To what extent have morals influenced fashion in India and France since the 1700s?

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Global Connections

3A

Abstract

The contents of this document state how morals influence Fashion. France and India are the focal countries of research. Japan acts as a common reference. The study begins with the 18th century and concludes with the 21st century. Women are the primary subjects. Methods used throughout the research include: the definition of morals, and background information on each country, results from studies, the misreading of fashion, and analytical reasoning. Based upon results from these investigations, morals decode fashion. A study from Lakehead University answered the question on how people’s clothing choices determine their work as a scholar. Results proved that clothing choices display a person’s background, income, heritage, and religious beliefs. This may be why new about France’s ban on burkas, established October 6th 2010, created religious debate. This news supports the notion that cultures protect their “brand” through fashion. Fashion has also been used as a way for women to progress. Middle Eastern women have begun to decorate burkas with Swarovski crystals. In addition, French women moved away from tight corsets to breeches and pantaloons after the French Revolution. Both are results of cross-fertilization, the integration of ideas. All in all, fashion displays the evolution of morals. It is a symbolic way of giving insight as to who a person is; who no language barrier. Continuation of the study of how morals influence fashion will continue as long as history is made.

Introduction

As researchers have begun to value the impact of fashion on society, the question of how morals have changed fashion has ignited scholarly debates. As many sociologists have discovered, fashion resembles moralistic changes. Fashion gives a sense of identity, but it also gives a window into a culture’s philosophies or social standing. In today’s fashion world, India has one of the fastest growing fashion industries. France, the birthplace of couture and avant-garde fashion, has become one of the fashion capitals of the world (Pringle). In Japan, the popular arrival of harajuku fashion has taken over comic book and pop culture. These reasons make India and France, with minimal discussion of Japan, the focal points of this piece of writing with women as the main subjects from the 1700s to the 21st century. Stated by the historical French fashion designer Coco Chanel, “Fashion is architecture. It is a matter of proportions” Coco Chanel ("FIDM Just for Educators"). Meaning that fashion builds a society’s identity and exhibits moralistic changes in that culture. In all, fashion consists of more than models walking down a runway; but how a society reinvents itself over time.

Fashion

Fashion is an everyday event that gives people the opportunity to display their identification to society. Clothing identifies morals, religions, and societies. More important, clothing indicates personal beliefs. In an experiment, Fiona Blaikie of Lakehead University asked the question “How will (people’s) clothing choices…determine (their) work as a scholar?” (Blaikie pg.1 par.1).

The visuals and the aesthetic choices combined in Blaikie’s results gave worldly meanings. Those meanings included how clothing shows a person’s background, income, and religious beliefs. Fashion statements made by the artists also presented their socio-economic standings as well as political and aesthetic values with the world and human kind (Blaikie pg.3 par.5). In other words, clothing helps people to communicate on a global spectrum. It requires no knowledge of the language, just a personal style. Without clothes, the difficulty of expression would increase. As stated by Fashion Marketing instructor Kathryne Pringle from Tallwood High School, “(fashion) is a part of (society)” (Pringle).

Fashion will persist to touch everyone, leaving no body bare from identification. Therefore, identification contributes to how a people form their personal style (Pringle). In short, personal style resembles a person’s lifestyle. In fact, people uninterested in fashion still have a place in it because they illustrate that neglectful sentiment through their clothing of choice. For that reason, every person has a since of style within him or her. Like designer Bill Base has stated, “Style is primarily a matter of instinct” (“FIDM Just for Educators”). The level of effort put into their style makes the difference between trend setters, fashion followers, or those who simply do not put in as much effort. Even through fashion is an artistic form of expression, cases exists where fashion can be misinterpreted (Pringle).

Misunderstandings with Clothing

Metaphorically speaking, misjudgment occurs when a person walks down the runway; society’s runway is the street. Professor Anne Jund from the University of Hawai’I at Manoa, lectured about traditional clothing and her discussion helps to support how clothing sometimes goes misread. Jund works with students in the process of developing their English language skills, they are known as ESL students. ESL means English as a Second Language. Jund asked her students, to define kimono, a traditional Japanese wear that has a square cut body and square cut sleeves (“UBC” par.2). Some of her results included that a kimono is a type of costume and inspired by the western world. (Jund pg.3 par.2). All things considered, fashion is inventive, making it subject to misinterpretations ("Fashion and Culture of the Industrial Design"). This helps to illustrate why clothing alone does not make for fair judgment. In order to validate what lifestyle people identify with, a person should have knowledge about someone’s heritage.

Lack of knowledge about a culture can create unfair judgments. For instance, some may feel that in places such as India and Iran, men force Arab and Muslim women to wear burkas as a practice of purdah or hijab (Hunter). Actually, men do not always force Middle Eastern women to do so. Some women make that decision. Those women choose to do so because in their eyes, purdah, the covering of the entire body, is a way of remaining loyal to their culture and keeping cultural integrity (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh). Another example exists in the document *The Scented Winds of Change: Conflicting Notions of Modesty and Vanity Among Young Qatari and Emirati Women*, the authors give an in depth analysis on how women’s fashion in the Qatari and Emirati culture reflect social, gender, and religious identity.

Through their research, they found that the black abaya, outer gown, has a different context in oil rich Gulf countries and does not associate with religion, in this case Islam, but with status and wealth (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh). Their finding gives another reason why the idea of practicing purdah should not automatically be negative. Yet again, this notion supports why understanding a culture is vital before a person can create an opinion about a heritage. On the other hand, those of a certain heritage also ensure that what they reflect to the world is true their culture.

Roles and Meaning

Therefore this leaves a society in the shoes of a designer, designing and deciding their brand for the world to see. Fashion has many roles and through those roles professes a culture. “Acceptance or rejection of a style (reacts) to the society we live in.” (“PBS” par.5) The way people decide to dress each day exemplifies an unconscious way of making sure that he or she is giving out their desired message to others. Clothing can differentiate economic classes, social classes, and the amount of power someone has. For instance:

“Japan’s colonial regime also used clothing reforms to try to exercise authority over colonial people. The resistance to such acts of control by colonial women points to the power of clothing as a technology of empire but also to the “precarious vulnerabilities” of Japan’s imperial regime.” (Nickerson)

In all, fashion plays a plethora of roles in the world and as a result it continues to reflect different moralities. Bernard Gert, a writer for Stanford University’s Encyclopedia, gives an in-depth understanding of morality. He defines morality as being a code of conduct made in a society, a group of people, or a certain type of behavior that someone accepts (Gert par.1). James Fieser from the University of Texas states that morals exist in order to “avoid punishment, to gain praise, to attain happiness, to be dignified, or to fit in with society”.

Traditions exist within morals. Historically and traditionally speaking, males have dominated morals (Fieser). Categories such as property, business contracts, and governing society support the theory of male dominance in morals throughout history (Fieser). On the other hand, according to Fieser’s research, women do not have such a dominate role when it comes to morals. Women usually have nurturing spirits and overseers of domestic life which makes them more impulsive and creative than men (Fieser). As a result, social movements and changes have received more women supporters. All in all, fashion is susceptible to creating barriers amongst cleavages like gender, race, religion, and socio-economics. In turn, those barriers create distinctions between groups because of the way they dress (Gert par.5).

By taking a look in history, those barriers can be seen. In 19th century England, laws prohibited people from wearing clothing produced by France (“PBS” par.9). Now in the 21st century, France has a ban on burqas; established October 7th, 2010 (“Associated Press”). Anyone seen wearing a burqua in France will find their self with a $213 fine. Those who force a woman to wear a burqa will be fined $42,392 (“Associated Press” par.4). “Only about 2,000 women in France wear such veils, but proponents see the law as a symbolic defense of French values such as women’s rights and secularism” (“Associated Press” par.5). The ban was apparently put in place in order to protect France’s national values as well (“CNN” par.8). French Prime Minister Francois Fillon defended the ban by stating “the French Republic lives in a bare-headed fashion” (“CNN” par.9). In this respect, these laws safeguard a society’s brand, but also create religious barriers and conflicts. Yet, without protection of a society’s “brand” a member of the society may give the wrong impression to an outsider of how his or her culture may work.

Evolution through Fashion

VIPs, or very important people like celebrities, influence fashion; so as very important people are to fashion trends, people are the protectors and influencers of their heritage. Therefore as morals change, so will fashion. Fashion indicates a society’s beliefs and how those beliefs have changed over time. For example, in the ancient Japanese culture, a woman covering her neck showed her virtue, explaining the high collars. Over the course of history, this thought has changed because of progression with women’s rights and the cross-fertilization of cultures around the world (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh). “The possibility to adopt innovations already tested in different sectors, generating a transfer of knowledge across various sectors” defines cross-fertilization (“DesignResearchNetwork” par.5). For this reason, today kimonos do not have such high collars. Therefore, the struggle between traditional values and modernity has come into play. Hence, some women have chosen to integrate the two rather than deciding between the two (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh). As a result, some women in the Middle East have chosen to wear a traditional black abaya but cover it with Swarovski crystals (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh).

One of the focal factors for why the struggle between modernity and tradition persists comes from technology. “‘Tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are widely used as polar opposites in a linear theory of social change” (Gusfield par.1). The authors of *The Scented Winds of Change* gave their own judgment on the subject matter explaining that their experience with studying women’s fashion in the Qatari and Emirati cultures was “particularly interesting because of the social and economic upheaval that these countries have (undergone) and the concomitant shifts in discourses of beauty, religion, and modernity in the media, advertising and other forms of the local commercial imagery” (Belk, Gressel, and Sobh).On the contrary, the integration of fashion between international borders threatens a culture's uninfluenced progression. As a result, cross fertilization continues (“DesignResearchNetwork” par.4). As the world comes to a more homogenous foundation, cross fertilization could change the theory on what a certain culture deems as culturally fashionable. This could then lead to a culture separating from original traditions and creating new traditions. Designer Bruce Oldfield stated, “Fashion is more usually a gentle progression of revisited ideas” (“FIDM Just for Educators”). This then brings about the question of how a culture keeps its identity.

Keeping the Culture

Every fashion event gives new insight of what is trending and what is not; but society does not always choose to comply. However, societies have remained loyal to their roots while keeping up with worldly trends. Take Japan for instance. Elizabeth Vanhouten, writer of *Women in the Japanese World*, discovered that traditional dress for men and women includes the kimono and obi sash. The color, design, and decorations of the kimono all represent something about that person (Vanhouten). Although many people of the Japanese cultures do not wear kimonos on a regular basis as their ancestors did, they keep the tradition up by wearing them to special occasions such as weddings, tea ceremonies, and on shichigosan (Vanhouten). Shichigosan, a traditional rite of passage festival held nationally on November 15th for girl’s three and seven and for boys three and five (“Kids Web Japan” par.2). The Japanese culture has also kept up with the modern world by adopting western-styled clothing such as trousers. Still, Japan continues to safeguard its culture.

India Takes on the Runway

India has chosen to take the role of the public relations manager who is behind the scenes of a fashion show by creating its new identification and exhibiting it to the world. Hindol Sengupta, author of *Rampup: the business of Indian fashion* by Hindol Sengupta, discusses how the world of fashion has helped India to change its own image. She explains the arrival of the fashion industry in India as “a time when the entire focus of fashion in India is toward putting together processes and systems through which our cultural heritage in clothing (converts) into powerful brands” (Sengupta). In 2008, the number of major fashion shows in India increased from less than two in 2004, to three to four in 2008 (“Grail Research” slide.5). The Indian fashion market is expected to grow 178% between the year 2008 and 2012; making India one of the top emerging fashion markets in the world (“Grail Research” slide.16). Questions like how to protect the Indian heritage but still create a unique Indian idea in fashion remain in people’s minds. “Indian designers (continue to try) to blend in western and traditional designs” (Nidhi). This concept could be difficult as 80.5% of India’s population practices Hinduism and 13.4% practices Islam; whereas with the majority of European and Western countries, Hinduism is not the primary religion (“Central Intelligence Agency”). Consequently, that means the idea of fashion trends differ around the globe. Yet, India has to think of the right image for Indian fashion. Market competition remains very influential in how a fashion company brands itself, and essentially their cultural. Therefore, support from that culture's government and society remains crucial in order to be successful.

So far, little, if any, support exists toward the progression of fashion in India by its government (“Grail Research” slide.12). Still, support from international fashion brands, corporations, and associations exist abundantly (“Grail Research” slide.12). Nonetheless, the Indian fashion market continues to grow based upon the 7.1% consumer spending growth from 2002 to 2007 (“Grail Research” slide.19). Even fashion representatives and buyers have shown more support in the Indian market as it went from 160 fashion representatives and buyers last year to 190 this year (Nidihi par.7). Yet, it did not start that way. Every single country started off with its own style. In India, the environment influenced what people wore, but religion influenced the design.

Indian fashion began within the formation and creation of religion. The versatility of the Indian Subcontinent shaped a mixture of different people with different needs. Such groups include the Turkic-Iranian, Indo-Aryans, Mongoloids, and the Mongo-Dravidians (Shetty). Some lived in tropical moonshine or temperate areas (“Central Intelligence Agency”). Based upon where they lived, their clothing choices would be made. Therefore, clothing has religious, cultural, and regional identifications (Shetty).

During the Mughal Empire, 1526 to 1857, fashion took on an evolution in India (Shetty). In this period of time “the purpose of clothing moved from protection and ornamentation to “rules of behavior” for men and women: veils, turbans, etc., acquired cultural and societal connotations” (Shetty). Influences of fashion came from those in the court and who had nobility (Akbar the Great). Purdah, nose rings, and salwar kameez, loose pajama-like trousers, a traditional dress worn by women and men in South Asia and Central Asia established themselves in this period (Shetty). Ruler Humanyun introduced Persian elements in costumes, which transformed the designs and styles of fashion in India.

Then Akbar introduced the terms sarbgai, meaning to cover the entire body, izar, later renamed yar, which means companion of the coat, and last but not least burqa which means the covering of the entire body (Shetty). The burqa, contrary to popular belief, formed as a method to respect women. Purdah, the practice of covering of the whole body, carries the idea that a man can see a woman for her, not her looks. It also helps to protect marriages and to avoid gazes from tempted men.

In the modern Indian world, the functionality of clothing has taken a place of importance. In relation to how the functionality of clothing, influences such as culture also change how people dress. There is an Afgan-type Karakuli cap which is common in Delhi during the winter (Shetty). Also, the Punjab tshoga came from the Turkestan culture with its plaited silk cords still attached to slit over the breast (Shetty). As Indian fashion has transformed through cultural inspirations, it has led itself into modern day wear. Today, males continue to wear the lungis or mundus and have started to dress in a fashion that composes of a pagri breeches and a short kurta. India’s advancements in the fashion industry continue to help their economy. “India’s rapidly expanding economy has provided the basis for a fundamental change” (“CountrySide”).

Along with the economic changes, India has shown itself more to the world. Bollywood has taken on a huge influence with the help of movies such as Slumdog Millionaire. Clothing has moved from being only purposeful for migrations and cultural adoptions to now being representational of a growing independence through globalization. In reference to the women of India with the struggle between modernity and tradition, Indian women “still care about fashion and being unique and embellished” (Pringle). India’s story through fashion is not the only one to show how fashion has transformed a society; countries such as France have their own stories as well.

Couture, French Fashion

If Vogue Magazine had an international edition, alongside India would be France on the cover. In France’s history, one of the most well-known trend setters of the 18th century include Louis XIV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour (Tait). During the 18th century, Louis XIV held the title of the new monarch but his mistress, Madame de Pompadour, changed the fashion scene (Tait). Madame de Pompadour loved art work and had a “taste for the Rococo that transformed the look of Versailles and swept through the drawing rooms of Europe and beyond” (Cosgrave). Rococo was a famous artist of the time (Cosgrave). The role of women during the 18th century began to change as women gained more independence. The new found independence made it possible for women to start their own salons and write books (Cosgrave). Then Watteau, a painter known to create prolific scenes of Parisian life in his works, transformed fashion by bringing about a new spirit of elegance (Cosgrave). Therefore, a new art inspired style began to form for women during the 18th century. “The Watteau gown……a mainstay of the fashionable woman’s wardrobe of the period” (Cosgrave).

When looking over the list of fashion icon’s in France during the 18th century, Marie Antoinette has her place on the list as well. Marie Antoinette was the Queen of France during the late 1700s (“Marie Antoinette Online”). She was in contrast to the strict and ritualistic etiquette of the French court (“Marie Antoinette Online”). She showed this contempt through her exuberant fashions. For instance, one of Marie Antoinette’s biggest successes was the coiffure a l’Iphigenie (Weber 105). The coiffure a l’Iphigenie is made of black ribbons, has a black veil trimming, and has a crescent moon on top (Weber 105). This particular dress did not only show her individual, trendsetting style, but her tribute to death of King Louis XV with it being black (Weber 105). Antoinette continued to reinvent fashion until she was beheaded in the French Revolution by her own people (“Marie Antoinette Online”).

French fashion came to yet another turn after the French Revolution because revolutionary momentum. The French Revolution was an attempt to take down the Louis XVI and began with the storming of the Bastille (Cody). At this point in time, “fashion had become a political issue and increasingly styles became more democratic” (Cosgrave). Women who supported the cause wore the *negligee a la patriote*, which is “a royal blue redingote worn over a white dress and red and white striped collar” (Cosgrave). Fabrics named “Equality”, “Liberty”, and “Republican” began to sell, giving women another opportunity to have a political stance (Cosgrave). Then, a green and white silk and linen robe *a la Francaise* emerged which “corresponded to the philosophy of freedom and love of nature...” and changed women’s fashion yet again (Cosgrave).

“The French Revolution (remains as) not only a crucial event considered in the context of Western history, but also, perhaps the single most crucial influence on British intellectual, philosophical, and political life in the nineteenth century.” (Cody) When the revolution ended in the 19th century, the government wrote a new constitution and Napoleon Bonaparte soon became the new emperor with his wife Josephine by his side (Cosgrave). Napoleon and Josephine revived the wearing of court dresses just as the style had started to die out which brought an end to the “sartorial egalitarianism of the revolution.” (Cosgrave) “The style of clothes which the emperor and empress of France chose to wear at their coronation held a huge significance, for it displayed the simple fact that France again was governed by an institution”(Cosgrave). In effect, this put them in a position of royalty that might have gone a loose. Thus, the influence of fashion among all social groups became more important; resulting in the creation of department stores.

The arrival of department stores in France was not the only thing evolving during the 19th century. Women evolved as well. Women began to gain more opportunities especially in education at colleges such as Smith and Wellesley and in the work force (Cosgrave). Activities such as swimming, fencing, and bicycle-riding also became a bigger part of life for women (Cosgrave). As a result, fashion for women changed so that women could do these new found activities. Clothing such as breeches and pantaloons replaced full skirts and restricting corsets. This may be a result from articles written by muckrakers (Dorman). Muckrakers, those who seek to expose harm or other human rights issues in order to influence change (Dorman).

The Progression of Women through Fashion

Fashion took yet another major turn when it hit into the 20th century. In 1950, thirty percent of the world’s population lived in cities, and statistics predicted that by the year 2005 nearly half of the world’s population would live in cities (Cosgrave). This meant that the cross fertilization of influences would occur more often with the abundance of cultures integrating. Sadly, during the same era the urbanization took place, so did times of war and turmoil. World War I broke out in 1914 and a number of other wars including World War II and the Spanish War did as well (“Kennesaw”). “Two factors are largely responsible for this – technological innovation and the progression of thought” (Cosgrave). Later, when the internet became mainstream, liberal thoughts could spread throughout the world. Therefore, women become able to gain more rights with a new system of having support. For women, the requirement no longer existed to wear skirts and tight corsets.

French designer Paul Poiret assisted with the progression in the early 20th century when he traveled to Europe and America to advance French fashion (Cosgrave). Then came Coco Chanel, a historical French fashion designer. Chanel helped to move women’s fashion into one that was inspired by men’s fashion such as suits. Her ideas at the time seemed very radical. Overtime, people began to accept Chanel’s ideas. “Revolutionary genderless daytime pant suits and evening tuxedos reflected a modern society in which feminists had earned a place for women in a man’s world” (Cosgrave). Today’s modern day world proves that her efforts found long lasting success. “Pierre Berge said that Coco Chanel had given women freedom, adding that Yves (a famous French designer) gave them power, reducing the sartorial differences between men and women” (Cosgrave). In all, women today have become more independent and expressive. As a result, women have gained political rights such as voting and workplace equality with the transformation of women’s fashion being the mark of success.

A Conclusion of Fashion

Fashion has helped to not only show progression throughout society, but also to safeguard identity. People act as a model every day by walking in the hallway, down street, up the stairs, sitting in a chair, or standing by a door, not realizing that they are in fact reflecting not just a moment, but their life. The way a person dresses displays the way he or she thinks. Morals are perceived based upon the way a person dresses, may it be a burqua or colors that support a revolution. Fashion and morals go hand in hand. Therefore, history will continue to show that the two overlap. According to William and his wife, women’s trends in the past consisted of more curvaceous and busty shapes. Vanity Fair’s July 2008 issue shows how women wearing loose-fitted, unbiased clothing that allow for them to have a gender neutral look (Williams).

Therefore, men and women wear similar styled clothing, if not the same type of clothing. In all, fashion symbolizes progression and change in morals. For that reason, the author of this paper likes to say that fashion is a wearable art, and therefore by looking at fashion throughout history, the way a society “carried themselves” during that time becomes apparent. Although most people may not put much contemplation into fashion, fashion has a vital role on how a society evolves, and everyone involves his or her self in it. As a result, the author of this paper agrees with Mrs. Pringle with her statement that, “(People) have to get dressed, so (they) care to a certain point” (Pringle). Without fashion, getting new ideas and concepts to spread without having a way to exude them would become difficult. It would be difficult because there would be no way to convey a movement or thought to the rest of the world without having that language barrier.

Fashion is symbolic of its time, and morals influence where trends go. “So much of what we wear deal with historical developments” (Pringle). Even today with Lady Gaga, her outrageous dress is not just for entertainment value, but to show those who look up to her that being different does not make a person weird. Then with the show “American Muslim” on TLC, the Muslim women prove that although they do keep their culture’s traditional wear, they have integrated modern customs as a way to show that they remain connected with the world and modernity (TLC). Therefore, as a society changes and morals progress, fashion will advance with them and France and India have proven so throughout their history. All in all, as long as people continue to “walk the runway” and attended their personalized fashion show in the mirror, “there will always be fashion” (Pringle).

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