populations had reached their lowest.⁶³ Within a decade of the first sukajan being sold to US occupying forces, TOYO Enterprise was producing souvenir jackets in a wide range of designs corresponding to the region in which they were being sold, adding an additional layer of complexity to the matters of US settler colonialism, cultural appropriation and racial stereotyping. When a Japanese company portrayed Indigenous peoples of the west coast of North America to appeal to US



Figure 3.11 'Alaska Highway' sukajan (mid to late 1950s), collection of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd. Reproduced by kind permission of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd.

customers, Japanese constructions of race, nation and Otherness, and their entanglement with wider constructions of difference circulating in East Asia, Europe *and* America, brought Japanese embroideries directly into the wider use of ethnic stereotypes within global systems.⁶⁴

Souvenir to Global Fashion

As souvenir jackets became ubiquitous with tours of duty, the production of souvenir jackets spread to other centres. For example, while TOYO Enterprise continued to produce sukajan two decades later for American military personnel on shore leave in Japan during the Vietnam War, souvenir jackets also began to be made in Vietnam. During the 1960s, confidence in the United States' military intervention in Vietnam waned, and the character of these jackets transformed dynamically. Documentary footage from Ken Burns and Lynn Novik's *The Vietnam War* (2017) captures a naval officer bidding a fond farewell to his family before departing for Vietnam. His little boy is dressed in a brightly coloured embroidered sukajan perhaps purchased for him by his father while on a previous tour of duty (Figure 3.12).

The boy's jacket contrasts sharply with those produced in Vietnam during the War. The Vietnam souvenir jackets still performed commemoration and were rather formulaic



Figure 3.12 ‘The Vietnam War’ directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick © Florentine Films and WETA 2017. All rights reserved.

in featuring battle maps relating to tours of duty and motifs related to military prowess or stereotypes of Asia such as tigers and dragons, but they also differed notably from the earlier Japanese examples. The colourful, sumptuous rayon of the sukajan was replaced with the utilitarian fabric of field uniforms. Military or South Vietnamese tailors directly embroidered battle maps upon used garments as well as the specific details of where and when the wearer served. Mottos such as ‘When I die I’ll go to heaven because I’ve served my time in hell’, communicated a less triumphant stance, as seen in the jacket that heavy truck driver Joseph Monroe had custom made before departing Vietnam in 1968 following his tour of duty (Figure 3.13).

Further meanings were folded into the garment when sukajan were adopted by Japanese youth cultures. In the 1960s a working-class fashion movement called sukaman (Yokosuka Mambo) rejected the popular post-war Ivy look, inspired by college dress at Ivy League institutions in the United States and precursor to the preppy look.⁶⁵ Sukaman instead imitated the dress of Japanese gangsters and American soldiers, patronizing the very shops that dealt souvenirs to the Americans.⁶⁶ This style was brought to popular attention in Japan through Shohei Imamura’s 1961 film *Buta to gunkan* (*Battleships and Pigs*), set in the red light district and docks near the American naval base in Yokosuka in which the ineffective, wanna-be yakuza character Kinta dons two such jackets. The jacket’s association with deviant behaviour has continued to be reinforced through international film and television. Both its military and subcultural associations made it an attractive garment outside of military circles and subcultural groups to consumers hoping to draw on these associations, as well as fashion labels hoping to capitalize on them. The contradictory reading of military garments as both highly ordered and subversive lends to their irresistible fashion appeal.⁶⁷ Likewise, the ‘most common narrative about subcultures



Figure 3.13 Souvenir jacket belonging to Specialist Fourth Class Joseph 'Joe' E. Monroe (1969), Collection #MHI 2014.22.01, US Army Heritage & Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

is one that casts them as non-conformist . . . different, dissenting,⁶⁸ adding further to the desirability of the garment.⁶⁹ The appeal of the sukajan has been enhanced by celebrities who donned the jacket, from Mick Jagger in the 1960s to Kanye West in 2016. While the garment now has little to do with class, political struggle, or criminality, the 'badass' exchange value of the jacket is promised to global audiences through such associations in fashion blogs and advertising and reinforced through film and TV.⁷⁰ Indeed, in the mid-2010s the souvenir jacket became a 'must-buy piece'⁷¹ in mainstream fashion. However, while its relationship to violence gives the sukajan its fashionable edge, the depoliticization of the garment through popular and celebrity culture obscures its history. The potent impact of politics and the military on the everyday in post-war Japan – desperation, injury and death, sexual exploitation and rape⁷² – has been lost in fashionable translation.

In an oversaturated market, fashion brands have increasingly turned to storytelling to capture attention and connect emotionally with the consumer. Fashion blogs and product descriptions during the 2010s trend latched onto the origin story of the sukajan, emphasizing the pleasures and excitement of its militaristic and subculture associations without looking too deeply at the related violence and trauma.⁷³ For example the Japanese distributor SUKAJACK, which sells upmarket sukajan, emphasizes such connections in

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its blog; it recommends the brands Tailor Toyo as the first and continuous line of sukajan since the 1950s, Alpha-One Industries as an established producer of military wear since 1959, and Houston as another manufacturer of military wear since 1947 and responsible for the first flight jacket in Japan.⁷⁴ These sanitised heritage narratives are key to the garment's sartorial appeal as markers of authenticity, but the omitted stories of sukajan are also crucial in that they enable a new reading of culture and power displays that can help us rethink global fashion flows.

Sukajan continue to be available for purchase as souvenirs in Japan. However, fieldwork analysis of the sukajan available at speciality shops in Tokyo and Kyoto in 2019 revealed that most of these garments emblematic of Japan are now manufactured in China.⁷⁵ The Japanese textile and fashion industry experienced dramatic heights, dizzying falls and recovery either side of the Second World War, most recently succumbing to import competition from more newly industrialized economies.⁷⁶ When we asked at BSC Gallery in Kyoto why most of the sukajan featured in their specialty shop were manufactured in China, we were handed a bilingual, laminated sign explaining this was due to financial hardships that the Japanese textile industry underwent in 2000 but to rest assured that Japanese apparel companies built garment factories in China resulting in 'high-quality works by cutting-edge technologies' so 'please don't worry about it'. The nonchalance with which this sign dismisses a shift in the production base for sukajan demonstrates both the geographical fluidity of fashion due to economic imperatives and also how fashion retailing seeks to minimize this in order to capitalize on more historic cultural capital.

Conclusion

Global flows of fashion have enabled the presence of paradoxical hybridities within codes of national identity, and underline the ways in which both international trade and national subjectivities have formed up in conditions of colonialism. Writing a history of the Chinese embroidered shawl in Britain and America has involved consideration of transformation and transmission between China, the Philippines, Latin America, Spain, the United States, Britain, France, Italy and India. The sukajan offers material evidence of distinct transnational narratives through local sewing cultures and personal and public narratives of travel across a similarly wide range of locations. Multicultural roots resulting in an ambivalence and multiplicity of meanings and overlapping resonances have given these garments their fashionable edge at particular moments in time and in many places. These are accretions of the local and the transnational. They create localized fashion phenomena that in turn create distinctive styles associated with particular times, places and people that are then appropriated and acquire wider commercial uses. They show that fashion cultures traverse continents in response to business ventures bound up in narratives of imperialistic expansionism. Rather than repulsing consumers, these stories of militaristic prowess attract them. However, histories of Americanization/globalization and American history making are also turned inside out when the fashion acts of American soldiers are appropriated by Japanese 'bad boys' too.

Many discussions of the globalization of fashion, including notions of internet ‘fashionscapes’, are still based on overall definitions of fashion, modernity and postmodernity created within the modern/coloniality frame, focused mainly on the late 20th and 21st century, and most often reflecting a White Euro-American perspective.⁷⁷ Attempts to write back – by arguing from the perspective of the local, the indigenous, the colonized, the margins – risk re-inscribing categories of oppression, confirming their validity and reproducing colonial power relations.⁷⁸ Shawls and sukajan are two examples in transnational fashion research that have the capacity to catalyse other ways of discussing East Asian fashion histories as globally connected, but without recourse to positions of Otherness. Decolonial debates require a re-envisioning of the dynamics of globalization. The word ‘global’ often masks specific transnational interactions, with specific power relations and histories of conflict. Through our work on embroidered things, we have sought to underline both the specificity and imprecision of global flows of fashion. Bringing attention to bear on these relationships and journeys involves holding lightly the idea that cultural assignments can be made at all. This enables us to pay attention to the in-between and the transformation and transplantations that ‘globalization’ implies and that fashion makes an everyday, material experience. Exploring how the paradoxical nature of fashion is driven by ideas of distinction and difference creates a particular set of dynamics around travelling objects and allows us to think differently about how globalization works, and how fashion has exploited colonial activities and legacies. This does not enable fashion scholars to create neat narratives, geographically or in time. Indeed, any attempt to reduce fashion globalization to something simple would be to miss the presence of narratives with decolonial potential.

Notes

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