

**B-FD323/B-FM323
Dissertation**

**A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Japan and South Korea: The Differences of
Aesthetics and Influence in Menswear Street Fashion**

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BAFDTN5B / 18688

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AY2017/18

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Fashion Design and Textiles

LASALLE College of the Arts
Faculty of Design
Singapore

Accepted by the Faculty of Design,
LASALLE College of the Arts,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Fashion Design and Textiles

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Introduction

The Asian streetwear market in youth culture is dominated by two prominent countries: Japan and South Korea. While Japan is already well-established and known in the fashion scene, South Korea's fashion scene is only recently emerging in the past few years. Streetwear is a fashion movement that consists of individuals "who roam the streets expressing their interests, cultural identity and common scenarios that take place in urban catwalks" (Dolores, "The Evolution of Streetwear"). It has been eminent in Japan for some time and is always associated with the famous Harajuku street due to its well-known reputation of churning up creative and intriguing styles. It is also rising rapidly in South Korea owing to the country's pop culture scene receiving global attention. As these two countries are always being looked to for the latest street trend or inspiration, many have had difficulty in separating and acknowledging the two countries' unique aesthetics and it is, more often than not, classified as one, particularly in men's streetwear, when in reality the two are vastly different. In an article from Highsnobsociety, a website dedicated to streetwear, it states that fashion designer Shawn Stussy was one of the "godfathers" that helped birth the scene (of streetwear culture), and a streetwear brand's blog mentions that musician and designer Hiroshi Fujiwara is known as a "godfather" of Harajuku fashion. As some of the known pioneers of the streetwear movement are men, it is ideal to analyse the menswear scene. This paper will discuss the key aesthetics of the fashion scenes in both countries individually, followed by a comparison of the two, to bring attention to the differences of their aesthetics and

what distinguishes each country's fashion scene, particularly in menswear, as many have had difficulty separating the two countries. Furthermore, this paper will also address and clarify what influences brought about these prominent aesthetics that have been receiving global attention. A total of four case studies will be analysed in this dissertation to restate the key aesthetics of Japan and South Korea streetwear scenes.

History of Japan's Fashion Scene

Clothing has been of importance in the Japanese culture for centuries, as far back as 1891. Masafumi Monden states in *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan* referring to Oscar Wilde, "The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists' and thus 'the whole of Japan is a pure invention.'" However, it is only in the 1970s when the street fashion in Japan rose and youngsters first embraced a sense of communal solidarity as a generation. They joined together in opposition to adults and renounced the values of the generations before them and took their own stance. The DC boom (DC stands for "designer" and "character") in the first half of 1980s is the first fashion trend to originate from Japan. The main leaders of this trend are the subsequent *shinjinrui* generation (Japanese who came of age during the 1970s onwards) as they attempt to get away from the baby boomer generation. The 1980s was also the peak for idols in Japan. It began with pop star Seiko Matsuda, who invented the Seiko-chan haircut, and all the teenagers were imitating hairstyles and fashions of singers and entertainers. It can be said

that the end of the 1980s was the era where the “Tokyo” fashion boomed, as people were experimenting more with combinations and prints, using design concepts based on the kimono and Japanese motifs. Though the fashion scene in Japan is constantly changing and evolving, there is always a similar nuance to Japanese street fashion.

Japan has already been influencing the West and Europe, which has been known as ‘Japonism,’ a term which was identified by a French critic in 1872. It refers to the influence of Japanese design that assisted Western and European artists in all media, such as fashion and art, to achieve new heights of creative liberation, such as using asymmetry characteristics in clothing and textiles which was rare prior to Japonism influence. Akiko Fukai, the chief curator of Kyoto Costume Institute, wrote an article solely about Japonism in fashion, where she elaborates on the usages of kimono and Japanese style motifs as textiles in Europe and the West. Loosely-fitted clothing carries the air of Japanese fashion, deriving back to its kimono silhouette, and the West were inspired by the structure of the kimono that brought the vision of flat construction of clothing. Therefore, Japanese fashion is no stranger in the global context with a rich history that dates as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century.

History of Korea’s Fashion Scene

As compared to Japan, South Korea is only an infant when it comes to freedom of cultural expression. Regardless, South Korea has prevailed on many global creative stages over the past few years. Not only has the present South

Korea evolved from who she was before, but she has received significant global attention and recognition, especially from the West. Dr Michael W. Hurt, a professor as well as the author of *The Seoul Fashion Report*, the first photo book about Korean street and runway fashion, writes, “as the ‘global’ has become more than just a pipe dream and a reality for a Korea with not just a highly developed infrastructure...that have served the Republic well, but which now has a highly developed popular culture infrastructure in music, film, food, and fashion, there is now a discernible ‘global fetish’ that undergirds and validates Korean cultural projects.” So it is to say that the rise of fashion culture in South Korea is a movement of growth for the country as a whole and to advance to become a more modernised society. With it comes global recognition that puts the country as one of the hotspots for fashion in Asia, alongside Japan.

The global recognition quickly established South Korea as one of the world’s most exciting new markets for fashion, perhaps due to other Korean industries’ rise in hype. This global phenomenon of ‘K wave’ (Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism 11), “Hallyu” in Korean, which literally translates to “flow of Korea”, refers to the popularity of Korean pop culture. It began with the export of Korean television dramas to China in the late 1990s and since then, South Korea became the center for the production of transnational pop culture, even expanding to a more global audience like America, Europe and Middle East more recently. With this Hallyu wave, people all around the world has been looking to Korea for fashion trends and styles, particularly at what the idols and actors are wearing.

Significance of Streetwear in Japan and South Korea and Their Misconceptions

In both South Korea and Japan, the streetwear culture is of high importance and many on the global scale look to these countries in this aspect. Fashion is a cipher for understanding the biggest cultural-structural shift. It's the ultimate expression of dominant values. (Hurt, "Why You Should Care about Korean Street Fashion...and Korean Shit in General."). The streetwear culture allows youths, the future generation, a vessel to express themselves and convert consumption into creation. It gives them the power of human creativity to make the best out of a soulless system of what is always overruled by political issues. For South Korea, streetwear culture allows them to remix various social tendencies of post-colonialism as well. Japan "has had business booms thanks to the style, and has trademark looks which are recognizable worldwide" (Dolores, "The Evolution of Streetwear"). With this perception of their streetwear culture, it can be inferred that the streetwear culture in Japan itself is so significant that its presence can be perceived so globally.

However, with both fashion scenes evolving, it is understandable that fashion styles can overlap and look similar, making it difficult to identify the differences of Korean and Japanese streetwear. It is easier to find dissimilarity in womenswear fashion due to their market being more profitable and a wider scale of flexibility in terms of design. However, the lines have become blurred to some for menswear. There are numerous forum sites and blogs that discusses the differences in style of Korean and Japanese streetwear, whereby the different

users state overlapping opinions — some might say a certain aesthetic derived from South Korea while others say Japan. A comment by DashAttack on Reddit said, “To compare Korean streetwear to Japanese streetwear is a little bit disingenuous, because they simply do not exist on the same scale.” It is true that they are on a different scale as the two countries’ streetwear scene started for different reasons and uphold different beliefs.

The Cultural and Historical Influences

Although the hype for streetwear is prominent in both countries, they are influenced by different factors. Both South Korea and Japan have deep-rooted cultures due to their long cultural histories, so it is only natural that the becoming of streetwear in both countries are influenced by their own history and culture. After all, culture is the “behaviour and beliefs that are learned and shared: learned so it is not ‘instinctual’ and shared so it is not individual” (Monden 2). With the upbringing of being taught their traditional ways, or for some even still living in traditional set-up homes like a “hanok” in South Korea or a home with wooden sliding doors and tatami mats as flooring in Japan, they would have inherited a sense of patriotism that would very much shine and be brought over to the methods they express themselves. This would naturally have impacted their modern fashion aesthetics as it is a means of self-expression. Although the cultural and historical influences are already visible in runway fashion of their respective local designers, it is particularly more obvious and significant in streetwear as it is more commonly worn daily. Moreover, clothes are nearly

always animated and understood by a body — meaning to say fashion and its aesthetics is less understood if it were an isolated product on its own (Monden 14). It can be said that the message or influence of garments is clearer when presented in a put together outfit that is being worn as compared to if it were on shelves in a store. Therefore, their cultural and historical impact on their fashion aesthetics will be prominent.

Cultural and Historical Influences in Japan's Fashion Scene

Japan's streetwear has always had a particular vibe and aura that is strongly influenced by their very own culture and history. Monden's book offers a wide-ranging and original study that reveals the complex exchange of styles and what these styles represent in Japan. In Japan, dress is one of the most useful instrument in order to calibrate the cultural and aesthetic history of the country. The art of matching colours was especially important in the Hian court (794–1185) that the skill to combine colours and select clothing in terms of layering far outweighs the physical features with which one was born. It is to say that the current aesthetics of layering in Japanese culture derives from aesthetic history such as this, and is brought to the current generation's way of dressing.

Japanese author Jun'chiro Tanazaki's essay "In Praise of Shadows" writes about the Japanese aesthetics and the Japanese ideology where one appreciates the feint light even more because there is such quantity of darkness and shadows. He writes, "...darkness causes us no discontent, we resign ourselves to it as inevitable. If light is scare then light is scarce; we will immerse ourselves in the

darkness and there discover its own particular beauty” (30). As this essay compares that of the Japanese culture to the ideology of the West, he brings forth the mentality of the Japanese who are able to find the beauty in not just the light or brighter side of things, but as well as the shadows and darkness. Women and even men in the past consider concealing skin more beautiful than revealing them, “so that one part and one one stood out — (her) face.” (Tanizaki 30) Due to this, they often wear long clothing, especially for the ladies, that only shows from the neck up and their palms. This ideology of beauty in shadows coincides with the aesthetics of layering, as both are aspects of covering up.

Cultural and Historical Influences in South Korea’s Fashion Scene

Similar to the Japan streetwear, the Korean streetwear has their own vibe that is influenced by their own culture. Ken-ichi Sasaki’s *Asian Aesthetics* studies deep into the origins of aesthetics in Asia, which includes Korea. The Korean aesthetics is often associated with the colour white so as to express the spiritual and simplistic attitude as well as purity, innocence, peace and patriotism. The notion of whiteness is about the naturalness and the formlessness of Korean art (Sasaki 73). This taste for white can be seen in artworks, myths, legends, folklore, food, poetry and, of course, clothes. Koreans enjoyed wearing white and moreover, it is also a symbol of national identity used by many artists and writers in their works. Some writers link the aesthetics of white to political nationalism. This aesthetics of whiteness comes hand in hand with the evolution of Korean fashion that is the movement of growth for the country as it presents itself as a

clean slate from their past. With the association and identification of white to the nationality of Korea, it then provides another step for the country to move forward from their colonial past and reform as an independent country.

Another aspect of Korean aesthetics is the term “meot”, which can be summarised into qualities such as simplicity, finesse and artificial deviation from the norm or defamilialisation (Sasaki 68). These characteristics closely resemble the whiteness mentioned previously, as the concept of “meot” is the idea of being against the norm and the familiar. Such concepts can be tied to the formlessness of Korean art, as without form it is considered disorder and unfamiliar to others on the outside. These factors have remained essentially unchanged for decades and are largely unaffected by greater global changes in preferences or trends in the fashion scene today, so it is fascinating to understand the culture through the means of fashion in Korea.

Runway Examples of Local Japanese and Korean Designers



Fig.1 Miharayasuhiro Tokyo Spring 17 Look 1. 2017.



Fig. 2 Miharayasuhiro Tokyo Spring 17 Look 34. 2017.

Most Japanese street wearers often don their own local brands as it probably is more coherent to their own personal and cultural aesthetics. True enough, the local designers of Japan have created various collections that were inspired by their own culture. An example is Japanese designer Miharaya Suhiro cited her inspiration for the Tokyo Spring 2017 collection the historic depths of Japanese clothing, from kimonos and yukatas to robes and imperial army regalia. The models had exposed skins that were tattooed with dragons and butterflies, like in Figure 1, white fabric textures closely resemble wash paper and throughout the entire collection incorporated a well-known 1794 kabuki portrait by Toshusai Sharaku onto the fabrics. Although the skin is exposed, defeating the ideology mentioned by Tanizaki, it is made so to show the beauty of the darkness on the skin, in this case the tattoos.

In Figure 2 is an example of how the portrait was diffused into a pixelated spray of dots to have the modern, wearable effect, as well as incorporating layers. This collection closely resembles the ideology and aesthetics mentioned by Tanazaki, as the essay is also an indirect source of inspiration for this collection. Another well-known Japanese designer is Yohji Yamamoto, whose works often reflects the zeitgeist or the period of the time because he was inspired by the Japanese culture, and a lot of the time he based the style of his clothing on traditional Japanese dress of the 18th century. Issey Miyake as well, in 1974, showed a collection based on the essential concepts of Japanese clothing: "flat construction and a piece of cloth hung on the body without eliminating any excess, letting gravity have its way." (Fukai 10). This can also be

linked to the aesthetics of drape as seen in both Figure 1 and 2.



Fig. 3 D.Gnak Seoul Spring 16 Look 32



Fig. 4 D.Gnak Seoul Spring 16 Look 13

The attitude of the Korean aesthetics can be seen in the Korean's fashion, with many local brands that are popular in streetwear like D.GNAK getting inspiration from their cultural background to create their collections. There has been various local brands in South Korea that supports similar aesthetics. Kang Dong Jun, creative director of the brand D.GNAK, was inspired by the royal Korean clothing traditions for his Spring 2016 collection. It took the shape of kingly purple silk robes and soaring dragon emblems. In Figure 3, Kang modernised the look of traditional Korean clothing and fuses its elements with modern tailoring techniques. The dragon emblems can be seen on the sleeves as well, which brings its cultural elements to light.

In Figure 4, the entire look is of pure white, and it gives off a pure and simplistic feel. Kang also incorporated baggy bottoms from the Korean traditional wear for mens, which seems to be highly popular for Korean fashion presently. Another Korean designer, Juun.J, which is highly known globally, mentions in an interview with matchesfashion.com that his favourite colour is white and he tries to use it often in his collections. Though he often opts for darker colours, Juun.J finds ways to slide the white palette into his different seasonal collections. Perhaps his reasons for having white as his favourite colour may be because it symbolises simplicity and formlessness in the colour. Juun.J is also a brand that is looked up to by street wearers as the brand itself consists elements of street in the designs. The designer also mentions, "street tailoring is a word that describes my collection very well as I like to inject some 'street' into classic shapes."

With deeply rooted cultural backgrounds in Japan and Korea, it is

unavoidable for creative talents to be inspired by their own ethnic cultures. From cultural ideologies and beliefs to the physical remodification and modernisation of cultural clothing, it is reflected and can clearly be seen in unique designs by the countries' respective well-known designers. Although the examples mentioned were only from runway and of their local designers, it is still necessary in providing an insight to the fashion of the respective countries in general as they are, to a certain extent, the voice of their own country's fashion. These designers are also part of the street culture as well, as they often incorporate "street" elements into their designs.

Influences of the Streetwear Scene



Fig. 5 Still Image from Frugal Aesthetics' Video on Japanese Street Style



Fig. 6 Still Image from Frugal Aesthetics' Video on Korean Street Style

To begin differentiating the streetwear of the two countries, it is crucial to point out the key aesthetics of their respective streetwear scenes, which often derive from the influences that each country has. These influence can be from, other than history and culture, television programmes, magazines, celebrities and even just the mere observations of their fashion streets, and they are the ones that mould and shape the streetwear scene. Youtuber Christian Vui creates fashion-content videos on his channel “Frugal Aesthetics”, mainly focusing on menswear. One of his videos, called “How to II Asian Streetwear,” covers the aesthetics of menswear fashion in Korea and Japan, noting the differences of the two countries’ fashion scene. Vui states, “Japanese street(wear) style is more conservative and it is more focused on fit, flow and personal style. Korean street(wear) style is very playful and it lies in the eyes of the beholder.” It is noted that in the video, the examples given for Japanese streetwear style was more of “Harajuku fashion” icons or legitimate street images whereas for Korean streetwear style examples were Korean idols and artists. These influences are being looked up to for inspiration and the latest trend, therefore they hold a certain power in the scene.

Influences of Japan’s Menswear Streetwear Scene

Japan’s fashion magazine Men’s Non-No is one of the most influential fashion source for menswear street fashion in Japan. In one of Masafumi Monden's case studies in the book Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan, Monden examines well-known fashion

magazines aimed specifically at young men. He stated that even with magazine sales declining, it is not the case in Japan. His analysis covers the prioritisation of content of these magazines and how the readers' age demographic control the content which they put in their issues. With this extensive analysis, it informs us the influence magazines have over the male fashion scene in Japan and also allows for a better insight at the mindset and mentality of these men. It is said that the age demographic for Men's Non-no magazine consists of mostly teenagers and young adults. With this, the magazine is able to create content that cater to a specific age demographic which helps them to maintain sensitivity to cultural change and trends (Monden 43). For example, as their audience is most likely to be high school or college students, the magazine uses popular narrative themes faced by people around their age like graduation anxiety (Monden 30) to relate to their audience. Through these themes, they integrate dress and style that they get from the magazine. From this relationship of magazine and reader, the reader will be more trusting and understood, therefore creates loyal followers for the magazine.

On top of featuring models, Men's Non-no is also known to include snapshots of young men on the streets who have a keen fashion sense. A section called Men's Non-No Fashion Circle (MNFC) on their website as well as the print edition, consisting of normal young men, highlights the top few "influencers" and their street style. This provides a source of inspiration in terms of styling, as well as opportunities and exposure for local fashion enthusiasts, creating a community within themselves. The ability to have a sense of belonging

that is created by them will invite more to join said community.



Fig. 7 Japanese kids on streets of Harajuku



Fig 8. Manaya in Harajuku



Fig 9. Street Style during Tokyo Fashion
Week FW17



Fig.10 Couple in Harajuku Street



Fig 11. Tokyo Style During SS18



Fig. 12 Street Style During Tokyo Fashion Week SS17

Tokyo's Harajuku street will always be a source of inspiration for street fashion in Japan. Though some people may state otherwise, but according to youtube and blogger Tokyo Fashion, who creates content and writes on the ever-changing Harajuku street fashion and Japanese fashion in general, "Harajuku is not dead" and that it "remains very much alive." To support their statement, the entry lists multiple evidences, concluding that the reason the statement is floating around is due to the decline of 1990s subcultures, and that Harajuku is a "special zone of creativity" and not limited to the specific styles these subcultures brought. Most current fashion personalities are also known as "Harajuku icons" or "Harajuku models" as their fame and recognition comes from the acknowledgement of their fashion styles on the streets of Harajuku. Through observing and analysing images of the people on the streets of Harajuku, similar aesthetics can be observed, making the key aesthetics more notable.

Figure 7 depicts a group of students of age 16 to 18 years old roaming around the streets of Harajuku. From the article on this group, the two on the right are wearing local designers like AMBUSH and Yohji Yamamoto. For a group that consists of very young people, they are very much brand-conscious as all of them seem to be wearing a luxury brand. It can be inferred that the Harajuku scene has been evolving from the previous generations where they were not as brand-conscious. This gives us an insight of how the future Harajuku will look like.

In Figure 8 is Manaya, a 19-year old Japanese student often seen around Harajuku and has been snapped by a website dedicated to Japanese fashion

tokyofashion.com. Manaya has often been seen donning Y-3 clothing as seen in Figure 8 as well. It is very common to see Y-3 and Yohji Yamamoto products around in the streets of Harajuku as this designer is very well known to product “luxury streetwear fashion”, and the designer being Japanese, it is only expected of the locals to fill the streets with this brand.

Figure 10 is of two young adults, Junya Watanabe wide-legged pants, jewelry from Yoshiko Creations and beret by a Japanese brand CA4LA, and Figure 11 and 12 are street snaps of the locals during Tokyo Fashion Week. These three images are quite similar in aesthetics — the pieces they wear are either oversized or baggy yet with an ironic sense of perfect fit. Similar to the first three images, everyone is dressed in mostly dark colours or black, and just like the runway fashion, it reflects the cultural meaning of shadows in Japan.

Although they are in mostly dark colours, they also pay close attention to details and accent colours. For example, in Figure 12, the man is wearing a red shirt underneath his black outerwear along with a cross body bag. This adds an interesting factor to his look. In Figure 11 as well, the man on the left rolled up his trousers to twist his look up a little bit. It can also be said that the outfits are more fluid and experimental for menswear in terms of silhouettes. Like in Figure 9, 10 and 11, the garments picked are more draped and flowy. With Japanese aesthetics, it is often flared and fluid but fit, with an amazing attention to details like these.

Influences of South Korea's Menswear Streetwear Scene

Unlike Japan where influence comes from the streets, the power of influence by people is strong in South Korea. The country has been noted for its thriving film and music industry, and Seoul's most stylish have been at the forefront of defining the country's modern and unmistakable aesthetic. Clothes are always animated and understood through other genres from literature to film, from music video to magazine, from classical ballet to museum-going (Monden 14). Many trends come about from dramas with model-turned-actor such as Nam Joo Hyuk and Lee Soo Hyuk. Idols like G-Dragon and Exo are extremely popular worldwide, and with this global recognition comes power. An example would be when Exo member Chanyeol was invited to a Tommy Hilfiger's Spring Summer 2018 show during London Fashion Week in October 2017. An article by Vogue UK by Libby Banks writes, "The boy band front man triggered the highest volume of tweets sent during the entirety of fashion month." As these fashion shows with luxury designers often invites celebrities from all around the world to attend their show to divert more attention to their brand, it is a given a member of a well-known Korean idol group would be invited. Chanyeol is ranked first as the most tweeted moments for fashion week, simultaneously bringing Tommy Hilfiger the most tweeted about and retweeted designer. Another example would be during 2017's Hera Seoul Fashion Week, when SHINee member Taemin was invited to perform on the Supercomma B runway while donning head-to-toe in the brand. As Seoul is a youth-driven city, Seoul's fashion weeks are often attended by mostly students as they consume then digest trends at an extremely fast rate

(Donovan n.p.). Taemin's presence alone brought audience to the livestream of the runway, and with this exposure of the brand on Taemin himself, it was a tactical move by the brand to raise its awareness as the audience of the idol and the brand are generally similar. These examples show the power of merely the presence of Korean idols.



Fig. 13 Seoul Fashion Week SS 2017



Fig. 14 Seoul Fashion Week FW 2017



Fig. 15 Street Style at SFW S/S18



Fig. 16 Street style at SFW F/W17



Fig. 17 GOT7's Mark



Fig. 18 EXO-CBX's Chen and Baekhyun

Korean street fashion is known to be more vibrant and trend-following. Josephine Cruz's article on Hypebeast website writes, "Korea may be a very trend-conscious country. Its still-developing identity can be characterised by an openness to trying new things, allowing designers to take more risks in cuts, colours and prints." With this openness mindset, the people on the outside has this perception that Korean streetwear fashion are more experimental and preppy as mentioned in Vui's video. With this trend of following the trend, it also shows that, as a culture, they value unity. They like to look like a group instead of standing out. (Pinkpangea n.p.) On forums like Reddit and Female Network, many users mention the fast-forwardness of Korean street fashion, the colourfulness and the unison in aesthetics.

In both Figure 13 and 14, the people captured in the images are more brightly-coloured dressed and boldly pairing it with patterns such as stripes and plaids. Although in Figure 15, where the outfit consists of stripes in both the top and bottom piece, and Figure 16, where the pattern for the top and bottom pieces are similar, are different in the sense of pairings as compared to the first two images, the characteristic of courageously coordinating a bold outfit is in both types of styling of Korean streetwear. GOT7's Mark in Figure 17 brightens up his outfit with a neon orange baggy sweater with a white long shirt underneath. This aesthetic seems to be the basis of "hypebeast" street fashion in Korean fashion, a term that has been toyed around with to refer to the typical streetwear fashion in South Korea.

Similarly in Figure 18, EXO-CBX's Chen wears a similar aesthetic of a

baggy top with black bottoms. Both idols complete their looks with a simple cap and mask. In most images, oversized tops and outerwear seem to be repeating in a lot of outfits by different people, which is possibly one of the key aesthetics of Korean streetwear, together with bold stylisation of colours and patterns.

Similarities and Differences of Japan and Korea's Streetwear Scenes

There are many similarities and distinct dissimilarities after a few visual analysis from both Japan and South Korea streetwear. The two countries' scenes play a lot with layering. In similar aspect, they both are more playful to try out different ways to layer certain pieces to make an outfit look more interesting and refreshing. A dissimilarity that can be observed from the pictures above collectively is that the Japanese scene often play with longer layers like long coats or long shirts, whereas the Korean scene does not. The Japanese scene are more flow and drape, experimenting different ways of fit. The Korean scene often play around with layering of button down shirts or jackets and outerwear that end around the hip or slightly above. This subtle observation assists in differentiating the silhouettes of the two different countries' streetwear scene.

Japan and South Korea seem to love the fit of the unfit, which is to say they do not particularly favour the slim and fitting look. However with this similarity, there is a difference in how they execute this liking of theirs. While the Japan scene prefer flared with a touch of tailoring look, the Korean scene opts for oversized bomber jackets or shirts. On top of the slight difference in silhouettes from this point, the preference of clothing type is already distinguishable in

determining whether a look is of Japan streetwear or Korean streetwear.

Another point is the colour the two countries seem to have in common. Both Japan and South Korea like to infuse monochromatic colours into their outfits. However, the Japanese scene uses these colours as most of their outfit and with only the brighter colours as accent colours. Meaning to say the dominant colours are black, white, or any other monochromatic colours. On the other hand, the Korean scene uses the bright colours more and the monochromatic colours are used to tone down the outfit or to make the outfit look whole. The two different scenes use colours differently and to their advantage to create their own unique styles and aesthetics.

Japan and South Korea Icons as Streetwear Fashion Influencers

As the influences for both countries' scenes vary, an in-depth analysis of various people's fashion who best represent their own country's streetwear scene is needed. This is also necessary as it is to reiterate the key aesthetics that has been pointed out from the fashion of people in their respective countries and make it more prominent. The visuals will be given to validate the statements from the literature reviews as well. A total of four artists will be looked into, all of whom are celebrities in their own countries, well-known for being fashionable as well as portraying interest in fashion. Two of the four artists have a mix of both Korean and Japanese streetwear fashion in their style, however their own country's aesthetic style is still visible. With these two artists' analysis, the key aesthetics

will become clearer as well as the ability to differentiate the two streetwear scenes.

Toman — Japanese Idol



Figure 19. Toman's Instagram update 1



Figure 20. Toman's Instagram update 2



Figure 21. Toman's Instagram update 3



Figure 22. Dao's Instagram update 4

As celebrities from the music industry have become an influence in the fashion scene, it is a given to look into the celebrities of each country. Toman is from a Japanese group called XOX. Not only is Toman an artist, he is also known to be a Harajuku fashion icon, model and fashion ambassador, making him an influencer in the Japan fashion scene. Toman's style can be described as the epitome of Japanese streetwear fashion. He finds new ways to spice up his looks, be it an accessory that accentuates the outfit or a different kind of fit to completely change the silhouette. In Figure 19, he is dressed in a rather simple outfit but with a little twist of a blue patterned belt and a unique pair of platform boots. Similarly in Figure 22, this image is of Toman and his group mate, Dao, where they both are dressed in somewhat similar aesthetics of completing their outfits with accent colours from accessories. Toman uses the same concept in Figure 19 of using a belt to add colour to his outfit. On top of that, he uses a patterned shirt under a black button down shirt to subtly add a hint of character in the look.

His attention to details are constant, as it can also be observed in Figure 20, where the illustration on the bag stands out against the head-to-toe black outfit, and Figure 21, where the side with the tucked-in shirt has the metallic chain and with the whole look completed with platform boots. Also in Figure 20, Toman dresses in an oversized long button-down shirt dress and layering a man-skirt on top of skinnies. This conforms to the aesthetics of layering and drape that is often seen on the streets of Harajuku as well. The characteristics of Toman's style overlaps nicely with the daily aesthetics seen in Harajuku.

Monsta X — South Korean Idol Group



Figure 23. Image of identified clothing piece Monsta X's Hyungwon 1



Figure 24. Image of identified clothing piece Monsta X's Jooheon



Figure 25. Image of identified clothing piece Monsta X's Minhyuk



Figure 26. Image of identified clothing piece Monsta X's Hyungwon 2

As the previous case study looks into a Japanese idol, this case study is of a Korean idol group. There are numerous Twitter and Tumblr pages that are dedicated to sharing Korean group members' fashion items. The pages can be specifically for one particular member or the group as a whole. These pages would identify the clothing items from recent pictures of the idols, music videos, music shows and interviews and would upload a comparison image such as in Figure 23. Although there are numerous other groups bigger and more well-known, Monsta X's style is said to be and known as Korean fashion as compared to other groups that are more Western-influenced. Figure 1 shows Hyungwon's, one of the members, airport fashion, wearing a Korean brand hoodie paired with the typical cap and mask. Their fanbase age ranges from teens to young adults, like themselves, which consists of a high percentage of street fashion. As they influence their local scene, the key aesthetics are also prominent. Moreover, as they wear local brands more frequently than international brands, it is easier for the market to own similar items as well as being less expensive. Due to that, local brands are more dominant in Korea in terms of streetwear.

In Figure 24, another member, Jooheon, wears another local brand high-neck t-shirt. The shirt has sleeve printings, much like the style in Figure 19. Tory Turk, who specialises in style and popular culture and has curated exhibitions for the Korean Culture Centre says, "I think it is about youth culture's obsession with desiring to be both unique and ubiquitous and [monograms or logos] are streetwear codes that satisfy this paradox." This might be the reason why this

kind of clothing is very common in Korean streetwear, bringing about the “hypebeast” term to the scene. The term “hypebeast”, which refers to the following of trend to be cool and in style, is often related to Korea as the people there are often following or in trend. In both Figure 24 and 25, Jooheon and Minhyuk, the member in Figure 23, are wearing track pants with stripes at the side. This has been an up-and-coming trend to the streetwear scene in Korea, and it is often paired uniquely just like in Figure 25 with a trench coat that is also from a local Korean brand. Minhyuk is also wearing a hoodie underneath the trench coat, a similar fashion like in Figure 14. Another local clothing brand mentioned in Figure 26 is a brand that is often seen on the members, and an example is Hyungwon in their pullover. The yellow colour of stripes on the pullover is being used well in the outfit, having a bottom that complements it and an outerwear that contrasts it. This colour use is often focused in Korean streetwear, as play of colours is one of their key aesthetics.

Usuke — Japanese Fashion Icon with a Korean Twist



Figure 27. Usuke's Instagram Update



Figure 28. Usuke's Twitter Update 1



Figure 29. Usuke's Twitter Update 2



Figure 30. Usuke's Twitter Update 3

As the past two case studies look into individual countries' fashion scene, a combination of both scenes in an icon would provide a different perception and perspective. It allows the dominance of the idol's origin's style to shine above what he mixed into the look. Yusuke Hide, also known as Utsuke Devil, is a popular Japanese Harajuku personality and fashion icon that infuses a Japanese twist to the average Korean streetwear fashion. In Figure 27, Utsuke wears the style of high socks and stripes of Korean streetwear fashion, but mixing it with the Japanese aesthetics of fit for the top and slightly flared pants. He also uses white shoes as an accent accessory, just like the Japanese streetwear aesthetics. In Figure 29, Utsuke also wears the high socks that has stripes and pairs it with an oversized shirt and shorts with white sneakers. In both looks, Utsuke has subtly use both country's aesthetics into his own personal style, making it look whole and complementing each other.

In Figure 28, Utsuke wears a graphic shirt under a baseball jacket, much like a look in Figure 14, but stylises it with uniquely cut-out pants and high boots. The top part of his look is commonly seen in Korea whereas the bottom part is often in Japan. Just like his other two looks, it looks whole and complete rather than choppy even with merging both fashion scenes into one. Utsuke uses layers underneath the oversized denim jacket in Figure 30, and even stylising his jacket by wearing it slightly off-shoulder, topping it off with a cap. Although the ensemble is of Korean streetwear, the way he puts them together adds a Japanese aesthetics to it. With that being said, Utsuke does not only add pieces to his looks to add his Japanese touch to it, he can also just stylise it the way pieces can be

seen on streets of Harajuku.

Taemin — South Korean Idol with a Japanese Twist



Figure 31. Taemin during MAMA 2016 Concert



Figure 32. Taemin for Japanese album photoshoot

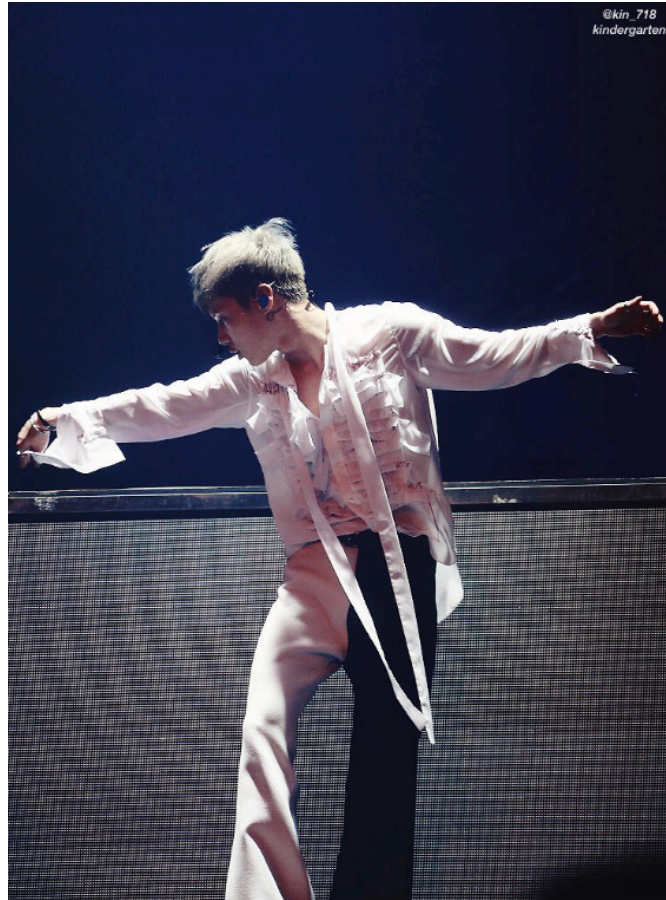


Figure 33. Taemin during Japanese concert



Figure 34. Taemin in Korean song music video

An artist that can be compared to the likes of Utsukushi is Korean group SHINee's Taemin. He is known in the K-pop industry to have outrageous outfits on stage and in music videos. His group were among the groups that led the "Korean Wave" which saw South Korean pop culture develop a fanbase across Asia and beyond, as well as constantly 'wow-ing' audiences with their stage and red carpet outfits. Taemin's outfits have always been influenced by the Japanese aesthetics, and it can be reflected in his performances and videos. His presence has also grown, especially in Japan, as he sold out his first solo concerts in Japan in mid-2017. In Figure 31, Taemin wears a black blazer with red and black ribbons attached to his sleeves and back, while performing the Korean version of a Japanese song on stage. He tones down the outfit by pairing it with a simple black jeans, along with a red ribbon tied to his torso to complement the ribbons from his blazer. The additional detailing of ribbons are much like the Japanese aesthetics of using details to accentuate the outfit. Similar to Figure 33, where the ribbons are exaggerated to be longer as subtle detailing. The pants in this outfit as well are of block colours, tapered and then flared, a subtle fusion of the two aesthetics. In Figure 32, Taemin wears layers, with the final layer being a flowy outerwear. This is also a Japanese key aesthetics, however, instead of using accent colours or accessories, Taemin wears a bright red outerwear. The play with colours is of the Korean key aesthetics, and with this ensemble, Taemin subtly fuses the two in one. Figure 32 is a still image of one of his Korean music videos and in one of the outfits featured, he wears an oversized top with interesting cut-outs and silhouette. The shirt itself is a fusion of Korean and

Japanese streetwear aesthetics as it looks like a button-down shirt which is always worn as one of the layers for Korean aesthetics, but with intricate details. The top is paired with straight-cut pants with the shirt tucked in. The entire look is very much Japanese influenced, but just like for the outfit in Figure 32, his own Korean streetwear aesthetics is injected into it subtly. Taemin notably likes to infuse the colour white in his looks, which might be due to the Korean cultural aesthetics of white.

Very much like Utsuke, Taemin has his own way of combining both Japanese and Korean streetwear fashion scenes into his own personal style by using intricate details and colours. Whereas Utsuke infuses Korean streetwear key aesthetics into his Japanese streetwear outfits, Taemin does the opposite and infuses his own Korean streetwear aesthetics into Japanese streetwear. With that, both artists are putting Korean into the Japanese, though at first glance it is not obvious, the overall appearance is different and tailored to the wearer's personal style and origin.

Conclusion

Given that the streetwear culture is constantly evolving in Japan and South Korea, each generation will continue to bring about a different element to the scene. As so many decades have passed and inspirations and influences come and go, it is understandable that at one glance the both countries' streetwear scenes look similar. However, these two countries are very much different, especially as their respective streetwear scenes have their own cultural

influences. These cultural influences can be seen in the key aesthetics of the current streetwear style. The Japanese favour their fit and flare with intricate detailing and the Koreans favour unity that comes from the trend of following trends by choice of colours and hoodie layering. From Toman and Monsta X's cases as well as visual analysis of South Korea and Japan's main sources of influences, it becomes easier to spot the differences of Japan streetwear and Korean streetwear by the key aesthetics that these two countries have. These key aesthetics are almost always repetitive, as the fashioning of one's appearance in modernity has been a precarious balancing act between individuality and conformity (Monden 29). Hence, most of the key aesthetics can be seen, one way or the other, in almost all of the visual representations and are very easily distinguishable. The method of stylisation and usages of them are what makes the evolution of the two countries' streetwear scene. Moreover, from both Utsuk and Taemin's cases, it is proven that a fusion of both Japan and Korea streetwear scenes is possible, likely to cause confusion of which look belongs to which country. Due to the evolution of streetwear culture as a whole, it cannot be avoided that Japan and South Korea are inspired by each other as well. However, even with the hybridisation of South Korean streetwear style and Japanese streetwear style, based on the case studies, the idols' origin country's style is still more distinguishable.

The importance of historical and cultural influences are very much prominent in the streetwear scene in Japan and South Korea, true to their standards of being deeply rooted in culture. Even in the streetwear scene, where

it is dominated by youths of the future generations, the act of incorporating their culture discreetly into their daily wear is what makes each country unique to their own. Because of that, Japan and South Korea will continue to strive as the two most prominent countries in Asian streetwear.

(7,739 words)

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