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Editor's Introduction

By Melissa S. Dale, Executive Director, Center for Asia Pacific Studies

The University of San Francisco Center for Asia Pacific Studies is pleased to announce the publication of *Asia Pacific Perspectives* vol. 16, no. 1 (Feb. 2019). This special issue is dedicated to exploring how fashion shapes identities in the Asia Pacific region.

Within this issue, we share three examples of the latest research on cultures of dress, clothing, fashion and the formation of identity in the Asia Pacific region. These articles reveal the innovative work that scholars are currently pursuing in this area of research, ranging from the history of the tattooing in Japan, to fashion exchange between China and Mozambique, to the phenomenon known as cosplay.

In "Fashioning Tattooed Bodies: An Exploration of Japan's Tattoo Stigma," **John M. Skutlin**, explores the history of tattooing in Japan, its stigma, and how tattooees today manage their stigma. Skutlin's work reveals how tattoos have evolved throughout Japan's history, noting important shifts in perceptions and attitudes towards tattooing - from positive to negative after contact with the Chinese, to being considered barbaric by the Westernizing Meiji government, to the association of tattooing with the yakuza, to the rise in popularity of Western style "fashion tattoos" and the continued need for tattooees to use "reconciliatory strategies" to conform to Japanese social and cultural demands.

Johanna von Pezold's article, "'It Is Good to Have Something Different': Mutual Fashion Adaptation in the Context of Chinese Migration to Mozambique," addresses China's rising influence in Africa through the lens of fashion exchange. Through field research and interviews on the ground in markets in Mozambique, von Pezold examines what motivates Chinese and Mozambicans to adopt foreign fashion elements from either side. Her study provides important insight into fashion exchange between non-Western countries and adds depth to our understanding of Chinese soft power in Africa.

Anne Peirson-Smith explores the increasingly popular phenomena of cosplay (costume-play) in her article, "Fashioning the Embodied Liminal/Liminoid Self: An Examination of the Dualities of Cosplay Phenomenon in East Asia." Based on fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong and Macau, Peirson-Smith's study reveals the motivations, challenges, and rewards behind cosplayer's acts of performance and their "fantastical fashioning" and creation of a "spectacular self."

In this issue's book review, **Barbara Molony** introduces us to **Kyunghee Pyun** and **Aida Yuen Wong's** edited volume, *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan,

2018). Their collection of 14 essays explores “the intersection of Western clothing, accessories, hair fashions, and fabrics with existing local versions of those aspects of dress and representation of the body” through the themes of garments and uniforms, accessories, fabrics, and fashion styles.

As always, we hope that these articles will stimulate further discussion and research in the field of Asia Pacific Studies. This issue would not have been made possible without the help of **Dr. Leslie Woodhouse** for her work gathering submissions and locating peer-reviewers and **Dr. Andrea Lingenfelter** for taking over the copy editing and production work. For the online version of this issue, we appreciate the excellent work done by **Michael Cole** and his team of web assistants, **Toff Nguyen** and **Tiffany Chen**. Many thanks also to our editorial board for their support and advice.

- Melissa S. Dale, Editor

Fashioning Tattooed Bodies: An Exploration of Japan's Tattoo Stigma

By John Skutlin, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Introduction

The words “Japanese tattoo” may, for those outside of Japan who possess even a passing familiarity with the country, conjure up images of fierce dragons, leaping carp, or sword-wielding heroes against a backdrop of roiling waves and swirling clouds. In the popular imagination, such images are likely to adorn the hulking bodies of intimidating men with hidden pasts darker than the sunglasses that they sport even indoors. Some of those less familiar with the history of tattooing in Japan may even casually call the style “yakuza tattooing” with reference to the organized crime members so infamous for acquiring this particular form of decorative body modification. Due in large part to the explosive proliferation of yakuza films in Japan since the 1960s and, more recently, popular video game series depicting the crime groups, *wabori* 和彫 (Japanese-style tattooing) has had its image as an antisocial “mark of disaffiliation”¹ (and, paradoxically, “affiliation” with less desirable social elements) firmly cemented in the public mindset. To put it plainly, tattoos in Japan have something of an image problem.

Since at least the 1970s, the U.S. is said to have undergone a “tattoo renaissance”² that normalized tattoos (for the most part) as fashion, eventually reaching the point where a 2015 survey found that three in ten American adults now have tattoos.³ Japan has also witnessed a comparative rise in the number of individuals going under the needle, yet without any concomitant increase in acceptability of the practice among the general



Figure 1. Example of Japanese style tattooing by Horitsuna (Tattoo Studio Desperado).

1. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 143-47.

2. Arnold Rubin, *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988).

3. The Harris Poll, “Tattoo Takeover: Three in Ten Americans Have Tattoos, and Most Don’t Stop at Just One,” accessed January 9, 2017, http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Tattoo_Takeover.html.

public. Due to the negative attitudes toward tattooing and institutionalized discrimination against those with tattoos in Japan, the concept of stigma becomes particularly relevant. Erving Goffman has described stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting”⁴ and that causes the person possessing such an attribute to be relegated to a less desirable category of social identity. In Japan, having a tattoo can certainly be “deeply discrediting,” since tattooed skin may be viewed as an intentional mark of affiliation with antisocial or criminal elements (and thus disaffiliation with conventional society), often resulting in fright and discomfort among those who are not tattooed when visible. Having a tattoo in Japan makes one an *irezumi*⁵ *no kata* 入れ墨の方 (tattooed person), a term often seen on signs prohibiting tattooed individuals from entering hot springs (onsen 温泉),⁶ public baths, pools, beaches, gyms, golf courses, and some restaurants, and can even limit employment, housing, and insurance options. A tattoo can therefore serve as a visible sign indicating that the person should be avoided, which will then cause discomfort and fear in those viewing it. While the same can be said about tattoos at many points in the history of the U.S. and Europe, it is clear that, particularly in the U.S., tattooing has become increasingly acceptable. It has even been reported that 71% of parents in the U.S. are comfortable with visible tattoos on their children’s primary school teachers or pediatricians.⁷ In comparison, in 2012, the mayor of Osaka at the time instituted a survey of tattoos among public workers in the city and threatened those who had them with dismissal from their jobs, regardless of their visibility.⁸ While it has recently been ruled that tattooing is not a medical act and thus may be legally practiced by those who are not licensed physicians, the prosecution in the case has made a final appeal to Japan’s Supreme Court to challenge the ruling.⁹ In spite of the legal gray area

4. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 3.

5. The Japanese characters used for *irezumi* (tattoo) can vary, and can refer to any style of tattooing (although it is most often associated with Japanese-style tattooing). In many cases, 入れ墨 (or 入墨) is used, which carries a particularly negative connotation because it is the standard rendering of the term for punitive tattooing practiced on criminals during the Edo period. (See the following section.)

6. Hot springs are popular tourist destinations and bathing in them (in the nude) is a form of relaxation in Japan that is generally considered to be imbued with aspects of Japanese culture. The banning of tattoos and the simultaneous desire to increase foreign tourism to such facilities have, in light of the higher percentage of tattooed non-Japanese, led to some efforts to address the issue by Japanese Tourism Agency. For more, see John M. Skutlin, “Japan, Ink(ed): Tattooing as Decorative Body Modification in Japan” (PhD diss., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2017).

7. The Harris Poll, “Tattoo Takeover: Three in Ten Americans Have Tattoos, and Most Don’t Stop at Just One.”

8. “Hashimoto Clashes with Osaka Officials Over Tattoo Survey,” *Japan Today*, May 23, 2012, <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/hashimoto-clashes-with-osaka-officials-over-tattoo-survey>.

9. Nichitere News24, “Tatū saiban muzai hanketsu de jōkoku タトゥー裁判 無罪判決で上告” (Tattoo Court Case: Challenging the Innocent Ruling in the Supreme Court), November 28, 2018. <http://www.news24.jp/nnn/news16222311.html?fbclid=IwAR1K2EzU4lr5FrS9o9Gmx0ktokLEdo5si7-NdCdNAHY-zL2oVwaU1fnwj8YE>. For more on the issue of tattooing’s legality in Japan, see John M. Skutlin, “Japan,

tattooing occupies, the number of tattooists and (by extension) their clients continues to rise in Japan.

In light of the proliferation of tattooed individuals despite such antipathy, this paper will briefly trace the history of tattooing in Japan together with the development of its associated stigma, and then shed light on the ways in which individuals seek to manage that stigma through various legitimation maneuvers and reconciliatory strategies. This includes the positioning of non-wabori tattoos as “fashion tattoos” performed by “tattoo artists” (rather than the Japanese term *horishi* 彫師) in order to fit into discourses of self-expression and self-determination, as well as normative gendered behavior and consumption patterns. *Yōbori* 洋彫 (“Western” or non-Japanese-style tattooing) and *wan-pointo* ワンポイント (“one-point,” i.e., an individual tattooed image applied without connection to a larger design) tattoos allow a linguistic and stylistic distinction between the widely vilified *wabori* style of *irezumi* and the more neutral designs of *tatū* タトゥー (the loan word for tattoo, used almost exclusively for non-Japanese-style tattoos) that can be viewed as forms of self-accessorizing. While not devoid of stigmatization, such *fasshon tatū* ファッションタトゥー (“fashion tattoos”) allow the tattooed individuals to deploy stigma management strategies and legitimation maneuvers that would be unavailable to those tattooed in the *wabori* style, particularly in the case of women. Furthermore, it will be shown how tattooed individuals in Japan often make strategic efforts to conceal their body modifications not only in the workplace, but also in public spaces in general. Such reconciliatory strategies are a two-way street, involving (usually) reciprocal bilateral exchanges to maintain social cohesion. Through an analysis of historical accounts and the author’s ethnographic data gleaned from interviews with fifty-eight individuals and extensive participant observation conducted in Tokyo, Osaka, and other cities in Japan from 2014 to 2017,¹⁰ it is revealed how legitimation strategies in Japan are both similar to and substantially different from those often employed in the U.S. and other Western countries, with “fashion” being used to position tattoos as marks of fashionable self-expression rather than (dis)affiliation, but nonetheless remaining hidden as appropriate in order to adhere to dominant group standards and social norms.

The Complicated Position of Tattoos as “Art” and “Fashion”

Margo DeMello has drawn on extensive ethnographic accounts of tattooists and enthusiasts to delineate the historical vicissitudes of tattooing and its status in U.S. society, tracing its development from the purview of sailors and circus freaks to a generally positive

Ink(ed): Tattooing as Decorative Body Modification in Japan.”

10. This research was conducted at The Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Department of Japanese Studies under the auspices of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme and with the support of the Nissin Scholarship and Haruna Scholarship. Informants were discovered using existing networks from previous in-depth research on Goth subculture in Japan and snowball sampling. The researcher’s BA in Japanese language and culture and MPhil in the anthropology of Japan, combined with his own experience with tattoos and body modification, allowed access to individuals and spaces that would otherwise be closed off to “outsiders.”

symbol of masculine bravado and patriotism when tattooed on soldiers and blue-collar workers, and then its later use among bikers and rebels.¹¹ She then points out its more recent appropriation as a widely legitimized form of artistic and spiritual self-expression by a middle-to-upper-class demographic that has systematically attempted to distance itself from and efface the lower-class origins of the practice, making the tattoo “in a sense, sanitized or stripped of its working class roots, in order to ensure that the tattoo is now fit for middle-class consumption...[through] a new set of meanings, derived primarily from non-Western cultures, giving the tattoo an exotic, primitive flavor.” It should be noted, however, that this process began much earlier and has much to do with the obsession with Japanese tattooing among travelers and European nobility.¹² The cultural construction of tattooing as something to be viewed as “art” (and thus palatable to middle-class consumers) is further examined in Mary Kosut’s research on tattooing and the art of asylum inmates, both of which are practices that have been generally viewed in psychological literature as pathological and deviant but were later redrawn as aesthetically and artistically legitimate or significant as a result of structural changes and shifting institutional discourses.¹³ She explicates how the adoption of the “skin-as-canvas” metaphor by news media, as well as the deployment of terms like “tattoo artist” and “tattoo studio” by those in the industry, contributed to a rising discourse of tattoos as an art form, a discourse that was further substantiated by an increasing number of university-trained artists taking up the needle from the 1970s to 1980s.¹⁴ Kosut states that tattooing thereby achieved a “quasi-legitimacy,” whereby the practice “has been granted a degree of academic legitimacy through recent scholarship, and tattoo artifacts have attained aesthetic-cultural legitimacy via exhibitions in the highly influential New York City art world.”¹⁵

It should be noted, however, that the widely accepted narrative of tattoo’s movement from the fringes of society to the “mainstream” must be viewed with a certain grain of salt, as astutely pointed out by tattoo historian Matt Lodder, who has discovered numerous examples, dating from as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century, of sensationalist headlines declaring tattoos to be on the rise.¹⁶ While scholarly works on the development of tattoos in a “Western” context have often constructed a perhaps

11. Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

12. See, for example, Koyama Noboru, *Nihon no irezumi to Eikoku ōshitsu* (Meiji ki kara Daichiji Sekai Taisen made) (The Japanese Tattoo and the British Royal Family: From the Meiji Period to WWI) (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2010) and Christine Guth, *Longfellow’s Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting, and Japan*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

13. Mary Kosut, “Mad Artists and Tattooed Perverts: Deviant Discourse and the Social Construction of Cultural Categories,” *Deviant Behavior* 27, no. 1 (2006): 73-95.

14. *Ibid.*, 87.

15. *Ibid.*, 75.

16. Quoted in Laurence Cawley, “People Always Say the Same Thing about Tattoos,” BBC News, February 3, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25330947>.

illusory history of tattooing's transformation from a marginalized practice to an artistically legitimized and decidedly middle-class body project, there has been a dearth of academic explorations into how tattoos have evolved throughout Japan's history, and this paper represents a limited attempt to address this lacuna in the literature. It must be remembered that tattoos have been a part of the history of what is now the Japanese archipelago since time immemorial. By the late 1700s, when the word "tattoo" (from the Tahitian *tatau*) was first introduced into the English lexicon (although it had long existed in the Western world in various forms)¹⁷ to describe the tribal practices encountered among Pacific islanders, the inhabitants of Edo (now Tokyo) were already honing the practice of decorative tattooing on the level of a popular art form in an urban setting. Traces of tribal tattooing could be found only in the far north and south of the Japanese islands, in areas that were not even yet a part of "Japan" at the time.

Tattoos were thus not always marks of deviance or fashionable accoutrements on the Japanese archipelago, and archaeological findings from the Jōmon period (approx. 14,000~300 BCE) would seem to indicate that ritualistic decorative body modification was not uncommon among the islands' inhabitants. While Japan's humid climate has prevented the formation of any naturally mummified human remains, archaeological evidence shows that the Jōmon people wore numerous forms of jewelry and accessories, had pierced ears (among both men and women), and practiced ritual tooth ablation and extraction.¹⁸ Furthermore, highly stylized figurines created from clay (*dogū*) from the period portray human figures adorned with various decorative marks that are believed to represent ritual scarification or tattooing.¹⁹ Additional evidence is provided by Chinese written records from around the second and third centuries CE. For example, the *Wei Zhi* 魏志 (*Records of Wei* [c. 297 CE]) indicates that, in the ancient state of Wa on the Japanese archipelago, tattoos were common among women and men of all ages and are thought to have originally served as amulets for fishermen and shell collectors who hoped to ward off attacks by sharks.²⁰ The continued contact with China, however, represented a turning point for Japan's inhabitants and for its tattoos as well. As Chinese cultural, religious, and political influence shaped Japan's development, negative attitudes toward tattooing took hold as well. As a result, any tribal tattooing practices on the main islands were either obliterated or pushed to the northern and southern territories that are now known as Hokkaido and the islands of Okinawa, where they continued on until at least the nineteenth century.

17. See Anna Felicity Friedman, "The Cook Myth: Common Tattoo History Debunked," *Tattoohistorian.com*, April 5, 2014, <https://tattoohistorian.com/2014/04/05/the-cook-myth-common-tattoo-history-debunked>.

18. Masami Takenaka, Kazuharu Mine, Kazuhiko Tsuchimochi, and Kazuyuki Shimada, "[Foragers and Farmers in the Japanese Islands] Tooth Removal during Ritual Tooth Ablation in the Jomon Period." *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 21:0 (2001): 49.

19. Jun Takayama, *Jōmonjin no irezumi - Kodai no shūzoku wo saguru* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1969).

20. Yoshimi Yamamoto, "From Early Times to the Tattoo Boom During the Edo Period," in *Tattoo*, ed. Aude Gros de Beler (Paris: musée du quai Branly, 2014), 88.

Tattooing had not completely disappeared, however, instead taking what might be called a rather Kafkaesque turn: in the earliest accounts in the *Kojiki* 古事記 (*Records of Ancient Matters*, 712) and *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 (*Chronicles of Ancient Japan*, 720) it is described how tattooing was mostly a punitive practice used for marking criminals.²¹ Tattooing as punishment for various crimes was a practice most likely introduced from China, and it was primarily in this form that tattooing continued up until the Edo period (1603-1868), although there is evidence that some priests of the Pure Land sect of Amida Buddhism tattooed the figures of Bosatsu Kannon or Shakyamuni on their bodies prior to that period.²² As can be seen from the historical accounts above, Japan has had its own history of tribal, punitive, and decorative tattooing since the Jōmon period, but there is relatively little awareness of such practices among those not interested in tattoo trivia, and thus the Edo period is generally considered the start of Japan's tattoo history in the public imagination.

Tattooing as "Art" from the Edo period to the Meiji period

The Edo period (1603-1868) brought with it a plethora of epoch-making changes in Japan's society, as the various domains of the archipelago's main islands were unified under a central government. Castle towns had appeared prior to the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 and the ascendance of the Tokugawa shogunate to power. Under the peace of unification these towns turned into thriving centers of commerce that brought considerable affluence to the townspeople, which then allowed them to engage more fully in popular entertainment, including art forms that would become symbols of Japan's traditional culture such as kabuki and woodblock printmaking. As townspeople, particularly the merchant class, became increasingly powerful economically, the Edo government was prompted to enforce stricter rules, both to ensure that those in the lower economic classes did not rise too far above their stations, at least visibly, and also to maintain a moral social order in line with the neo-Confucian ideals they espoused. Such rules included sumptuary regulations that defined the types of clothing that those of particular classes were allowed to wear. However, these rules were routinely flouted and largely ignored,²³ and colorful figurative tattoos became just one of many ways for those in lower social classes to indulge in deviant behavior in the face of a restrictive government.

The sources of many of these images can be found in the works of *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 - "pictures of the floating world" - intricately engraved woodblock prints that depicted the vibrant city life of Edo and its popular culture, including scenes from famous novels and Kabuki plays. Initially depicting the mutability and impermanence (*mujō* 無常) of human life, such images came to embody the hedonistic pursuit of worldly delights in the pleasure

21. Yoshimi Yamamoto, "'Irezumi': The Japanese Tattoo Unveiled," *Nippon.com*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.nippon.com/en/views/b06701/>.

22. Willem van Gulik, "Japan Tattoo, A Brief History of Its Origins and Development," in *Japan Tattoo: Tattoos in Japanese Prints*, ed. Henk Herwig (Leiden, The Netherlands: Society for Japanese Arts, 2009), 9.

23. Donald H. Shively, "Sumptuary Regulation and Status in Early Tokugawa Japan," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 25 (1964): 123-64.

quarters and theaters of Edo. Those who carved such images were known as *horishi* 彫師 (master engravers), and it is believed that these artists were responsible for the designs of many of the larger tattoos, until this work was eventually taken over by the tattooists themselves (also known as *horishi*). While, there are no historical records explicitly linking the two professions beyond their shared titles,²⁴ at least one famous woodblock print artist is said to have been tattooed across his back, and the influence of his works on tattooing in the Edo period is indisputable.²⁵ The artist in question was Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1797-1861), who released a series of prints based on a famous Chinese tale that simultaneously launched a tattoo boom and helped to elevate the artistry of tattooing in the Edo period to previously unseen levels.²⁶

The Chinese story in question was *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*), known in Japan as *Suikoden* and translated into Japanese as early as 1757 by Okajima Kanzan 岡島冠山 (d. 1727), which tells the pseudo-historical account of 108 righteous outlaws and their exploits during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) in the face of a corrupt government.²⁷ Among the many “heroes” in the saga, six are tattooed in the original novel, while Kuniyoshi’s sixty-nine-print series *Tsūzoku Suikoden gōketsu hyakuhachi-nin no hitori* 通俗水滸傳濠傑百八人一個 (*The 108 Heroes of the Popular Suikoden – All Told*, 1827-30) incorporated fifteen tattooed characters, including Shi Jin 史進 (Japanese: Shishin; marked with nine dragons across his body) and Yan Qing 燕青 (Japanese: Ensei; adorned with peonies and a temple lion).²⁸ Kabuki actors were also sometimes portrayed in popular prints with intricate makeup made to imitate the tattoo work of the *Water Margin* heroes.²⁹ Accuracy to the original tale aside, many in the *shitamachi* 下町 (literally “lower city”) downtown areas of Edo, including artisans and manual laborers, recreated these works on their bodies, sporting colorful representations similar to those of the fierce heroes of the *Water Margin*. Their general dissatisfaction with the ruling class led to a sense of solidarity with such heroes and formed a distinct undercurrent beneath tattooing’s rising wave of popularity.³⁰ In Japan’s Edo period, the relationship between tattoos and print art became clearly established, effectively overshadowing its use as a punitive measure.

Nonetheless, tattoos were still associated with the lower working classes – manual laborers, palanquin bearers, mail runners, and firefighters. Further complicating the status of tattooing in Japan was the eventual ban that accompanied the country’s transformation

24. Yamamoto, “From Early Times to the Tattoo Boom During the Edo Period,” 89.

25. van Gulik, “Japan Tattoo, A Brief History of Its Origins and Development,” 14.

26. Donald Richie and Ian Buruma, *The Japanese Tattoo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1980), 21.

27. Inge Klompmakers, “Kuniyoshi’s Tattooed Heroes of the Suikoden: Righteous Rebels from China in Japanese Prints,” in *Japan Tattoo: Tattoos in Japanese Prints*, ed. by Henk Herwig (Leiden, The Netherlands: Society for Japanese Arts, 2009), 18-19.

28. *Ibid.*, 21-23.

29. Herwig, Henk, ed., *Japan Tattoo: Tattoos in Japanese Prints* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Society for Japanese Arts, 2009), 79.

30. Manami Okazaki, *Wabori: Traditional Japanese Tattoo* (Hong Kong: Kingyo Books, 2013), 11.

into a modern nation during the nineteenth century. While the Edo period witnessed a veritable golden age of tattooing in Japan, it quickly gave way to a new era of repression of the practice. The Meiji period (1868-1912) was tumultuous and turbulent, as Japan's former government under the shogunate was uprooted and replaced with a new regime under the Meiji emperor. At the same time, the nation struggled to modernize and industrialize in the face of increasing encroachment by Western powers, particularly since Commodore Matthew Perry's "black ships" had forced the country to open its ports to international trade in 1854. Japan found itself engaged in a game of "catch up" with the imperialist Western nations, a game that it engaged in with much gusto by rapidly assimilating not only Western technologies, but also Western fashions and eating habits. Appearing "civilized" to the powerful nations that arrived on their shores thus assumed high priority. The Meiji government determined that tattooing was likely to be seen as "barbaric" if left unchecked, since rickshaw pullers and porters, many of whom worked nearly naked in the sweltering heat and humidity of Tokyo summers, were often colorfully adorned with highly visible tattoos.³¹ Thus, in 1872, the Meiji government enacted a stricter law that banned both the act of tattooing and the public display of tattoos. Violations of this law could result in the imprisonment of the tattooists and confiscation or destruction of their equipment.³²

The legislation in question, namely, the Misdemeanor Law (*Ishiki kaitō jōrei* 違式註違条例), was not related exclusively to tattoos. As Kawano has pointed out, the law prohibited commoners (especially women) from appearing in public in varying stages of undress or partial dress, and also outlawed mixed bathing. As a result, "ordinary people's bodies became the objects of intense sartorial surveillance as new rules for displaying bodies, in and out of clothing, came into effect."³³ Thus, tattooing was just one of the deviant bodily practices being targeted, and a tattooed body exposed in public would thus pose a double transgression: first by being in a state of undress, and second by being adorned with a bodily marking thought to be barbaric in the eyes of Westerners. Kawano points out that, like the sumptuary regulations mentioned above, the law was not entirely effective and merely encouraged many individuals of the period to be strategic about their states of (un)dress, such as making sure to be "properly" clothed only when police forces were likely to pass by. Such strategies of covering the body are relevant in the case of contemporary tattoos as well, as will be seen below. Kawano's point, however, is that the efforts of the Meiji government to modernize so as to appear civilized in the eyes of Western observers, while not entirely altering the practices and perceptions of Meiji Japanese, nonetheless "impoverished rich

31. Pascal Bagot, "From the End of Edo to the Present Day," in *Tattoo*, ed. Aude Gros de Beler (Paris: musée du quai Branly, 2014), 97.

32. Ibid.

33. Satsuki Kawano, "Japanese Bodies and Western Ways of Seeing in Late 19th Century," in *Dirt, Undress, and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Body's Surface*, ed. Adline Masquelier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 150.

but subtle ways of seeing practiced by Japanese actors.”³⁴ This notion of impoverished “ways of seeing” is highly relevant to tattoos as well. While *ukiyo-e* later gained international recognition as one of the Edo period’s great artistic traditions, the painstaking work of *horishi* using the human body as a canvas was erased from the public mindset by the ban that forced them to work underground or overseas.³⁵ However, together with their legalization in 1947 after the end of World War II and the enactment of the new Constitution of Japan, *irezumi* came into the spotlight once again, this time in a decidedly disreputable context.

The Yakuza Connection

As mentioned above, for many people in Japan, the image of *wabori* Japanese-style tattooing is indelibly linked with the country’s powerful organized crime syndicates, the *yakuza*, and for good reason. The *yakuza* have, in various incarnations, been depicted on celluloid since the silent film era, when *bakuto* 博徒 (itinerant gamblers and some of the precursors to the modern-day *yakuza*) were shown as sympathetic, “noble outlaw” characters who flaunted authority and forged their own paths with honor. This basic format led to a genre that blossomed in the 1960s called *ninkyō eiga* 任侠映画, or “chivalry films.”³⁶ These films usually depicted the postwar *yakuza* as honorable bands of male comrades fighting for their gang loyalties in the face of corrupt authorities or unscrupulous rival gangs. Like the tales told in the *Water Margin* woodblock print series more than a century earlier, these narratives resonated powerfully with working-class men, many of whom had migrated to metropolitan areas from the countryside in search of jobs.³⁷ Feeling detached and unmoored in the face of the new and impersonal urban sprawl and lacking social networks, these men were often highly attracted to the stories depicting powerful bonds among male mafia members, who led lives based on seemingly obsolete yet positive notions of loyalty and personal honor.³⁸ A typical storyline would involve an honorable gangster being released from prison after many years, only to find that his female partner has left him and his gang is in disarray. A new and less scrupulous mob group has taken over, preying on the weak and trampling former loyalties. The honorable hero has no choice but to take on the rival gang in a spectacularly bloody fashion, usually perishing in the effort.³⁹ My research led me to view dozens of *yakuza* films, and I found that tattoos often made an appearance, even featuring in titles such as *Tattooed Life* (*Irezumi ichidai* 刺青一代, 1965). Many of the older cohort of

34. Ibid., 163.

35. See, for example, Yamamoto Yoshimi, “Hon Kon no Nihonjin horishitachi: 19-seikimatsu kara 20-seiki shotō made (The Japanese Tattooists of Hong Kong: From the End of the 19th Century to the Beginning of the 20th Century),” *Meiji University Bulletin, School of Political Science and Economics* 85, no. 3-4 (2017): 179-216.

36. Mark Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), 23.

37. Ibid., 24.

38. Ibid., 24.

39. Patrick Macias, *Tokyo Scope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion* (San Francisco: Cadence Books, 2001), 98.

tattooists that I had conversations with mentioned a fondness for these films and how they influenced their choice of career. It can be said that the image of yakuza presented in these films was, while not wholly positive, not entirely negative either.

This image changed rather radically in the 1970s, when the yakuza film developed in a new direction known as *jitsuroku eiga* 実録映画 (“actual record films”), which appeared on the scene after the *ninkyō eiga* of the past decades had waned in popularity. In contrast to the “chivalry films” of the 1960s, mafia members in these newer films were clearly portrayed as criminals. Their lives were often depicted as ruled by ruthlessness, raw ambition, and treachery, all conveyed through over-the-top violence—usually captured in a cinema verité style to lend a documentary feel to the proceedings—which frequently served as the star attraction.⁴⁰ These films were generally based on journalistic accounts of real events, or even the memoirs of yakuza members themselves, and landmark works include Fukasaku Kinji’s eight films in the *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* (*Jingi naki tatakai* 仁義なき戦い) series from 1973 to 1976.⁴¹ Toei Studios was particularly prolific, releasing hundreds of titles through the 1960s and 1970s, and there were even attempts to bring the yakuza genre to the U.S. with titles like *The Tattooed Hit Man* (*Yamaguchi-gumi gaiden - Kyūshū shinkō sakusen* 山口組外伝 九州進攻作戦, 1974), but success in these overseas endeavors was limited.⁴² The advent of home video systems in the 1980s led to a decline in theatrical releases, but the direct-to-video market kept the genre alive throughout the following decades. In addition, the 1990s and 2000s were punctuated by several high-profile theatrical releases from directors Kitano “Beat” Takeshi (e.g., *Boiling Point* [*San tai yon ekkusu jūgatsu 3-4X10月*, 1990], *Sonatine* [*Sonachine* ソナチネ, 1993], *Outrage* [*Autoreiji* アウトレイジ, 2010]) and Miike Takashi (e.g., *Dead or Alive* [*Deddo oa araibu hanzaisha DEAD OR ALIVE* 犯罪者, 1999], *Ichi the Killer* [*Koroshiya ichi* 殺し屋1, 2001], *Yakuza Apocalypse* [*Gokudō daisensō* 極道大戦争, 2015]). The genre was taken in a somewhat more serious and existential direction by the former, and in an irreverently witty, perversely stylized direction by the latter.

Yakuza films have thus been a highly accessible medium through which many Japanese are exposed to images of tattooed gangsters, and the popularity of such films, in combination with the high media profiles of bold and powerful yakuza families, ensured that the association of Japanese tattooing with illegal activities would be deeply entrenched in Japan’s popular imagination. The portrayal of tattoos onscreen (accomplished through makeup) was often highly realistic and detailed, lending a significant degree of verisimilitude to the fictional proceedings. It should be noted however, that although the image of organized crime and *wabori* became inextricably intertwined in the postwar era, this association was not immediate. As pointed out by tattoo scholar Yamamoto Yoshimi

40. Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films*, 33.

41. *Ibid.*, 33.

42. Macias, *Tokyo Scope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion*, 110. Perhaps the most famous film to first introduce Western audiences to the image of tattooed yakuza gangsters is Sydney Pollack’s *The Yakuza* (1974), starring Robert Mitchum and Takakura Ken. A financial failure upon its release, it has since gained something of a cult following.

(and as noted by several of my informants), bodysuit tattoos were not an uncommon sight in Japan's *sentō* 銭湯, or public bathhouses, during the early postwar period where most Japanese needed to bathe in the absence of widespread indoor plumbing. Yamamoto⁴³ notes that individuals would have had the opportunity to encounter many tattooed non-criminals, like carpenters and manual laborers, in these public bathhouses.⁴⁴ However, the introduction of indoor plumbing and the simultaneous rise of yakuza films saw these images of harmless tattoo works on townsfolk was thoroughly supplanted by much more frightening associations with violent gangsters. Moreover, in 1991, when Japan's Anti-Organized Crime Law came into effect, in cooperation with its regulations, police forces worked with local businesses to drive the yakuza out of public spaces. Of course, since it would be somewhat difficult to recognize yakuza if they hid their tattoos and occasional missing fingers,⁴⁵ hot springs and some bathhouses would pre-emptively display signage prohibiting tattooed individuals, thereby effectively barring members of organized crime from gathering there. Prominent signage in many hot springs and public baths has ensured that the image of tattooed criminals is reinforced for all who enter such facilities on a daily basis. This stands in ironic contrast to the reality that very few yakuza are being tattooed today. Scholars like Yamada Mieko have reported that tattoos among yakuza have declined, with two of the artists she interviewed having only 50% of their clientele comprised of yakuza.⁴⁶ Others have reported percentages closer to



Figure 2. Japanese-style dragon back piece by Horitsuna (Tattoo Studio Desperado).

43. Quoted in Jon Mitchell, "Japan Inked: Should the Country Reclaim Its Tattoo Culture?," *The Japan Times*, May 3, 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2014/05/03/lifestyle/japan-inked-country-reclaim-tattoo-culture#.Vmjfvd8rLeQ>.

44. In most cases, the individuals exposed to such tattooing would be men in same-sex bathing areas, but Japan has, and continues to have in some areas, facilities with mixed-sex bathing areas. Also, fathers with very young daughters may sometimes take them into the male baths with them. Some of my female informants had first encountered tattoos this way.

45. Yakuza are notorious for the practice of *yubitsume* – proof of loyalty or sincere remorse by way of the ritual amputation of a digit. This practice was made explicitly illegal (in Articles 16-26 of the 2007 Revision to the Anti-Organized Crime Law) and has declined as yakuza families seek to avoid conspicuous appearances.

46. Mieko Yamada, "Westernization and Cultural Resistance in Tattooing Practices in Contemporary

zero based on interviews with dozens of tattooists in Japan, who indicated that most of their clients seeking *wabori* tattoos were simply those who appreciate the artistry and aesthetic of the style.⁴⁷ My own research also found that the percentage seems to be far less than 50% in most cases.

Rise of the Tattooists

Japanese tattooists increased exponentially from approximately 250 in the 1990s to anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 in the present day according to one of my interviews with Professor Yamamoto Yoshimi, a prominent tattoo scholar in Japan. This rise coincided to a degree with the aforementioned “tattoo renaissance” experienced in the U.S., as well as the increased availability of tattoo information and equipment that became purchasable through various publications and, later, the popular diffusion of the Internet. Aspiring tattooists could now access a wide range of information and easily order tattoo machines and specialty inks from overseas. Unlike the previous generations of tattooists, who worked out of their own homes or rented apartments and underwent a strict system of apprenticeship under a master tattooist for several years before being able to begin their own practice, the new tattooists were often young and self-taught, having read books and magazines and ordered their ink and tattooing equipment from catalogs. Imported mostly from the U.S., tattoo machines, while requiring a certain amount of practice, are far easier to pick up and use effectively than the hand-poking implement – a rod with a bundle of needles attached to its tip – used by many *wabori* practitioners (although many tattooists work in *wabori* using machines as well). It is difficult to assign a percentage, since there are thousands of tattooists operating in Japan with no official documentation of their numbers and styles they specialize in, but I would estimate based on my research that approximately 25% of all tattooists in Japan specialize in *wabori*, and perhaps only a few hundred regularly practice the traditional hand poking method. Many early tattooists were content to tattoo flash – premade designs created by other tattooists. Questions of artistic originality aside, such tattooists proliferated and operated out of walk-in shops that encouraged more casual clientele and spur-of-the-moment decisions among young people, in contrast to the previous decades, when an introduction from an existing client, phone call, and personal meeting with the tattooist were prerequisite to getting a tattoo that one might or might not have a say in choosing the design of. The popularity of Western musical styles, including hip-hop, combined with the ready availability of tattooists and information available on the Internet, saw increasing numbers of young people becoming tattooed in the Western “one-point” style that they observed on musicians and other celebrities.⁴⁸

Japan,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12(4) (2009): 327-28.

47. See, for instance, Okazaki, *Wabori: Traditional Japanese Tattoo*, 2013, 12; John M. Skutlin, “Japan, Ink(ed): Tattooing as Decorative Body Modification in Japan,” 256-58.

48. The information in this paragraph has been collated from accounts by numerous informants, both tattooists and tattooees, who were in Japan during this period and recalled what the situation was like during our interviews.

It should be noted here that, along with the increase in Western-style tattoos, there was also a concomitant increase in Western-style tattoo studios. Eccentric Tattoo Shop in Nagoya and Scratch Addiction in Tokyo's fashionable Harajuku district are generally regarded as the first "walk-in" tattoo studios in Japan, having been established in 1993 and 1995, respectively. Up until that point, anyone wishing to have a tattoo would generally visit the tattooist's home or rented apartment devoted to that purpose, with no external advertising to clue passersby in to the body modification activities going on behind the door. Such arrangements are still used by artists like Horiyoshi III, although finding the location of his main studio nestled in an obscure residential district of Yokohama – once a daunting task that required asking for directions at the local police box or finding a knowledgeable taxi driver – has been vastly simplified now that it is prominently labeled on Google Maps, complete with Google Street View. The vast majority of tattooists that I encountered during my research, however, were operating out of "walk-in" shops with varying degrees of signage to indicate their practices. I also found that tattooists working in *wabori* designs generally worked out of studios that were densely filled with books, magazines, manga, and assorted bric-a-brac, and had the artists' drawing paper hanging on the walls to display their previous works for clients, often alongside framed images of *wabori* designs.

The customers that I observed at these studios specializing in *wabori* never received any instructions or warnings about their tattoos, and it was assumed that the mere act of seeking out such a tattooist was indication enough of their preparedness to take on the body modification. Among younger Japanese tattooists working in styles other than *wabori*, however, I noticed a tendency to be influenced by the hygiene-consciousness and modern aesthetic sensibilities of the tattoo studios I encountered in the U.S. and Europe. Such studios were generally well lit, minimal in design and furnishings, and tastefully decorated with art and décor typical of such establishments, such as skull-themed items, skateboards, and various popular culture-related figures and objects. Tattoo tables and chairs for clients were covered with removable plastic sheeting, cling wrap coated almost everything, including the wires connecting tattoo machines to their power sources, and tools and ink pots were carefully arranged on stainless steel trays. The overall image of an alternative, yet safe and hygienic, environment was conveyed. These types of walk-in "street shops" proliferated around the turn of the millennium and consciously or unconsciously represented a type of differentiation strategy to distance the "art" and "fashion" of globalized, international *tatū* (tattoos) from the local associations of criminality that have historically been attached to Japan's *irezumi*.

The year 1999 witnessed the first international tattoo convention to be held in Japan, which was organized by both Japanese and overseas tattooists who wished to strengthen exchanges of designs and techniques between Japan and the rest of the world, and its success brought about another in the following year. Japan had already held its own tattoo events in previous years, most of which were associated with motorcycle enthusiasts, but this large-scale event opened up the floodgates to a heightening of the artistic level of Western-style tattooing in Japan and helped to encourage a wide range of young tattooists taking up tattoo machines and setting up shops, which were still relatively rare at the time.

Japan's first mainstream dedicated tattoo publication, *Tattoo Burst*, printed its first issue in 1999 as well, and its pages brought not only the history of tattooing to a broad readership, but also information on a plethora of tattooing styles and where and how to find tattooists in Japan. Even famous pop star Amuro Namie caught on to the tattoo trend, and had her arm prominently tattooed with a design and her son's name in Roman letters.⁴⁹ Massively popular recording artist Hamasaki Ayumi also flaunted a new tattoo on her shoulder in the early 2000s, which can be easily seen in videos and photographs online, and tattoos seemed to be catching on among youth in Japan as tattoo studios cropped up in cities around the country.

While fan reactions were mixed, the tattoos of media sensations like pop stars Amuro Namie and Hamasaki Ayumi challenged the view of such body modification as exclusively within the realm of criminals and social malcontents and introduced to a wide audience the concept of the "one-point" tattoo as a stylish fashion statement. Even so, Amuro's tattoos were blurred out on television,⁵⁰ and I was told by informants that other tattooed singers cover them during annual televised events such as the famous annual *NHK Kōhaku Uta Gassen* NHK紅白歌合戦 singing contest. Amuro eventually went on to have her tattoos removed, although outlines of where they were can still be plainly seen. The persistent negative image of tattooing and the erasure of potentially positive portrayals of "fashion" and "one-point" tattoos in Japan's mass media thereby contributed to a lasting stigma that continues to this day. The following section explores how individuals in Japan who adorn themselves with tattoos as fashion, rather than affiliation with criminal groups, negotiate and cope with the stigma surrounding their body modification choices.

Fashioning Stigma Management Strategies Among Japanese Tattooees

The term stigma is so particularly suited to the subject of tattooing as to be almost taken for granted. Goffman, who wrote extensively about social stigma in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* and other works, explains that the original Greek word indicated "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor – a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places."⁵¹ C.P. Jones has pointed out that these marks, rather than branding, were almost always a variety of ancient tattooing,⁵² and thus the very first stigma was a tattoo. While modern usage of the term "stigma" tends to refer "more to

49. It should be noted that Amuro had already received a small tattoo of a barcode on a trip to Jamaica as early as 1996, but her highly visible arm tattoos were the first time her tattoos attracted national attention. She has since had her arm tattoos permanently removed, although traces are still visible.

50. Leo Lewis, "Japan's Crackdown on Tattoos Sparks Legal Battle," *Financial Times*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/cbdabcce-c340-11e6-9bca-2b93a6856354>.

51. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 1.

52. C.P. Jones, "Stigma and Tattoo," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion, 2000), 1.

the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it,"⁵³ in the case of tattooing the original meaning once again comes to the fore, as tattooing may serve as presumed bodily evidence of any number of characteristics. Such meanings are not universal, of course, and Goffman discussed stigma as being relative within the context of relationships among various social actors, noting that, "an attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself."⁵⁴ A study by Link and Phelan has pointed out that much of the problem with literature on stigma lies in the fact that it focuses on the effect of a particular stigma on just one outcome when, in fact, it can exert significant influence over a multitude of outcomes that can thereby limit the life chances afforded to an individual.⁵⁵ In Japan, tattooing has the potential to affect the lives of individuals in numerous ways, including career, marriage, lifestyle, and even housing.

Tattoos in North America were once seen as "marks of disaffiliation" and, by contrast, could be seen as symbolizing affiliation in social groups that engage in illegal or socially disvalued behavior.⁵⁶ Together with other forms of aesthetic deviance, they could also be ways of indicating affiliation with rebellious subcultures.⁵⁷ Tattooing is a deviant social action that takes the form of a visible attribute resulting in stigmatization, but, because the deviant act of being tattooed is almost always a voluntary one, such acquired stigmas do not meet with the same degree of sympathy or reactions from "normals"⁵⁸ as a hereditary physical ailment or accidentally acquired disability.⁵⁹ Since the act of getting a tattoo is a "characterological stigma," those who have them are seen as responsible for their own situations, and thus any discrimination they face may be legitimized.⁶⁰ Because of this, tattooees must often engage in a wide range of "stigma management strategies"⁶¹ to manipulate how they are perceived by themselves and others. Katherine Irwin, in her study of first-time tattooees in the Western U.S., discovered four main "legitimation maneuvers" that individuals used to justify and explain their choices of body modification.⁶² These

53. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 1-2.

54. *Ibid.*, 3.

55. Bruce G. Link, and Jo C. Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 (August 2001): 381-82.

56. Clinton Sanders, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 58-60.

57. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

58. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 5, 28. In his works, Goffman refers to those who bear stigma as "stigmatized" and those who are not as "normals," with an additional category of the "wise" – those normals who are aware and sometimes accepting of the stigmatized.

59. Gretchen Larsen, Maurice Patterson, and Lucy Markham. "A Deviant Art: Tattoo-Related Stigma in an Era of Commodification," *Psychology & Marketing* 31, no. 8 (2014): 672-73.

60. *Ibid.*, 673.

61. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

62. Katherine Irwin, "Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction," *Symbolic*

included the use of mainstream motivations (explaining tattoos as markers of celebration or memorialization of conventional life transitions and milestones), commitment to conventional behavior (asserting that the tattoo was well planned and thought out, and making assurances that it did not indicate a departure from conventional social activities), offering of verbal neutralizations (condemning the stigmatizers for being intolerant and insensitive to trends), and conformance to conventional aesthetics (usually getting small and discreet tattoos that adhere to mainstream aesthetic sensibilities).⁶³ Such individuals seeking tattoos experienced both “deviant attraction”⁶⁴ toward tattoos, but also “deviant aversion” of the prospect of lost status due to their ink, and thus engaged in a process of “reconciliation” in which “they attempted to capitalize on the positive associations with deviance while avoiding the negative ones.”⁶⁵ In North America and much of Europe, such meanings have largely changed and allowed tattooing to hold a wide array of often-positive meanings, particularly when accompanied by the legitimation strategies described above. However, the associations of tattooing as a characterological stigma in Japan remain firmly entrenched in the public imagination, and the culturally and historically specific modes of tattooing’s stigmatization in that country lead to both similar and different legitimation maneuvers and stigma management strategies engaged in by individuals.

Tattoos as (Gendered) Fashion in Japan

In the literature on tattooing in North America, Europe, and Australia, it is clear that there is a certain hierarchy of tattoo designs and placements that affects how a given tattoo is perceived by tattoo enthusiasts or by the general public. For instance, DeMello points out that in the early days of tattoo conventions in the U.S. during the 1970s, facial tattoos were not allowed in the convention centers in order to maintain the respectability of the events at a time when such tattoos were strictly the purview of gang members or particularly bold tattooists.⁶⁶ This issue will be explored further in the following section, but suffice it to say, face, neck, and hand tattoos are still heavily stigmatized by the non-tattooed public in the U.S. and elsewhere,⁶⁷ and some tattooists reserve the right to refuse service to customers who request tattoos in such areas.⁶⁸ Naturally, tattoo designs that would generally be considered grotesque, obscene, or otherwise offensive are meant to serve as statements of rebel-

Interaction 24, no. 1 (2001): 49-73.

63. *Ibid.*, 61-67.

64. Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, “Tinydopers: A Case Study of Deviant Socialization,” *Symbolic Interaction* 1 (1978): 90-105.

65. Irwin, “Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction,” 68-69.

66. DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community*, 31.

67. Astead Herndon, “Society Isn’t Quite Ready for Facial Tattoos,” *CNN*, August 7, 2014, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/06/living/face-tattoos-style-identity/>.

68. Anna Codrea-Rado, “Are Tattoo Artists Right to Refuse to Adorn Necks and Hands?” *The Guardian*, August 9, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/aug/09/can-tattoo-artists-refuse-adorn-necks-hands>.

lion against mainstream tastes, and thus it should come as little surprise that such forms of self-expression might serve as detriments to one's employability if discovered. In the case of "Western" tattooing, such designs might include realistic skulls, satanic imagery, nude female figures, and symbols with racist connotations. In Japan, however, many of the *wabori* designs that inspire such fear and discomfort among many people might be hung up and displayed proudly on the walls of art museums, were it not for their medium of human flesh rather than paper or canvas. Intricate designs featuring heroes of Japanese mythology, swimming carp, or religious figures take on a sinister aspect due to their association with Japan's yakuza organized crime groups – an ignominious distinction that bleeds over to all tattoos regardless of design but is especially pronounced when it comes to *wabori* designs.

Whether or not a tattooed individual encounters difficulty in their daily life in Japan can depend on a wide range of factors, including sex and gender, ethnicity, family situation, place and type of employment, area of residence, and socioeconomic class. Even more important, however, is the type of tattoo in combination with any or all of these factors, meaning that the size, placement, design, and meaning of a tattoo can have a significant bearing on how the tattooed individual is perceived and may successfully or unsuccessfully navigate various situations in their lives. Most of my informants were Japanese in terms of both nationality and presumed ethnicity, and thus it was numerous other factors that came to the fore as they told me their stories. The following cases are provided in an effort to demonstrate the various ways in which individuals that I interviewed, who were tattooed in spite of the prevailing stigma, encountered and sometimes overcame difficulties in their lives due to their tattoos, and how various social and cultural factors affected their specific situations, particularly with regard to how tattoos are situated as fashion, rather than marks of (dis)affiliation.

For women with relatively small tattoos in Japan, having a tattoo is little more than a minor inconvenience in most situations. Keiko,⁶⁹ a 40-year-old woman living with her parents on the outskirts of Tokyo, got her first and only tattoo in her late twenties, when she first became more involved in the underground subculture scene in Tokyo, particularly that involving *visual kei* ビジュアル系⁷⁰ music and fetish-related events. She told me she never really saw herself as someone who would get a tattoo, but a trip to France inspired her to have a Baroque floral design tattooed on her upper arm, featuring the leaf scroll motifs of that art style in the design of a candleholder that she had seen in an antique shop. When asked why she tattooed the image instead of merely framing a photograph of it, she replied, "The style really moved me. I wonder what it was...somehow a photograph wasn't enough. I wanted [the design] to be a part of my body." I inquired about how her parents reacted,

69. A pseudonym.

70. Similar to glam rock, *visual kei* (with *kei* roughly meaning "style") is a Japanese musical and fashion genre that features musicians with highly stylized and androgynous makeup and attire. Despite being considered a musical genre, the styles of bands cover a wide gamut of rock subgenres and, as implied in the name, the appellation indicates a visual aesthetic more than a musical style.

and her response was similar to what I received from many of my informants. “They weren’t very happy about it at first, but when they saw that it was a beautiful design, and they knew that I had done it after thinking it through, they really didn’t mind.” She spoke about her own tattoos using the terms “art” and “fashion tattoo,” without using the more negatively charged term *irezumi*, and generally described her experience as a cathartic one.

I asked Keiko if she had ever faced any other difficulties in her life due to the tattoo. At work, Keiko told me, it was a simple matter of wearing sleeves that covered her upper arm and, in fact, her superior in her job as a sales clerk was actually a woman more heavily tattooed than her (also in a non-*wabori* “Western” style) who also covered her tattoos as appropriate for the job. I assumed that surely, she must have trouble when entering *onsen*, or hot springs, in Japan, but her answer was somewhat surprising.

About that, I actually went to an onsen recently. I told the woman at the front desk that I have a tattoo on my upper arm, showed it to her, and asked her if it would be okay to go in. She told me it would be fine as long as I covered it with bandages, so I did and went into the onsen. Of course, the bandages got all wet and ended up falling off, so the tattoo was exposed, but no one was bothered by it.

It should be noted that, particularly in recent years, many hotels, *onsen* facilities, pools, and gyms have been allowing visitors to cover their tattoos with adhesive bandages (*tatū kakushi yō no tēpu* タトゥー隠し用のテープ) when using their facilities, thus allowing these institutions to maintain the tattoo ban in practice while allowing customers with small “fashion tattoos” to enter. Naturally, anyone with a full sleeve or back tattoo might end up looking like someone who has suffered a serious injury if they attempted to take advantage of this tactic, and thus it is only applicable to smaller tattoos like the one Keiko has. Several factors contributed to the ease with which Keiko was able to enter the *onsen*. The size of the tattoo and its placement in an area that would be easy to cover with a bandage (her upper arm) made it simpler for her to conceal her tattoo, but the issue is not so simple. Her tattoo design stretches nearly from her shoulder to her elbow, large enough to be highly conspicuous. In addition, the bandage would be likely to fall off in the humidity of the *onsen*, or if she decided to enter the water up to her shoulders. The individual at the front desk was most likely aware of this but made a judgment based on her impression of Keiko. As a woman with a feminine Western design, Keiko was able to circumvent the usual ban on tattooing.

It has been observed in U.S. cases of court battles involving tattoos in the workplace that male tattoos as body adornments are generally coded as masculine in terms of toughness, aggression, and military associations, while in contrast, tattoos on women are viewed as indicating that they are sexually available to men.⁷¹ A study by Swami and Furnham in the U.K. also found that women with tattoos were viewed as less attractive, more sexually

71. Lucille Ponte and Jennifer Gillan, “Gender Performance Over Job Performance: Body Art Work Rules and the Continuing Subordination of the Feminine,” *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* 14 (2007): 361-62.

promiscuous, and more likely to be heavy drinkers.⁷² During my fieldwork in Japan, I found that such stereotypes applied rather evenly regardless of gender. The difference was that tattoos for women, provided that they were within a certain size and of a suitably feminine design, were generally more acceptable than tattoos on men, which tended to be stereotypically masculine in style. In other words, tattoos on males in Japan are coded as representing only a negative, criminal masculinity, while tattooed female bodies are gaining a modicum of acceptance as decidedly more radical forms of accessorizing, self-expression, or beautification through bodily fashion. This slight degree of acceptance, however, depends greatly upon the design, echoing the findings of Thompson, whose ethnographic work in the U.S. has shown how non-stereotypically feminine tattoo designs, while often empowering to the women who choose to have them indelibly marked upon their bodies, are generally viewed as masculine or even ugly.⁷³



Figure 3. A “one-point” tattoo using both tribal and Japanese design elements by Horitsuna (Tattoo Studio Desperado).

The above points were illustrated well by an episode of a television program called *Suki ka kirai ka iu jikan* 好きか嫌いか言う時間 (Time to Say Whether You Love It or Hate It), which aired on Japan’s TBS television on June 30, 2016. In the episode, a panel of celebrities and a live audience were asked whether they loved or hated “the trend of tattoos being completely okay.” The more neutral loan word *tatū* was used throughout the segment instead of *irezumi*, which would have more loaded connotations of *wabori* designs on gangsters. The results of the vote were overwhelmingly uniform, with the older men on the panel saying they hated this trend, and the one woman and one twenty-year-old man on the panel saying they liked it. The young women in the audience were also overwhelmingly positive in their responses to the trend. However, the young man who liked it, genderless fashion (*jendāresu kei* ジェンダーレス系)⁷⁴ icon Ryuchel (りゅうちえる), made an important distinction that revealed an

72. Viren Swami and Adrian Furnham, “Unattractive, Promiscuous and Heavy Drinkers: Perceptions of Women with Tattoos,” *Body Image* 4, no. 4 (2007): 343-52.

73. Beverly Yuen Thompson, *Covered in Ink: Tattoos, Women and the Politics of the Body* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

74. “Genderless kei” is a recent fashion trend in which individuals (almost exclusively male) incorporate

underlying assumption of all of the participants, saying “If it’s like a dragon all over the back, I think it can’t be helped if someone judges that person, but if you do it as a ‘one-point’ and as a part of your fashion to express your own worldview, I think it’s rather cool then.” It became clear from the conversations and images given throughout the entire segment that the “one-point” tattoos being discussed were those practiced by women, and the designs on display included hearts, stars, and crowns in “coin-size” designs on the ankle (which one audience member actually showed off for the panel). As was the case with Keiko, so long as the design is not unreasonably large and suitably “fashionable,” it can be coded as appropriately feminine. It is also clear that there is a distinction between *irezumi* (e.g., “a dragon all over the back”) and *tatū* (e.g., a “one-point” fashion tattoo). The Kanto Federation of Bar Associations’ 2014 survey of 1,000 individuals in Japan indicated that 39.2% claimed that the impression they receive from *tatū* is different from that of *irezumi*.⁷⁵ While the study had no follow-up question to determine what impressions are discussed, my research indicates that *wabori* tattoos are much more likely to have a negative reaction due to their association with the yakuza.

Keiko’s case elucidates one other important point concerning tattoos in Japan, namely, that the mere act of attempting to hide something is often sufficient to satisfy the seemingly adamant social and cultural demands for conformity. For Keiko’s fellow *onsen-goers*, it is highly unlikely that her bandage would have been mistaken for anything other than a tattoo cover. If she actually had an injury requiring such a bandage, she first of all would not be in fit condition to enter the bath, and furthermore would pose a health hazard if her wound contacted the water shared by the other bathers. Much as celebrity tattoos can be obviously blurred out on television, or the way Amuro Namie’s laser-erased tattoo designs are still visible as traces on her skin in photos and televised appearances, the very fact that one has made the effort to cover a tattoo shows consideration to others. Thomas Rohlen has pointed out how belonging to a group, in this case, society as a whole, is inculcated in Japanese children from a very young age, and this group mentality continues throughout the social patterns of the workplace and even daily life. He explains:

The very powerful emotional pressures for participation normally associated in the West with the family are at work throughout the society. Failure to follow directions, careless variance from group norms and standards in such matters as uniforms, etiquette, and practice, for example, create surprising levels of consternation centering on issues of the offending individual’s connectedness to the group. The result of such pressure is very high levels of orderly conduct in the organized spheres

both male and female fashion items and beauty techniques to achieve an androgynous appearance. (“Genderless Kei – Japan’s Hot New Fashion Trend.” *Tokyo Fashion*, January 30. Accessed May 30, 2017. <https://medi-um.com/@TokyoFashion/genderless-kei-japan-s-hot-new-fashion-trend-9e25a2c559c6>).

75. Kantō Federation of Bar Associations, *Jikoketteiken to gendaishakai: Irezumi kisei no arikata wo megutte* (Tokyo: Kantō Federation of Bar Associations, 2014).

of society that do not depend on authoritative action⁷⁶ [emphasis added].

Tattooing is certainly a variance from group norms and standards in Japan, yet I emphasize the word “careless” in the above quote to draw attention to the fact that, in the case of tattooing, it is not the tattoo itself that causes consternation, but rather the failure to make adequate efforts to hide the offending stigma. In other words, the effort to hide tattoos can serve as a reconciliatory strategy, which can help reestablish one’s “connectedness” to social groups in Japan.

Through full disclosure of her tattoo and willingness to cover it, Keiko demonstrated that she was aware of the social norms and explicit rules pertaining to the onsen. Her desire to conform counteracted the generally negative attribute marked visibly on her skin, easing any consternation that it may have ordinarily caused. The combination of her gender and the feminine Western design and small size of her tattoo enabled her to enter an *onsen* that would normally bar anyone with tattoos. Even the tattoo’s ultimate exposure when the bandage fell off was not an issue. Further evidence of the powerful effects of reconciliatory

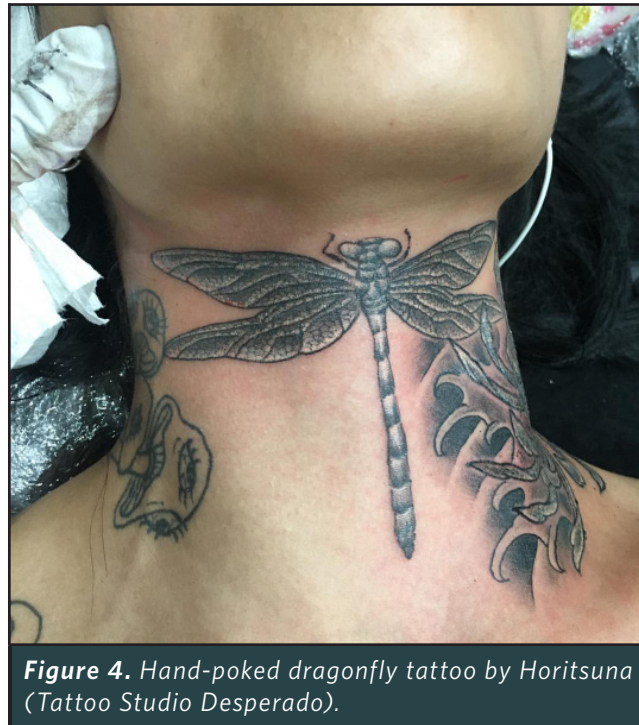


Figure 4. Hand-poked dragonfly tattoo by Horitsuna (Tattoo Studio Desperado).

efforts like Keiko’s can be found in the prominent example of pop singer Amuro Namie and her tattoos. Although Amuro eventually had her tattoos removed, the removal process left behind faint traces of the original design, traces that are often quite visible in marketing photos and on album covers. Such marks could have easily been removed using even the simplest photo editing software, and yet they were left as they were, a visible reminder of her decision to make amends and conform to social norms, which adds depth to her public

76. Thomas Rohlen, “Order in Japanese Society: Attachment, Authority, and Routine.” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 15, no. 1 (1989): 29.

persona. Once known for her “bad girl” image, Amuro now visibly parades her acquiescence to social norms through the traces of ink still visible on her skin.

Tattoos Under Cover

The examples above show how tattoos can be revealed, covered, and removed through reconciliatory strategies that serve as (in)visible concessions to social norms. But what of those with extensive tattoos, which are more likely to be seen on male bodies? Naturally, such individuals first have the choice of limiting them to areas that can be hidden beneath a business suit. Ichirō,⁷⁷ a male piercer operating in Tokyo, offered some insight into such choices. Ichirō’s ears and face were, as might be expected, adorned with piercings, including a septum piercing and prominently stretched earlobes, as well as a dermal punch in the outer conch of his right ear. He also sported full sleeve tattoos and large subdermal silicone implants on the backs of his hands, one in the shape of a captive bead ring and the other in the form of a circular barbell. During our interviews, he told me about one of the major differences he perceived between many Western countries and Japan was the need to show off piercings or tattoos. In Japan, he explained, people might get completely covered in tattoos and yet take great pains not to show them any more than necessary. He told me of a girl he knew who lived with her parents, and therefore decided to get tattooed only around her midsection, so that even if she were to get out of the bath wrapped in a towel, her tattoos would be covered. We eventually got on the subject of “crossing the line,” meaning to reach the point where one’s body has been modified so much that there is no practical means of returning to a less “marked” state in society. I asked him when he felt he had crossed this line, but his answer surprised me:

I haven't crossed that line. Probably, in terms of myself, while I'm in Japan, I won't cross that line here. I've [tattooed] up to this point [indicates tattoos cutting off at wrists], but that's where it stops. If I were to go abroad and make my living there, I could cross the line. As to why, it's because I wouldn't have to cover them anymore. Japan's society is very cramped [semai 狭い], so that's really troublesome [mendōkusai めんどくさい]. If I weren't in Japan, I'd probably have my neck tattooed. I'd have them on my hands, and I'd probably even tattoo my face. I'm in Japan, so that's why I haven't done it... There are people [with hand and neck tattoos], but if those people live in Japan, I think they're regretting their choices. I think there are a lot of people like that... You see, I have my tattoos cut off [at the wrists], so if I put on clothing, I have no tattoos.

At first, I was perplexed to find that Ichirō, despite being heavily pierced and tattooed, felt that he hadn’t “crossed the line,” and I was particularly interested in how he rationalized this in light of the subdermal implants on his hands, which could not be hidden and could be considered much more extreme and even illegal than tattooing. He responded matter-of-factly, saying:

77. A pseudonym.

Yeah, but people don't actually know what these things are – neither good nor bad – before that all they have is a question mark. But, if they see my tattoos, [they think] I must be a scary person. Also, in a worst-case scenario, I can easily remove these [implants]. You can't remove tattoos.

Of course, tattoo removal is possible, but is a highly costly procedure and, depending on the method, can leave behind traces of the tattoo design, scarring, or both. His extensive tattooing, moreover, was well past the point of any possibility of removal. His first point is significant however, in that he acknowledges that the gut reaction that many have toward tattoos would not apply to something like implants, which are essentially neutral in their associations simply because most people outside of the world of body modification have no idea what they are.

For individuals with more extensive tattoos, particularly men, covering up one's tattoos may involve additional efforts – efforts that may ultimately be only partially successful if the tattoo is on the hands or neck. I spoke with Satoshi, a Tokyo tattooist in his thirties, about any problems that he faced in his daily life due to his American traditional-style tattoos, which covered his arms and extended all the way to his fingers, and also the side of his neck. He told me that his difficulties went beyond simply being unable to enter an *onsen*. He told me:

It is difficult, you know. Usually if you can't see [the tattoos] it's okay, but I'm already like this [indicates his tattooed hands and neck], so even if I wear gloves, it just ends up being even more suspicious and people ask questions. So, when I ask a real estate agent to look for an apartment, he'll say, "I found a place and called, but the landlord hates tattoos"... Always. Even now it's like that for me. I'm working and looking [for a new place to live], but the landlord can't rent the place to me.

As a tattooist, his tattoos served as a kind of (sub)cultural capital but as a man with tattoos that extended even to his hands and neck, it became difficult to even rent an apartment and “pass” in his everyday life. Being a man may actually serve as a detriment in this case, as Chie,⁷⁸ the only Japanese woman living in Japan that I interviewed with easily visible hand tattoos,⁷⁹ was able to secure secretarial jobs for a construction company and later an English language school, but eventually ended up making most of her income from bartending due to personal reasons unrelated to her tattoos. The association of tattooing, particularly extensive designs, with male gangsters makes it comparatively easier for women than men to avoid discrimination due to tattoos, provided they avoid large designs in areas that are difficult to conceal. Nevertheless, I found that my informants still made the attempt

78. A pseudonym.

79. One other informant had an anarchy symbol tattooed on her middle finger, but she was able to easily hide it with a large ring. Some lines that resembled stitches were also somewhat visible, but mostly faded. The other two female Japanese informants with hand tattoos were living in Germany and planned to continue residing there.

to conceal their tattoos, even wearing long sleeves during the sultry Tokyo summers.

During my fieldwork in tattoo shops throughout Japan, I often observed tattooists wearing long-sleeved clothing in the summer. Yasu,⁸⁰ a Tokyo tattooist in his forties, wore a long-sleeved tracksuit when I visited his shop in July, even though his hand and neck tattoos were still clearly visible past the cuffs and collar. While he declined to give a personal interview, an issue of a well-known Japanese tattoo magazine⁸¹ included a statement about his feelings toward showing his tattoos.

I normally try to maintain a sense of moderation by not exposing my tattoos [irezumi] very much, and it is my intention to communicate this about tattoos to my customers as well. If we disregard that aspect, we will increasingly find we have no place to belong in society, and so I want to act with propriety.

Yasu's words "to act with propriety" were *eri o tadishite* 襟を正して, which literally means, "to straighten one's collar." Speaking of moderation and propriety, Yasu indicates that tattooists and tattooed individuals can only expect to be accepted by the general public if they keep their tattoos hidden and act appropriately to prove that they are upstanding members of society. Moreover, his stigma management strategy of "committing to conventional behavior"⁸² also calls to mind the example given by Goffman of a former mental patient who, due to a heightened consciousness of his own stigma, is afraid to engage in heated arguments with others out of fear that his outbursts may be interpreted as evidence of his psychological condition. He avoids showing a level of emotion that in a "normal" person would be perceived as negligible or even expected, thus overcompensating due to consciousness of his stigma.⁸³ In the case of tattoos, for example, a man in a business suit bumping into another person in a train station without a word of apology may be quickly forgiven and forgotten; the same action, committed by a visibly tattooed person, may be instantly interpreted as reflective of the negative character of that person, and used to justify past and future feelings of discomfort and fear toward such individuals. As mentioned above, tattoos are almost always voluntarily acquired "characterological stigmas," meaning that the tattooed individual is fully responsible for their decorative body modification and thus any negative response that they meet with is something they should be prepared to face without complaint. It is important to remember that this way of thinking is often internalized not only by those who are opposed to tattoos, but by those who have them as well.

Committing to the practice of "straightening one's collar" is a way for Yasu to "pass" in society - showing that, even if his neck and hand tattoos are visible, he is making an effort to cast a positive light on tattooees in Japan. As in the case of Keiko above, the effort to

80. A pseudonym.

81. The name, issue number, article title, author information, and other details of this magazine are withheld to protect the anonymity of the informant.

82. Irwin, "Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction," 62.

83. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 25-26.

hide one's tattoos can be viewed as a reconciliatory action that allows reintegration into a situation in spite of common knowledge of the stigmatizing attribute. Yasu thus represents a view held by other tattooists that I encountered in Japan as well – that tattoos should be hidden and that one who shows them cannot expect to achieve public acceptance. Such attitudes and ways of negotiating tattoos in Japan stand in a state of tension with other, more globalized discourses that rely on principles of freedom of expression and the right to self-determination.

Conclusion

As shown briefly in this paper, the narrative of tattooing's general transformation in Western countries from appropriated cultural practice to marginalized mark of "disaffiliation" to widely accepted fashion cannot be accurately applied to the case of Japan. The story of tattooing on the Japanese archipelago stretches beyond recorded history, and the uses and meanings of tattoos have been multifarious across time periods and contexts. Among the various factors contributing to the contemporary stigma of tattoos in Japan, the *yakuza* and their full bodysuit *wabori* tattoos certainly loom large, yet most of the individuals going under the needle today (and their tattoo designs) have nothing to do with organized crime. While linguistic and stylistic distinctions are now made between the generally vilified *wabori* style of *irezumi* and the foreign *tatū* that can be practiced as *āto* アート (art) or *fasshon* ファッション (fashion), tattoos nonetheless remain redolent of antisocial forces regardless of their design, and the practical implications in the daily lives of those who undertake such decorative modifications are largely similar. Thus, rather than stigma management efforts that seek to justify or legitimize tattooing, tattooed individuals in Japan engage in reconciliatory strategies to show their adherence to social standards while ostensibly deviating from them, and these endeavors are generally recognized in a reciprocal exchange that reinforces group norms of tattoos as something that should be hidden in public. These findings offer new insight into the nature of stigma in Japan, illustrating both vividly and colorfully on actual human bodies how, even when the offending mark of a tattoo remains visible, a discernible effort to acquiesce to social norms is generally recognized and maintains social cohesion. This paper highlights the realization that concepts such as stigma and the strategies used to manage it are not necessarily interchangeable across social and cultural contexts, and that explorations of bodily praxis must take into account the everyday lived experience of individuals if we are to reach a greater understanding of tattooing and its stigma in Japan.

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“It Is Good to Have Something Different”: Mutual Fashion Adaptation in the Context of Chinese Migration to Mozambique

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Introduction

Strolling along the orange dirt roads of her Northern Maputo suburb, Nadia¹ is quite a sight to behold. Together with skinny jeans, a black faux leather handbag, and her signature Afro hairdo, she wears a long-sleeved bright red top, which is tight-fitting and of a thick synthetic fabric. Affixed to its little stand-up collar there are two nicely contrasting black silk knots holding together a subtle cut-out running diagonally across the right side of Nadia’s chest (see figure 1). Her top is reminiscent of a qipao, a style of Chinese dress that became popular in 1920s Shanghai. Having previously witnessed the former fashion shop employee describing Chinese fashion as a “quick thing” (*coisa rapida*), which “breaks in two days,” I curiously address her new outfit. Nadia, who was born and



Figure 1. Nadia (on the right) with a friend. (Courtesy of Nadia)



Figure 2. Xiwen at a work event. (Courtesy of Xiwen)

raised in Maputo, replies: “Yeah, Chinese style, it’s good to have something different, you know?” The top was actually a dress, which she had bought in South Africa. As her mother found the dress too short, she just took up the hem to wear it as a top. Going out in the evening, she receives many compliments from her girlfriends, who all want to know where she bought that smart new top.

At a fancy seaside restaurant in the southern part of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, Xiwen uses her smartphone to show me pictures of work events she has attended for her employer, a large Chinese construction company. In most of the pictures she is wearing elegant mid-length dresses made of colorful cotton fabrics, which are known as “capulanas” in Mozambique. In a lively mix of Chinese and Portuguese, the administrative secretary from

1. All names are pseudonyms.

Zhejiang province in south-eastern China, who has been living in Maputo for two years, tells me about the small hidden tailor shop one of the capulana sellers recommended to her. She always goes to this tailor “because he knows me and my wishes.” Pointing at a geometrically patterned sleeveless dress with a full skirt (see figure 2), she explains that to be able to wear the dresses at work, she usually picks knee-covering designs and fabrics which are “not too typically African,” implying rather muted colors and patterns that are neither too bold nor too figurative. She also intends to wear her capulana dresses after her return to China at the end of this year. Asked how her Chinese peers might react to them, she seems confident: “Don’t all girls all over the world just want to be pretty? That is why they keep looking for new things. Fashion is changing all the time, anyway.”

Nadia and Xiwen’s fashion choices show that there is a growing mutual bottom-up fashion exchange between China and the southern African nation Mozambique, which has a long history of adapting and integrating external cultural forms and practices into local dress. In this study, I attempt to explain what leads Chinese and Mozambicans to adopt foreign fashion elements and how this adaptation influences their perceptions of each other. The two examples above capture several phenomena that together constitute mutual Chinese-Mozambican fashion influences. Most importantly, both Chinese and Mozambicans are motivated by the quest for novelty to incorporate elements of each other’s fashion into their own outfits. In this search for “something different” and “new things,” as Nadia and Xiwen put it, they are attracted to what they consider “typical” of Chinese or Mozambican culture, such as qipao dresses and capulana fabrics. This adoption of foreign ethnic dress components entails a certain exoticization of each other. Moreover, there is a range of strategies that Chinese and Mozambicans use to gradually integrate these exotic elements into their own fashion universes, which makes the adaptation more natural and socially acceptable. As Nadia and Xiwen’s creative adaptations show, this includes subtle alterations to form and fabric, combining foreign fashion with home culture fashion, and adjusting the length of garments. These strategies also illustrate the important role of culturally determined dress norms in this adaptation process. This article furthermore shows that the adaptation of fashion elements in the Chinese-Mozambican context is different from fashion exchanges between Western and non-Western countries.

These processes of fashion adaptation should be understood in light of the intensification of Chinese-Mozambican relations since the mid-1990s, when China and Mozambique, which used to be close allies under Mao Zedong, resumed their bilateral relations after the end of the violent Mozambican civil war (1977-1992). In Mozambique, this coincided with economic liberalization and constitutional reforms, as well as the discovery of vast natural gas resources, which made the southern African country attractive for Chinese investors.² Therefore, China soon became very active in the Mozambican economy.³ This multilevel

2. Jorge Njal, “Chinese Aid to Education in Mozambique,” *IESE Conference Paper*, no. 24 (2012).

3. Sérgio Chichava, “Mozambique and China: from Politics to Business?” *IESE Discussion Paper*, no. 5 (2008).

cooperation was institutionalized in the early 2000s through the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), a Joint Economic Trade Commission, and the Macao Forum.⁴ In 2011, China granted zero-tariff treatment to 60 percent of the goods imported from Mozambique, which let the trade volume between China and Mozambique further increase and resulted in China becoming a key trading partner of the African country.⁵ More recently, the two countries announced a “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership,” which is supposed to be accompanied by increased Chinese investment in Mozambique’s natural gas exploitation, manufacturing, agriculture, and infrastructure, as well as closer interactions between Chinese and Mozambican ministries and armed forces within the framework of Chinese president Xi Jinping’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative.⁶ At present, China is the largest foreign investor in the former Portuguese colony.⁷

According to unofficial estimates, there were between 10,000 and 40,000 Chinese nationals living in Mozambique in 2017.⁸ The arrival of a growing number of Chinese nationals is evidenced by the mushrooming of small Chinese shops, restaurants, and guesthouses all over Maputo⁹ and across the country.¹⁰ The most visible manifestations of Chinese activity in Mozambique, however, are the numerous large-scale infrastructure and construction projects,¹¹ such as the newly finished Maputo-Katembe bridge across Maputo Bay.

The literature on cultural exchanges between Chinese and Mozambicans mainly focuses on state-led initiatives, such as the establishment of a Confucius Institute in Maputo,

4. Njal, “Chinese Aid to Education.”

5. Sérgio Chichava, Jimena Duran, Lídia Cabral, Alex Shankland, Lila Buckley, Lixia Tang, and Yue Zhang, “Chinese and Brazilian Cooperation with African Agriculture: The Case of Mozambique,” *CBA Working Paper*, 2013.

6. *Global Times*, “China, Mozambique Establish Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership,” May 18, 2016, accessed November 22, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/983835.shtml>.

7. Chris Alden and Sérgio Chichava, eds., *China and Mozambique: From Comrades to Capitalists* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2014).

8. According to the following source, there were 10,000 Chinese nationals living in Mozambique in 2009: Joao Feijo, “Mozambican Perspectives on the Chinese Presence: A Comparative Analysis of Discourses by Government, Labour and Blogs,” in *China and Mozambique*, 146–87. The current numbers are unknown but in 2017, members of the Chinese Association in Maputo put the number of Chinese at 40,000, which seems realistic given the steady (official as well as unofficial) influx of Chinese migrants since the early 2000s.

9. Sérgio Chichava and Jimena Duran, “Migrants or Sojourners? The Chinese Community in Maputo,” in *China and Mozambique*, 188–98.

10. Howard W. French, *China’s Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

11. Paulo Figueiredo, “Mozambique and China: A Fast Friendship into the Future,” *Macauhub*, August 19, 2016, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.macauhub.com.mo/en/2016/08/19mozambique-and-china-a-fast-friendship-into-the-future/>.

several scholarship programs, agreements on media cooperation,¹² as well as the launch of a Chinese language degree course at Eduardo Mondlane University.¹³ As tools of Chinese cultural diplomacy, these activities, which in similar forms can be found all over Africa, are supposed to strengthen China's soft power in the international community.¹⁴ As observed by Fijalkowski¹⁵ and King,¹⁶ the Chinese notion of soft power differs significantly from its conceptualization in the West. By including foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, trade incentives, and foreign aid, China uses soft power as a catch-all concept to create a positive national image, form international alliances, and position itself as a model of economic success.¹⁷

According to Chichava et al.,¹⁸ Chinese soft power initiatives in Mozambique have largely gone unnoticed by the general public. This corresponds with the findings of several other scholars, who agree on the incapacity of cultural diplomacy instruments to increase China's soft power in Sub-Saharan Africa among other places.¹⁹ This means China has not managed to achieve the success of national branding campaigns such as "Korean Wave" and "Cool Japan." These cultural strategies of the South Korean and Japanese governments were able to enhance the global image of the respective country's identity by actively promoting popular culture, including music, fashion, cuisine, movies, soap operas, and cartoons.²⁰

12. Sérgio Chichava, Lara Cortes, and Aslak Orre, "The Coverage of China in the Mozambican Press: Implications for Chinese Soft Power," paper presented at the conference China and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Beijing, 10-11 September, 2014.

13. Xinhua, "Mozambique's Top University to Launch Chinese Degree Course," January 17, 2016, accessed November 10, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/17/c_135017522.htm.

14. Lucy J. Corkin, "China's Rising Soft Power: The Role of Rhetoric in Constructing China-Africa Relations," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 57, special edition (2014): 49-72.

15. Łukasz Fijałkowski, "China's 'Soft Power' in Africa?" *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2011): 223-32.

16. Kenneth King, *China's Aid & Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education & Training* (Woodbridge: Currey, 2013).

17. Fijałkowski, "China's 'Soft Power' in Africa?" 223-32; Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).

18. Chichava, Cortes, and Orre, "The Coverage of China in the Mozambican Press."

19. Falk Hartig, "New Public Diplomacy Meets Old Public Diplomacy - the Case of China and Its Confucius Institutes," *New Global Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 331-52; Maddalena Procopio, "The Effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a Tool of China's Soft Power in South Africa," *African East-Asian Affairs* 2 (2015): 98-125; Anita Wheeler, "Cultural Diplomacy, Language Planning, and the Case of the University of Nairobi Confucius Institute," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 49, no. 1 (2014): 49-63; Zhou Ying and Sabrina Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes: A Tool for Promoting China's Soft Power?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 628-42.

20. For South Korea: Joo, Jeongsuk, "Transnationalization of Korean Popular Culture and the Rise of "Pop Nationalism" in Korea," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 3 (2011): 489-504; Kuwahara, Yasue, ed. *The Korean Wave: Korean Popular Culture in Global Context* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Shim, Doobo,

Fijalkowski states that “soft power is about the dynamic relationship between the agent and subject of attraction,”²¹ which makes clear that in order to understand the true influences on China’s image in Africa, one has to look beyond state-led forms of “high culture” relations, which is what this paper aims to do. China’s real extent of what Kurlantzick²² describes as “low” soft power, which in contrast to “high” soft power is not targeted at a country’s elite, but at the general public, can only be grasped from the perspective of people on the ground. While Tella claims that “China has not been able to win the hearts and minds of Africans through its language, music and food,”²³ this study looks at another element of “low” soft power in the context of China-Mozambique relations, namely fashion.

Fashion should not be confused with clothing or dress. Other than clothing, fashion includes accessories, make-up, and body modifications.²⁴ For a long time, the term fashion has only been used in the context of Western cultures. Describing non-Western fashion as costume or ethnic dress implied that in Asia or Africa, dress does not change and therefore lacks the cultural achievement and individual creativity that constitutes fashion.²⁵ Several authors such as Eicher,²⁶ Hansen,²⁷ and Rovine²⁸ have made clear that there indeed is a long history of creative adaptations in marginalized non-Western dress, which is why it should be called fashion, too.

There is a significant amount of literature on intercultural fashion exchanges and

“Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2006): 25-44. For Japan: Daliot-Bul, Michal, “Japan Brand Strategy: The Taming of ‘Cool Japan’ and the Challenges of Cultural Planning in a Postmodern Age,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 12, no. 2 (2009): 247-66; Valaskivi, Katja, “A Brand New Future? Cool Japan and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Nation,” *Japan Forum* 25, no. 4 (2013): 485-504.

21. Fijałkowski, “China’s ‘Soft Power’ in Africa?” 231.

22. Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*.

23. Oluwaseun Tella, “Wielding Soft Power in Strategic Regions: An Analysis of China’s Power of Attraction in Africa and the Middle East,” *Africa Review* 8, no. 2 (2016): 143.

24. Joanne B. Eicher and Barbara Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” in *Dress and Ethnicity*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 295-306.

25. Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994); Karen T. Hansen, “The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2004): 369-92; Sandra Niessen, “Afterword: Re-Orienting Fashion Theory,” in *Re-Orienting Fashion*, ed. Sandra Niessen (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 234-66; Victoria L. Rovine, “A Meditation on Meanings: African Fashions, Global Traditions,” in *Mode in Afrika: Mode als Mittel der Selbstinszenierung und Ausdruck der Moderne* [Fashion in Africa as a means of self-dramatization and expression of modernity], ed. Ilsemargret Luttmann (Hamburg: Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg, 2005), 128-34.

26. Joanne B. Eicher “Fashion of Dress,” in *National Geographic Fashion*, ed. C. Newman (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2001), 16-23.

27. Hansen, “The World in Dress,” 369-92.

28. Rovine, “A Meditation on Meanings,” 128-34; Ibid., “Viewing Africa through Fashion,” *Fashion Theory* 13, no. 2 (2015): 133-39.

influences. Most of the studies relate Asian or African fashions to Western fashion, not to each other,²⁹ even if Hansen states that “dress influences travel in all directions, across class lines, between urban and rural areas, and around the globe.”³⁰ Moreover, scholars often focus solely on high fashion,³¹ leaving out the ways in which ordinary fashion³² becomes influenced by foreign aesthetics. Fashion influences among non-Western countries of the so-called “Global South”³³ have been ignored by most scholars. Notable exceptions are Leslie Rabine and Nina Sylvanus. In her book *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*,³⁴ Rabine proposes a model of informal linkages that remain uninfluenced by the West, along which fashion travels directly between what she calls “peripheries.” Sylvanus’ ethnographic studies on Togolese wax fabric³⁵ traders explore Chinese involvement in the West African fabric market, its social and economic consequences,³⁶ and the way in which it is changing Togolese perceptions of value and authenticity.³⁷

29. Kerstin Bauer, “‘Blue Jeans are Turning the World Blue’: Jeanshosenstragen in Westafrika [Wearing jeans in West Africa],” in *Mode in Afrika*, 119–23; Parminder Bhachu, *Dangerous Designs: Asian Women, Fashion, and the Diaspora Economies* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Karen T. Hansen, *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000); Hildi Hendrickson, ed., *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Rovine “Viewing Africa through Fashion,” 133–39; Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Zhao Jianhua, *The Chinese Fashion Industry: An Ethnographic Approach* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

30. Hansen, “The World in Dress,” 372.

31. Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (London: Hurst, 2007); Valerie Steele and John S. Major, *China Chic: East Meets West* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999). High fashion, or haute couture, are exclusive, trend-setting, and expensive fashions designed by leading fashion houses and usually adopted by a limited number of people.

32. Ordinary fashion, or mass market fashion, is mass-produced, cheaper than high fashion, and easily accessible.

33. The term “Global South” refers to developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

34. Leslie W. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

35. Wax fabrics, also called wax print fabrics, African wax prints, or Dutch wax prints, are a kind of cotton cloth with distinctive colorful prints, which cover their whole surface. The wax printing process is influenced by batik, an Indonesian technique of patterning fabrics with molten wax before dyeing them. After becoming familiar with this process during the Dutch colonization of Indonesia, Dutch traders introduced wax fabrics to West Africa in the late 19th century.

36. Nina Sylvanus, “Chinese Devils, the Global Market, and the Declining Power of Togo’s Nana-Benzenes,” *African Studies Review* 56, no. 01 (2013): 65–80; Nina Sylvanus and Linn Axelsson, “Navigating Chinese Textile Networks: Women Traders in Accra and Lome,” in *The Rise of China and Africa in India: Challenges, Opportunities and Critical Interventions*, eds. Fantu Cheru and Cyril I. Obi (London: Zed Books, 2010), 132–41.

37. Nina Sylvanus, “Fakes: Crisis in Conceptions of Value in Neoliberal Togo,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, no. 205 (2012): 237–58; Ibid. “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” in *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance*, ed. Karen T. Hansen and D. S. Madison (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 30–44.

This study sheds light on the multifaceted character of low-level cultural exchange among people of the Global South by examining the way in which Chinese nationals are adopting elements of Mozambican fashion and vice versa. In contrast to many post-colonial contexts, processes of adaptation do not emanate from a one-sided quest for modernity, but from an appetite for novelty on both sides, which leads to very specific forms of mutual fashion exoticization. These peculiar processes are also influenced by the demographic features of the persons who are most keen to adopt elements of the foreign fashion. To describe processes of mutual adaptation, I introduce a set of gradual strategies that Chinese and Mozambicans employ to harmoniously integrate foreign fashion elements into their own styles.

The data for this research was collected during five weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in Maputo, Mozambique, in Spring 2017. On-site unstructured and semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and visual analysis were supplemented by two structured phone interviews with European producers and retailers of wax print fabrics. Additionally, I conducted discourse analysis of all fashion-related articles in the online archives of two of the most widely circulated Mozambican newspapers, Domingo and Noticias.

The Global Circulation of Fashion

Fashion Globalization

In light of global systems of fashion manufacturing and distribution, various scholars have expressed concern over the worldwide homogenization of fashion and thereby the loss of local traditions.³⁸ Indeed, many people from non-Western countries have adopted what has been called “world fashion” or “cosmopolitan fashion” by Eicher and Sumberg,³⁹ either because they were forced to do so by colonial rulers or because they were attracted by its notion of modernity.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, this patronizing fear for cultural preservation itself is a remnant of colonial Orientalist logic, as Jones and Leshkowitz⁴¹ point out. Eicher and Sumberg⁴² clarify that even if it is typically perceived as “traditional” and never changing, “ethnic dress” is not static over time and may also include borrowed items from other cultures. Examples for this creative merging and cross-cultural fertilization can be found in the publications of Hansen, Luttmann, Rabine, Rovine, and Tarlo.⁴³

38. Rovine, “Viewing Africa through Fashion,” 133–39.

39. Eicher and Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” 295–306.

40. Robert Ross, “Cross-Continental Cross-Fertilization in Clothing,” *European Review* 14, no. 1 (2006): 135–47.

41. Carla Jones and Ann M. Leshkowitz, “Introduction: The Globalization of Asian Dress: Re-Orienting Fashion or Re-Orientalizing Asia?” in *Re-Orienting Fashion*, 1–48.

42. Eicher and Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” 295–306.

43. Hansen, *Salaula*; Ilsemargret Luttmann, “Einführung [Introduction],” in *Mode in Afrika*, 7–16; Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*; Ibid. “Creating Beauty across Borders: Hand-Dyed Textile Arts in Francophone West Africa,” in *Mode in Afrika*, 97–107; Rovine, “A Meditation on Meanings,” 128–34.; Ibid. “Viewing

Several scholars stress that this stylistic innovation and creativity is not restricted to the realm of high fashion, but quite the contrary, is focused on a grass-roots level.⁴⁴ Therefore, the popularity of world dress does not necessarily imply “Westernization” or the disappearance of local cultural diversity. Using the example of blue jeans in West Africa, Bauer⁴⁵ has made clear that cultural globalization is usually accompanied by localization and local identity building processes, which is why world fashion and ethnic dress can coexist in a closely interconnected way. Meanwhile, Zhao⁴⁶ argues that in the case of Chinese fashion, Westernization has been avoided by a process which he calls “re-territorialization,” meaning the endowment of foreign fashion with local meanings.

These “layered complexities of identities and styles in an increasingly globalized world”⁴⁷ have given rise to questions of authenticity and cultural identity in the realm of fashion. A very fruitful discussion of these concepts has evolved around Vlisco, a Dutch company producing wax prints for the West African market that are often copied by Chinese competitors. Several studies concluded that the authenticity of a product, in this case Dutch-produced “African” fabric, is not among its inherent characteristics, but gets ascribed to it through a complex creative process of negotiations, alignments,⁴⁸ (re)appropriation,⁴⁹ and counter-appropriation.⁵⁰ Dutch wax cloth as a “cross-cultural commodity”⁵¹ can therefore be African and cosmopolitan, and local and foreign at the same time.⁵² Considering this “cultural hybridity,”⁵³ Rabine⁵⁴ even makes a case for overcoming the slippery and paradoxical concept of authenticity in relation to (African) fashion.

Another aspect of the authenticity of Vlisco fabrics concerns the “fakeness” of their

Africa through Fashion,” 133–39; Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

44. Suzanne Gott, “The Dynamics of Stylistic Innovation and Cultural Continuity in Ghanaian Women’s Fashions,” in *Mode in Afrika*, 61–79; Hansen “The World in Dress,” 369–92.

45. Bauer, “‘Blue Jeans are Turning the World Blue,’” 119–23.

46. Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry*.

47. Rovine, “A Meditation on Meanings,” 132.

48. Christine Delhaye and Rhoda Woets, “The Commodification of Ethnicity: Vlisco Fabrics and Wax Cloth Fashion in Ghana,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 77–97.

49. Danielle Bruggeman, “Vlisco: Made in Holland, Adorned in West Africa, (Re)Appropriated as Dutch Design,” *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2017): 197–214.

50. Paulette R. Young, “Ghanaian Woman and Dutch Wax Prints: The Counter-Appropriation of the Foreign and the Local Creating a New Visual Voice of Creative Expression,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 51, no. 3 (2016): 305–27.

51. M. Amah Edoh, “Redrawing Power? Dutch Wax Cloth and the Politics of ‘Good Design,’” *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (2016): 258.

52. Delhaye and Woets, “The Commodification of Ethnicity,” 77–97; Young, “Ghanaian Woman and Dutch Wax Prints,” 305–27.

53. Bruggeman, “Vlisco,” 197.

54. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*.

Chinese counterfeits. Vann⁵⁵ observes that Vietnamese fashion customers classify counterfeits as good “mimic” or bad “fake” products according to their quality and reliability. Sylvanus⁵⁶ and Luttmann⁵⁷ confirm these findings by showing that constructions of authenticity are shifting and Chinese copies of Vlisco fabrics can gain prestige on their own. Product authenticity is thus a highly ambiguous concept that is “constantly reconfigured, reinterpreted, and interrogated anew.”⁵⁸

Fashion Exoticization

For a long time, Africans and Chinese have adopted the fashion of Western countries which they considered culturally superior and progressive to achieve a modern look for themselves.⁵⁹ People from Western countries borrow elements of non-Western fashion, but they have a different motive for doing so. According to Craik, Western fashion is nothing more than “a sign of individual adornment (self-presentation), group identity and role playing.”⁶⁰ Hence, there is a strong focus on what Craik calls “newness and nowness”⁶¹ meaning that Western fashion systems constantly look for new impulses to assert distinctiveness. For this purpose, foreign ethnic dress is a popular source to draw from. Examples of Western-adopted “ethnic chic” have been described by scholars, such as Bhachu,⁶² Clark,⁶³ Steele and Major,⁶⁴ and Tarlo.⁶⁵

Following the definition of Craik, these foreign motifs in fashion can be called “exoticism.”⁶⁶ The appropriation of foreign ethnic dress in a way that exaggerates the difference between “exotic” and regular fashion elements is thereby used to achieve a deliberate breach of style. Niessen et al.⁶⁷ have pointed out that when ethnic dress is a

55. Elizabeth F. Vann, “The Limits of Authenticity in Vietnamese Consumer Markets,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (2006): 286-96.

56. Sylvanus, “Fakes,” 237-58; *Ibid.*, “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 30-44.

57. Luttmann, “Einführung,” 7-16.

58. Sylvanus, “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 41.

59. Craik, *The Face of Fashion*; Hansen, Salaula; Ilsemargret Luttmann, ed., *Mode in Afrika: Mode als Mittel der Selbstinszenierung und Ausdruck der Moderne* [Fashion in Africa as a means of self-dramatization and expression of modernity] (Hamburg: Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg, 2005); Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*; Ross, “Cross-Continental Cross-Fertilization in Clothing,” 135-47; Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry*.

60. Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, 19.

61. *Ibid.*, 36.

62. Bhachu, *Dangerous Designs*.

63. Hazel Clark, *The Cheongsam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

64. Steele and Major, *China Chic*.

65. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

66. Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, 17.

67. Sandra Niessen, ed., *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

mere “currency in the fashion system,”⁶⁸ Orientalist stereotypes of foreign styles become reiterated. Jones and Leshkowitz⁶⁹ call this situation “homogenized heterogeneity,” in which difference is not only appreciated, but also commodified. This is taken to the extent that sometimes non-Western people themselves have started to exoticize their own ethnic dress and thereby engage in a practice of “self-Orientalizing.”⁷⁰

Mechanisms of mutual fashion adaptation outside of these colonial or post-colonial power relations have largely been left unexplored. I propose that in this case, both sides adopt elements of each other’s fashion owing to a quest for sheer novelty and self-expression rather than an aspiration to be modern. They simultaneously adopt the position that was formerly reserved for Western countries. Following Zheng, this situation could then be described by an egalitarian model of global cultural dynamics, in which there is no cultural hierarchy, but a “flat playing field within which individual consumers are free to choose depending on their personal preferences.”⁷¹ Even if in this context, the notion of superiority that is attached to the term Orientalism⁷² can be spared, a certain degree of mutual exoticization is still difficult to avoid. In this instance, the two cultures mutually see each other as a source of undifferentiated exotic style. The exoticization of fashion thus exists in every cultural milieu.

Fashion Adaptation

Although the terms “appropriation” and “adaptation” are often used interchangeably, the notion of “adaptation” is more appropriate in the context of Chinese-Mozambican fashion exchanges. I use the term “adaptation” rather than “appropriation” to set apart these exchanges from the colonial and exploitative connotations that come along with the complex political and ethnological concept of cultural appropriation.⁷³ As a strategy of change, the process of adaptation has been defined as “cultural authentication process” by Eicher and Erekosima.⁷⁴ According to them, this process consists of four closely interrelated steps, namely the selection of a certain foreign practice or product as appropriate and desirable, the characterization of the foreign element with a native category, the incorporation of the element into the own culture, and finally, the transformation of the foreign element into an

68. Annie Chan, “Fashioning Change: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Modernity in Hong Kong,” *Postcolonial Studies* 3, no. 3 (2000): 293.

69. Jones and Leshkowitz, “Introduction,” 1–48.

70. Ibid, 37.; also Chan, “Fashioning Change,” 293–309; Beth A. Conklin, “Body Paint, Feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism,” *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 4 (1997): 711–37.

71. Zheng Tiantian, “Karaoke Bar Hostesses and Japan-Korea Wave in Postsocialist China: Fashion, Cosmopolitanism and Globalization,” *City & Society* 23, no. 1 (2011): 60.

72. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1978).

73. Denise N. Green and Susan B. Kaiser, “Fashion and Appropriation,” *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2017): 145–50.

74. Joanne B. Eicher and Tonye Erekosima, “Why Do They Call it Kalabari? Cultural Authentication and the Demarcation of Ethnic Identity,” in *Dress and Ethnicity*, 139–63.

element of their own culture.⁷⁵ In the case of fashion, Hansen⁷⁶ also suggests using the terms “bricolage” or “creolization” to express the complexity and heterogeneity of this creative process of mutual adaptation.

Creativity is needed to incorporate foreign styles into one’s own fashion in a way that accommodates local dress norms in regard to etiquette and sexual decorum.⁷⁷ Gradualism is one of the approaches through which global fashion inspiration and local norms can be combined in a harmonious way. Some examples of gradualist strategies include the alteration of foreign clothes by tailors,⁷⁸ using them in a different way from what is customary or expected in the culture of origin,⁷⁹ combining them with local clothes, and restricting their use to certain occasions.⁸⁰ Looking at the incorporation of British styles and fabrics in Indian dress in the nineteenth century, Tarlo⁸¹ puts forward an especially comprehensive list of gradual variations, ranging from the use of foreign fabrics in local styles, the combination of foreign and local garments, the change from foreign to local clothes depending on the occasion, to the adoption of full foreign dress. By ranking them in a sequential order according to their degree of adaptation, Tarlo, however, neglects the possibility of combining different strategies to different degrees, which results in an indefinitely large set of individual grades of adaptation.

Most scholars writing about the adaptation of Western dress or world fashion state that men, not women, are the first to adapt their own style to a foreign fashion. Eicher and Sumberg⁸² assert that men are more likely to work outside of their home town, which is why they have a higher chance to come into contact with foreign ideas and styles. Another explanation given by Sylvanus⁸³ and Ross⁸⁴ is that men have a greater desire to express their modernity and “index their educational, financial, and cosmopolitan status.”⁸⁵ Wearing cosmopolitan fashion might also increase their chances of getting certain jobs. In contrast, women face much stricter moral expectations towards their dress which causes them to avoid modern world dress in favor of their supposedly more traditional and therefore more appropriate ethnic dress.⁸⁶ In non-colonial contexts, however, this might be slightly different. Women are an important part of fashion exchanges between Chinese and Mozambicans. In

75. Ibid.

76. “The World in Dress,” 369-92.

77. Hansen, *Salaula*.

78. Ibid.

79. Kerstin Bauer, “‘Other People’s Clothes’: Secondhandkleider in Westafrika [Second-hand clothes in West Africa],” in *Mode in Afrika*, 124-27.

80. Bauer, “‘Blue Jeans are Turning the World Blue,’” 119-23.

81. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

82. Eicher and Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” 295-306.

83. Sylvanus, “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 30-44.

84. Ross, “Cross-Continental Cross-Fertilization in Clothing,” 135-47.

85. Sylvanus “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 34.

86. Hansen, *Salaula*; Niessen, “Afterword,” 234-66; Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

fact, my findings show that women are especially keen on trying out new fashion styles and are as (or more) likely to adopt foreign elements.

Chinese Fashion in Mozambique

Changing Supply Chains

The Mozambican textile and garment industry almost entirely collapsed in the 1990s because of mismanagement, capital and spare part shortages, and restrictive labor laws. Recent efforts by the Mozambican government to revive these industries have not been effective due to poor infrastructure, a highly bureaucratic regulatory environment, and a lack of skilled labor.⁸⁷ There are a few notable exceptions, such as high fashion brands Taibo Bacar and Nivaldo Thierry, the upcycling⁸⁸ fashion brand Mima-te, and the small textile company Kaningana Wa Karingana, some of which are highlighted during the annual Mozambique Fashion Week. Considering their prices and marketing strategies, however, these instances of local fashion initiative seem to exclusively cater to rather wealthy and upper-class consumers in Mozambique and abroad. Thus, the Mozambican fashion market is now dominated by second-hand clothes and imports, most of which come from China,⁸⁹ but also from South Africa, Europe, and Brazil. The same applies to other fashion items and beauty products including underwear, capulanas, shoes, jewellery, hair extensions, hair products, nail polish, and whitening creams. These products are not produced in Mozambique, or if they are, they are of a very low quality, whereas their imported Western versions are not affordable for most Mozambicans.

Chinese manufacturers are able to fill this price and quality gap between Western and local or South African products, although public perceptions continue to lag, at least with regard to Chinese-made clothing. Or, as Mozambican wholesaler Tino explained to me: “China offers different qualities for different prices, that is their advantage. You can find any quality you want.” The 32-year-old trader has been traveling to Guangzhou in southern China for two years to buy clothes and beauty products, which he sells to many shops in and around Mercado Central, a large market in downtown Maputo, where he also owns a little stall.

The good quality-price ratio of Chinese products also has an impact on the ubiquitous Mozambican capulanas, cotton print fabrics usually worn as wraparound skirts. While the capulana market has long been dominated by Indian producers, most of the large capulana wholesalers in Maputo’s downtown Baixa area have now switched from Indian to Chinese suppliers. Aanesh, a shop owner of Indian descent confided that, although communication with Chinese producers is challenging sometimes due to linguistic and cultural differences, they deliver better quality for a lower price, which he attributed to the use of modern

87. USITC, *Sub-Saharan African Textile and Apparel Inputs: Potential for Competitive Production* (Washington DC: United States International Trade Commission, 2009).

88. Upcycling is the process of transforming used materials into new products of better quality.

89. US Aid, “Mozambique Textile and Apparel Brief,” 2012.

technology and the production of larger quantities. The colors of Chinese capulanas are more intense and do not run, their prints are clearer, and Chinese send fewer defective goods, he said, pointing at a pile of dirty capulanas he received from India.

In Baixa, there are even several recently opened capulana stores owned and run by Chinese (see figure 3), who buy their goods directly from China. Similar developments can be observed in the Mozambican clothing and accessories market. For a long time, Chinese fashion came in mainly via third countries such as South Africa, Brazil, or Portugal.⁹⁰ In the last few years, the number of local direct importers such as Tino has increased, but they now have to compete with Chinese traders, who often benefit from their Chinese language skills and their close connections to the producers in China

Local Perceptions of Chinese Product Quality

Wholesaler Tino proudly shows me around the empty space close to the Mercado Central that will become his first fashion store. Spacious and painted white, Tino's Fashion will stand in stark contrast to the cramped little shops in the surrounding streets. Upon completion, he is planning to offer "good quality Chinese clothes" for women, men, and children. He explains: "So far, Mozambicans don't like Chinese[-made] clothing because they only know the cheap and poor-quality stuff imported by Nigerians." Tino, however, "knows about fashion," so he can easily find high-quality clothing in China. Indeed, for some time, many Mozambican consumers have had a rather negative opinion of Chinese products such as electronics and clothing, which are associated with poor workmanship, inferior materials, and a short lifespan. With the influx of Chinese beauty and fashion products, however, these perceptions are changing.

As many Chinese clothes are still imported via other countries, Mozambicans are often unaware of the origin of the clothes they wear and just assume they are from Brazil or Portugal. In some cases, even the vendors are oblivious of the true origin of the garments they sell. This confusion enables Mozambicans to enjoy the style and quality of Chinese products without being biased. This kind of unconscious endorsement can also be observed in the case of capulanas. Unlike West Africans, Mozambican consumers do not pay attention to brand or origin when buying print fabrics. Thus, they are easily convinced by the good fabrics, and the pretty and innovative designs of Chinese capulanas. Another reason Mozambicans may value Chinese products is the way these products help them to achieve

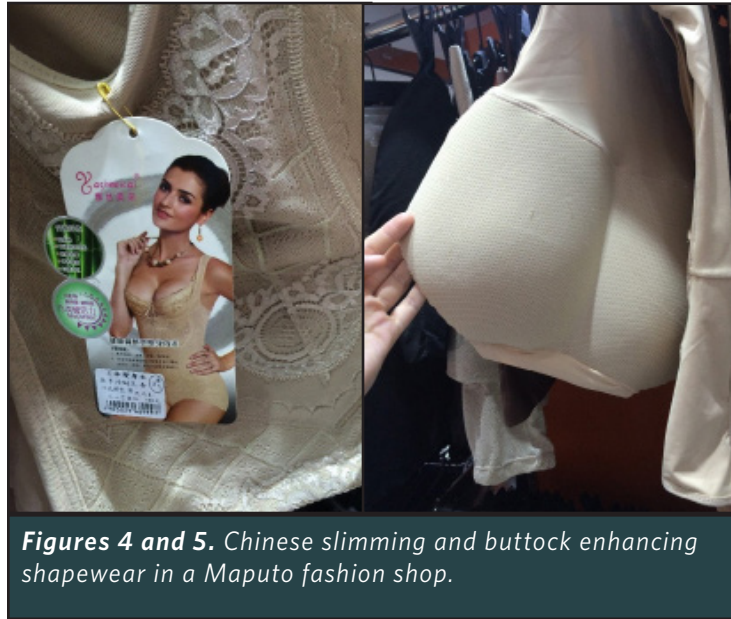


Figure 3. Inside a Chinese capulana store.

90. There are various reasons why these countries serve as conduits to Mozambique: economic power and global connectedness in combination with geographical proximity in the case of South Africa; the former colonial relationship in case of Portugal; and cultural proximity as well as long-standing ties as a fellow former Portuguese colony in the case of Brazil.

the Western or Brazilian style they desire. Slimming and buttock enhancing shapewear from China (see figures 4 and 5), for example, is very popular as it permits Mozambican girls and women of any build to wear the much-loved tight-fitting jeans and dresses imported from Brazil.

Yet, by early 2017, Mozambicans had started to appreciate more and more Chinese products as such. The most prominent manifestation of this trend is KAQIER,⁹¹ a leave-in conditioner hair spray for curly hair from the product range of the Guangzhou KAQI Daily Cosmetic



Figures 4 and 5. Chinese slimming and buttock enhancing shapewear in a Maputo fashion shop.

Factory, which became popular in Mozambique in 2016, and Unique,⁹² a high-quality synthetic hair brand, which enables Mozambican girls and women to obtain the quality of real hair extensions for a much lower price. These products may be helping change widely held negative perceptions of Chinese quality. Another factor that contributes to the slowly growing Mozambican appreciation of Chinese products is a very particular understanding of what is fake and what not. Tino, for example, told me that he will not sell “pirated goods” (*piratas*) in his new shop, but rather “good quality European-style clothes, for example Gucci, Nike, Adidas, Puma.” He does not consider these Chinese counterfeits of Western brand name products fake, as they are made of high-quality materials such as real leather. For him and several of my other Mozambican informants, *pirata* stands for inferior quality, not for counterfeit. This is largely consistent with Sylvanus⁹³ finding that Togolese conceptions of value have changed in reaction to Chinese counterfeits of Dutch wax print fabrics. It also explains why a Mozambican lady chose to go to a Chinese supermarket to buy Blackhead shampoo, a Chinese knock-off of the German brand Schwarzkopf. She bought this product solely for its good qualities and was fully aware of it being a counterfeit, which is why she

91. At the time of my research, KAQIER could be found in any hair and beauty product stall at the large markets of central Maputo. This product is widely known to be Chinese and is nonetheless considered to be of a very high quality. The fact that most Mozambicans cannot read its package instructions (written in English and Chinese) does not diminish KAQIER's popularity. One beauty shop owner affirmed: “even if they [the Mozambican customers] cannot read it, they buy and use it”.

92. This immensely popular hair produced in China is available in any color, length, and texture and feels so real that it is called “human hair” (*cabelo humano*). Like real hair (*cabelo*), it can be used several times, but costs only a fraction, which permits Mozambicans to change their hairstyles more often.

93. Sylvanus, “Fakes,” 237-58; *Ibid.*, “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 30-44.

described it as “a copy, but a good one” (*uma copia, mas uma copia boa*).

The Influx of Chinese Style

The shift towards Chinese producers in Mozambican fashion supply chains described above entails the influx of Chinese styles and aesthetics. As there is a steady demand for new patterns and motifs, many capulana wholesalers receive new collections from China weekly or every other week. These capulanas are often not only produced, but also designed in China, which is why they sometimes include novel and distinctly Chinese motifs such as yin-and-yang symbols. However, “Chinese” capulana designs enter the Mozambican market not only via China. Chinese-style motifs such as dragons are so popular that they can also be found on Indian-made capulanas (see figure 6). This transnational circulation of designs stands in the long tradition of African print fabric making, which is characterized by cultural hybridity and cross-cultural fertilization.⁹⁴

Sometimes, Chinese-style products appear on the Mozambican market rather randomly as a result of the assortment expansion of local wholesalers who have familiarized



Figure 6. Indian-made capulana with a Chinese dragon motif.

themselves with the full range of Chinese products. Concomitant with these traders' shopping sprees in China or at Chinese wholesalers, “typically Chinese” products end up in their stores. Thus, little silk-covered boxes and lipstick cases of a distinctly Chinese design can be found among other cheap Chinese paraphernalia in local beauty shops (see figure 7). The owner of a popular tattoo studio in Western Maputo found two tattoo sample books from China when he was purchasing

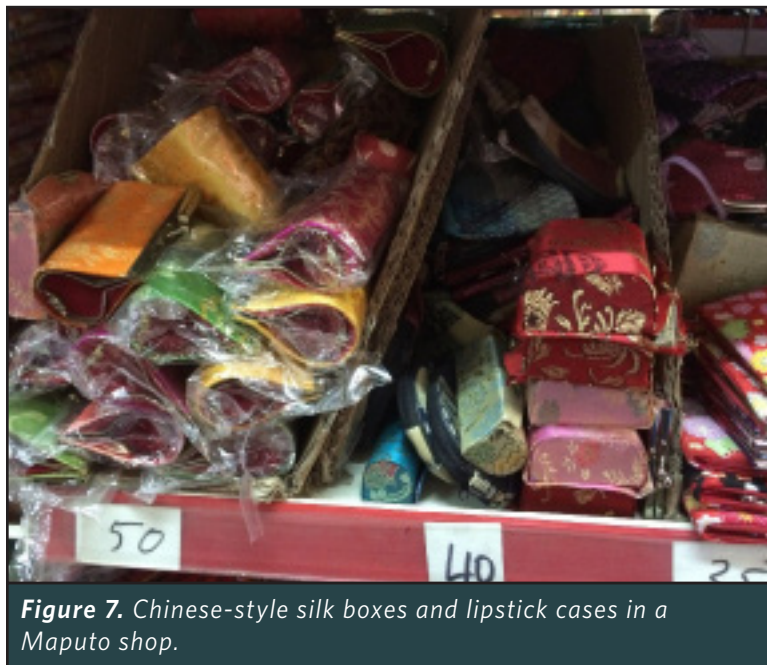


Figure 7. Chinese-style silk boxes and lipstick cases in a Maputo shop.

94. Bruggeman, “Vlisco,” 197-214; Sylvanus, “Fashionability in Colonial and Postcolonial Togo,” 30-44; Young, “Ghanaian Woman and Dutch Wax Prints,” 305-27.

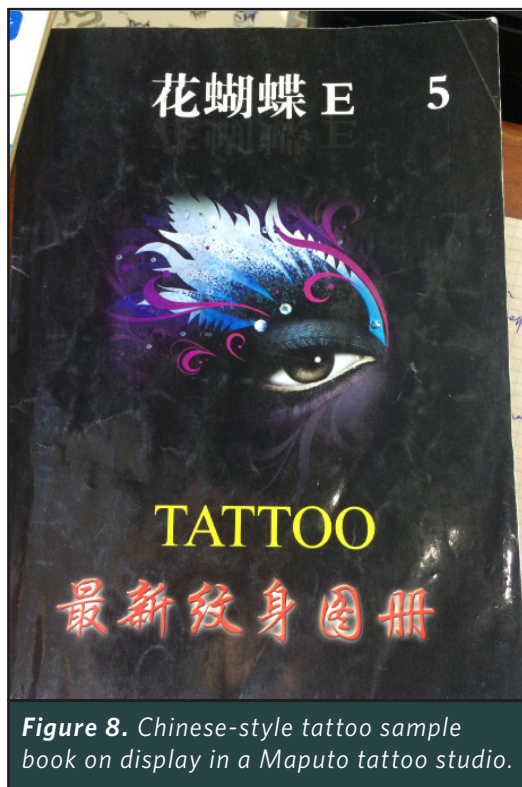


Figure 8. Chinese-style tattoo sample book on display in a Maputo tattoo studio.

tattoo supplies (see figure 8), and these books are now in daily use at the shop. Some of their templates are very popular with customers, just like the little silk boxes. Soon-to-be shop owner Tino confirmed that despite Mozambican consumers' still-prevailing distrust in Chinese quality, there is a certain demand for Chinese-style clothes and accessories in Mozambique. While he does not plan to sell such products at the moment, he says that he is open to exploring the possibilities in the future.

Novelty and Exotic Appeal as Drivers of Adaptation

The Global Homogenization of Fashion

The demand for fashion produced in China is indirectly caused by the fact that not only supply chains become globalized, but also tastes and styles. To illustrate, Mozambican second-hand

clothing customers usually do not see a difference between the styles of second-hand clothes from China and Western countries. For them, these clothes differ only in size and quality, with clothes from China regarded as lower quality. Chinese and Mozambicans perceive global fashion as increasingly homogenous, as they get used to the prevalence of world fashion, such as jeans and plain T-shirts.

While Eicher and Sumberg⁹⁵ deliberately refuse to call these kinds of clothes “Western fashion,” as it is now worn by people in all parts of the world, this notion is still common among Chinese as well as Mozambicans. Hence, wholesaler Tino says that the clothes he imports from China have “Western style” or “US style,” or just “whatever is in fashion.” The term typically used by Chinese is *xifu* 西服, a direct translation of “Western clothes.” This expression has even been adopted by the Mozambican students of the Confucius Institute at the Eduardo Mondlane University, who told me that the Chinese students they met at their partner University in China as well as the Chinese teachers at the Confucius Institute usually just wear the same *xifu* as they do. This is why they do not observe a difference in everyday clothing style between their Chinese peers and themselves.

Their male Chinese teacher Mr. Wei, however, drew a distinction between male and female fashion in this regard. For him, “there is no big difference in men’s clothing style, be it in Mozambique, China, or the US.” He continued: “It might be different for women; there are more distinct style differences.” This impression in relation to gender corresponds with the

95. Eicher and Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” 295–306.

observation of Ross⁹⁶ that male fashion has become globally uniform to a higher degree than female fashion.

Foreign Ethnic Dress as Novelty

As fashion is all about “rapid and constant change,”⁹⁷ Chinese and Mozambicans increasingly look for novelties in light of a homogenized world fashion. This becomes most evident when looking at Mozambican capulana shopping habits. When former fashion shop employee Nadia and I wanted to buy matching capulanas for National Women’s Day, it took us two days to finally decide on a certain print. This was not only because of our different tastes, but mainly due to the demands Nadia placed on the product. Apart from having a “sturdy” (*resistente*) fabric and “vivid colors” (*cores vivas*) which currently are “in fashion” (*na moda*), a capulana most importantly must be a “novelty” (*novidade*), i.e., a new design. Therefore, she decided against a capulana with a pattern that had already been popular last year, even though we both liked it very much. Nadia told me that she will immediately recognize a capulana that has already been on the market for several weeks or months. These “old ones” (*antigos*) can still be worn at home but are not appropriate to wear at special events such as weddings or Women’s Day. Several capulana traders confirmed that the importance of *novidade* cannot be underestimated and even bestselling patterns have to be amended continuously to retain popularity, which is why all the capulanas they offer are, at maximum, two to three months old. The same pertains to Chinese tastes as for instance the administrative secretary Xiwen (introduced at the beginning of this article), who constantly looks for new things to include in her wardrobe.

Especially suitable for this purpose is ethnic dress, which is often seen as the opposite of world fashion;⁹⁸ Chinese and Mozambicans are indeed attracted by fashion elements that they consider “typical” of the other culture. For a Chinese person, such things as Mozambican capulana fabrics and braided hairstyles might be considered “typical.” These are the elements of Mozambican fashion that come first into the mind of a young female Chinese teacher at the Confucius Institute. She considers clothes made of capulana fabric “very pretty” and “very special and different” (*hen you tese, hen bu yiyiangede* 很有特思, 很不一样的). She admires their bright colors and will bring some “typical African clothes” (*feizhou tese yifu* 非洲特色衣服) as gifts for her family at home. She would also like to get one of the “fun” (*hen haowan* 很好玩), “very interesting” (*hen youyise* 很有意思) and “ingenious” (*lingqiao* 灵巧) Mozambican hairstyles, but is afraid that she is “not skilled enough” (*bu tai shulian* 不太熟练) to make braids herself.

For their part, Mozambicans are especially drawn to dragon patterns, Chinese characters, and the qipao dress. Chinese dragons and characters are popular tattoo designs “because they are different” and “more personal” (*coisa mais pessoal*), since not everyone will understand them, a Maputan tattoo studio employee explained to me. Often deemed the

96. Ross, “Cross-Continental Cross-Fertilization in Clothing,” 135–47.

97. Rabine, *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*, 32.

98. Eicher and Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress,” 295–306.

Chinese national dress,⁹⁹ the qipao is seen by Mozambicans as the direct counterpart of the capulana. They keenly incorporate elements of it into their own fashion. There is a tailor at Mercado Janet, who has put two “Chinese dresses” (*vestidos chineses*) on display in his little stall (see figures 9 and 10). The dresses, made of capulana fabrics, with the typical short sleeves, side slits, and round stand-up collar of the qipao, were commissioned by Mozambican customers. When I asked the tailor whether his Chinese customers sometimes order qipao-style dresses, too, he just laughed: “No, the Chinese want African style clothing only!”

Neither the Chinese nor the Mozambicans see the other country as an explicit reference point for modernity or cultural progressivity. Chinese commonly assert that Mozambicans are backwards and of “low personal quality” (*suzhi di 素质低*). And Chinese culture is still a long way from gaining the high prestige accorded to Chinese technology, which is already regarded as progressive and superior by many Mozambicans. The Mozambican employees of a large Chinese supermarket in the center of Maputo, for example, were

very disapproving of the fact that their Chinese bosses still spoke poor Portuguese, even though they had lived in Mozambique for several years already. They complained about the rude and authoritarian demeanor of the Chinese managers, who are said to have “hearts of stone” (*coracoes de pedra*). Apart from being harsh employers, Chinese are also considered to be “racists” (*sao racistas*) and to “not have love” (*nao tem amor*), which implies a lack of empathy and benevolence.

Therefore, Chinese and Mozambicans are equally in pursuit of novelty and self-expression, which is the main reason that motivates them to adopt elements of each other’s fashion. Although there remains a certain power asymmetry related to differences in wealth, global influence, development status, and economic strength, Chinese-Mozambican relations in the area of personal fashion are more egalitarian than these kinds of relations between the West and Asian or African countries.



Figures 9 and 10. Qipao-style dresses made from capulana fabrics displayed in a tailor stall at Mercado Janet.

99. Matthew Chew, “Contemporary Re-Emergence of the Qipao: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress,” *The China Quarterly* 189 (2007): 144-61; Zhao Jianhua, *The Chinese Fashion Industry: An Ethnographic Approach* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Mechanisms of Mutual Exoticization

By adapting elements of foreign ethnic dress in order to establish distinctiveness, Chinese and Mozambicans exoticize the fashion of the other. In this process, they commonly generalize the foreign culture. Just like the young Chinese teacher at the Confucius Institute, who wants to buy “typical African clothes,” many Chinese indiscriminately use the term “African” when they actually mean “Mozambican.” They thereby implicitly deny the singularity and distinctiveness of Mozambican culture and lump it together with the cultures of other African countries. In a similar vein, they use the general term “blacks” (*heiren* 黑人) to talk about Africans of any nationality, be they Mozambican or not.

Meanwhile, Mozambicans usually do not draw a distinction between Chinese and other Asian cultures, as well. For example, I met a Mozambican girl on the street in Southern Maputo, who had a clearly visible tattoo of the simplified Chinese character for “love” (*ai* 爱) on her chest, which was slightly “misspelled” with a few strokes missing. Asked about her reasons for choosing this motif, she first told me that it means “love” in Japanese and then went on to say that she looked up the motif on the internet because she wanted to have a Chinese character. (In Japan this character is written with the traditional Chinese character 愛.) The fact that she mixed up Mainland China, where simplified characters are used, and Japan, whose writing system includes loaned Chinese characters (called *kanji* in Japanese), shows that she does not have a deep understanding of either these cultures or their writing systems, and is merely interested in the exotic appeal of Asian aesthetics in general. Often, Mozambican tattoo artists likewise cannot tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese motifs.

However, it is important to note that Mozambicans as well as Chinese are ambiguous about the distinctiveness of their own fashions. Among Mozambicans, there is a common confusion and ambiguity about the identity-giving and symbolic meaning of the *capulana*. While sellers always stress that the design and thereby the character of the (often Chinese-produced) fabrics is Mozambican or “100% national” (*cem porcentos nacional*), many Mozambicans associate *capulanas* with “Africanism” (*africanismo*) instead of “Mozambicanism” (*mocambicanidade*). This is not surprising, as Indian-made *capulanas* were originally brought to Mozambique by via Kenya and Tanzania and are now worn – under different names and with different designs – in many African countries.¹⁰⁰ A look into Mozambican newspapers shows that this double symbolism of the *capulana* does not need to be contradictory. *Capulanas* are seen as an expression of femininity and *mocambicanidade*, but at the same time identify the wearer as African.¹⁰¹ According to another article published

100. Helen Jennings, “A Brief History of African Fashion,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 2015, no. 37 (2016): 44–53; Jacqueline Shaw, *Fashion Africa: A Visual Overview of Contemporary African Fashion* (London: Jacaranda, 2013).

101. Carol Banze, “Vestido de Capulana no Corpo e na Alma [Capulana clothing on the body and in the soul],” *Domingo*, June 6, 2015, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.jornaldomingo.co.mz/index.php/report->

in *Domingo*, Mozambican fashion builds on African roots as well as on past international influences from Arabs, Persians, and even Chinese, which is reflected in the capulana as a cultural symbol.¹⁰² This way, the capulana can at once be an “object of the blending process of globalization” (*objeto de globalização liquidificadora*) and an affirmation of Mozambican identity.¹⁰³

The Chinese in Mozambique are definitely more aware of the distinctiveness of their own dress culture. They have, for example, very clear conceptions of what a qipao should look like. When I showed them pictures of the qipao-style capulana dresses I found at Mercado Janet (see figures 9 and 10), many Chinese stated that a qipao is not a qipao anymore if it is made of capulana fabric, which they consider to be unsuitable for a qipao, as it is too thin and not smooth enough, resulting in wrinkles and uneven seams. It can also not be worn by a curvy Mozambican girl, as according to them, the cut of a qipao has to be straight and slender.

As mentioned in the works of Chan,¹⁰⁴ Finnane,¹⁰⁵ and Zhao,¹⁰⁶ the qipao is not as “typically Chinese” as commonly believed. Based on Manchu women’s dress (hence the name “qipao” 旗袍 or “banner robe”), influenced by Western designs and tailoring techniques, embraced by the Nationalists, and popular in other countries like Singapore, the qipao is still highly contested in its unofficial role of a national dress. This ultimately makes the mutual cultural incomprehension between Chinese and Mozambicans a reiteration of already existing cultural ambiguities in the two countries.

Variables of Fashion Adaptation

Strategies of Gradualism

Looking at the ways in which Chinese and Mozambicans adapt to each other’s fashion tastes, a complete and permanent appropriation is extremely rare. Instead, there is a set of strategies that both employ to adjust the level of adaptation to their personal needs and tastes. By availing themselves of a gradualist approach, people are able to incorporate foreign fashion elements into their own fashion universe in a harmonious and socially acceptable way. The strategies can be divided into methods related to the gradation of scope, form, source, and time. This order does not constitute any ranking, as each of the methods can be applied to different degrees independently of each other, and in any

[agem/5594-vestido-de-capulana-no-corpo-e-na-alma](http://www.usfca.edu/center-asia-pacific/perspectives/agem/5594-vestido-de-capulana-no-corpo-e-na-alma).

102. *Domingo*, “Capulanas e Africanidades [Capulanas and Africanities],” June 6, 2015, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.jornaldomingo.co.mz/index.php/editorial/5609-capulanas-e-africanidades>.

103. Euclides F. Munhisse, “Capulana: Resgate da Tradição ou Moda? [Capulana: saviour of tradition or fashion?]” *Noticias*, 2016, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://www.jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/opiniaao/55287-capulana-resgate-da-tradicao-ou-moda.html>.

104. Chan, “Fashioning Change,” 293–309.

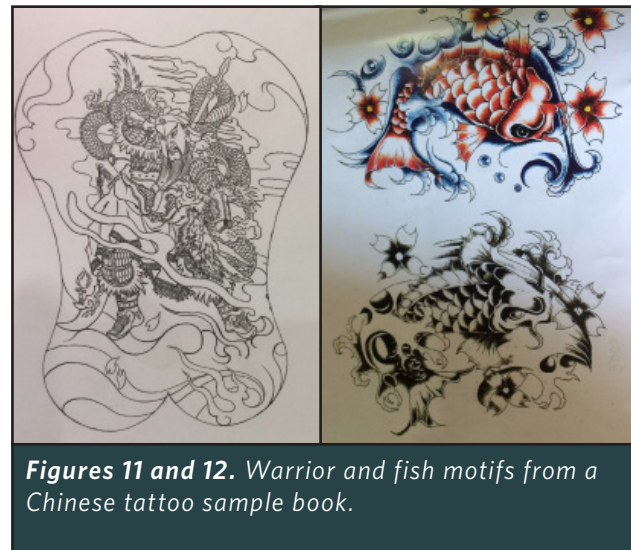
105. Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*.

106. Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry*.

individual combination.

The most obvious strategy is the adjustment of scope. Adaptation of foreign style can involve a whole outfit or be limited to certain parts of it. As seen in the introductory examples, Nadia and Xiwen mix garments inspired by the fashion tastes of the other with their regular clothes and accessories. A lower degree of adaptation is achieved by Chinese who commonly confine themselves to wearing Mozambican accessories, such as flip-flops, or bags, hats, or pieces of jewellery made of capulana fabric. Combined with world fashion, including jeans, T-shirts, sunglasses, or trainers instead of ethnic dress, foreign fashion elements lose a part of their strangeness and fit in more harmoniously. World fashion thus acts as a facilitator.

More elaborate than the variation of scope seems to be the variation of form, including design elements, motifs, and sewing patterns. The employee of the tattoo studio mentioned previously explained that compared to Chinese customers, Mozambicans seldom pick “very Chinese” tattoo motifs such as warriors or deities from Chinese mythology (see figure 11). One of the studio’s most popular motifs from their sample books is a black-and-white fish, which is drawn in a distinctly Asian style but is not associated with Chinese history or mythology (see



Figures 11 and 12. Warrior and fish motifs from a Chinese tattoo sample book.

figure 12), even though it has a certain symbolic meaning implying abundance. Similar patterns can be observed in the case of clothing design. Mozambicans do not necessarily adopt the whole sewing pattern of the Chinese qipao but rather only certain elements of it, as in the case of the two capulana dresses at the Mercado Janet tailor shop. Shirts, blouses, and dresses with a “Chinese collar” (*gola chinesa*) worn by Mozambican men and women are a common sight on the streets of Maputo. Incorporating Chinese style elements to a degree that lies right in between these regular garments with Chinese collars and the capulana-made qipao dresses, Nadia’s dress offers another example. She ordered a knee-length bespoke garment to combine qipao-style collar and short sleeves with a V-neck and a golden zipper which runs prominently down the whole back of the dress (see figures 13 and 14, p.55).

The prevalence of tailors, most of whom come from West African countries that have a longer tradition of tailor-made clothing, combined with the omnipresence of the capulana in Mozambique, greatly facilitates individual grades of adaptation in form. Due to their large variety and stylistic flexibility, capulana fabrics can not only be fashioned into Chinese forms without great effort, but also make it easier for Chinese to integrate Mozambican patterns and motifs into their wardrobes. Customers can choose the pattern, colors, and designs they like and thereby achieve a level of adaptation they are pleased with, just like Xiwen in the



Figures 13 and 14. *Nadia posing in her tailor-made dress.*

vignette at the start of this article, who picked a capulana in a “not too African” design to get a personalized dress made of it. Generally, Chinese do not use capulanas in their basic form as unsewn wraparound skirts. If tailored in a cosmopolitan design, however, Chinese are more likely to wear them. When I ordered capulana tailormade trousers in the style of my favorite pair of jeans, for instance, I received many compliments and curious requests from Chinese women, who wanted to get the same trousers.

The third strategy concerns the choice of different sources. Even if they are attracted by Mozambican aesthetics, Chinese are often reluctant to buy Mozambican fashion items for their own use from street vendors and market stalls like most Mozambicans do. Huili, for example, the wife of a Chinese entrepreneur from Henan province, who has been staying with her husband and her five-year-old son in Maputo for the past year, has bought her regular rose-colored flip-flops in a large seaside shopping center, although she could have purchased the same pair of the same brand of sandals at a street stall for half the price. Her son is also wearing a sun hat made of colorful capulana fabric, which Huili got from an upscale local handicrafts store in a popular expat area. This behavior cannot solely be explained by linguistic convenience. She only speaks a little English and Portuguese, and there is no Chinese spoken in either the shopping center or at street stalls. Therefore, in both places it is equally difficult for her to communicate. International places such as expensive shopping centres and European-owned boutiques moderate style- and quality-related uncertainty and thereby serve as intermediators between Mozambican fashion and Chinese customers.

The fourth strategy pertains to temporal aspects of adaptation, meaning how permanently and how frequently persons commit themselves to a foreign fashion. While a tattoo

certainly constitutes the longest-lasting commitment, braided hairstyles or foreign-style outfits are of a more temporary nature. People also tend to make their level of foreign fashion adaptation dependent on the occasion. Xiwen's Mozambican co-worker owns a traditional Chinese-style qipao dress made of shiny silk-like fabric, but she only wears it occasionally, usually when she is at the Chinese company she works for. In the most extreme cases, some Chinese only change into Mozambican clothes to take funny pictures with their friends. Nadia wears her Chinese-style dresses to go out or to attend class at her vocational school, but she would not wear them to church, where capulanas are considered more appropriate.

The Role of Dress Norms

Social dress norms have a determining influence on the manner and degree to which Chinese and Mozambicans adapt to foreign fashion. When choosing their outfits, both Chinese and Mozambicans face unofficial local dress rules they eventually must comply with to avoid alienation. Mozambicans and Chinese have to find ways and means to navigate these norms while incorporating foreign elements into their fashion.

Mozambican women especially pay a lot of attention to "decent clothes" (*roupa decente*). To be a "reputable woman" (*mulher digna*), they avoid wearing hot pants and sleeveless tops starting around the age of 18, confining themselves to long trousers and skirts that reach down to the knee when in public. When dressing for work or school, Mozambican girls and women ensure that the hem of their shirt or blouse ends below the waistband and that their clothes are not too tight. As the majority of Chinese second-hand clothes and garments on offer in Chinese shops are available in small sizes only, Mozambicans have to resort to tailor-made clothes or else have off-the-rack Chinese-style garments altered, just as Nadia did when she wore her qipao-style dress as a top when it was deemed inappropriately short. In one Noticias article, journalist Mutenda¹⁰⁷ scorns short skirts as un-Mozambican and praises women who lend capulanas to "badly dressed" (*mal vestida*) girls on the street. Nadia explained that every Mozambican woman is indeed expected to carry a spare capulana with her when she leaves the house. This custom "is part of the female hygiene" (*faz parte da higiene da mulher*) and enables women to cover parts of their body, if they, for example, spontaneously decide to attend a church service. It also makes it easier for them to wear Chinese-style fashion in daily life, as they can switch back to what is considered proper attire at any time.

After spending some time in Mozambique, most Chinese become aware of these norms, too. While newly arrived Chinese of all genders usually wear shorts which they purchased in China in preparation for their trip, they soon realize that despite the hot weather, the beach is the only place in Mozambique where it is appropriate to wear short trousers. Hence, they revert to wearing long trousers. Huili, the housewife from Henan, was also told by other Chinese that it is not "polite" or "respectful" to wear shorts in public, which is why she and

107. Mendes Mutenda, "Sociedade Civil e as Saias Compridas [Civil society and long skirts]," *Noticias*, 2016, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://www.jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/assim-vai-o-mundo/55106-cunha-afastado-de-presidente-da-camara>.

her husband now only wear them at home. Mr. Wei, the Confucius Institute teacher, was surprised to find out that Mozambicans look down on him when he is wearing shorts, but at the same time they find flip-flops in class or at the office perfectly acceptable. Like many Chinese, he considers flip-flops too sloppy and “informal” (*bu zhengshi* 不正式) for wearing in public. Convinced by their comfort and convenience, most Chinese nonetheless quickly adapt to this Mozambican habit and start wearing flip-flops, too. This also applies to Chinese individuals who otherwise reject Mozambican fashion. As many Chinese do not intend to stick to their long trousers or flip-flops after their return to China, these fashion adaptations based on foreign dress norms are of a rather temporary nature.

Sociodemographic Factors

Sociodemographic factors such as gender and education greatly influence, and arguably facilitate, the adaptation of fashion elements. Well-educated women of both nationalities are more likely to adopt elements of each other’s fashion. Because in the case of China and Mozambique the adaptation of the other fashion neither has the connotation of modernity nor is a prerequisite for employment, there is no compelling social or economic reason for men to strive for it. In this context, the main purpose for incorporating foreign elements is the achievement of a novel, distinct, and fashionable individual look, which nowadays is usually seen as something that women care about more. So even if there usually are higher moral expectations towards women’s dress, Chinese and Mozambican women show more receptivity towards foreign styles and are more likely to invest time and money to integrate these styles into their wardrobes in comparison to men.

Apart from gender, education and cultural awareness are important determining factors of the degree to which a person is willing and able to not only appreciate but also to adopt foreign styles. Accordingly, Chinese and Mozambicans with a higher level of education tend to have a better-informed opinion of culture and fashion of the other than their less educated peers. The young female Chinese teacher, for example, got in touch with African styles for the first time at high school. She had African classmates who came to her school as exchange students and also offered braid making at the annual school festival. This might be one of the reasons why she is now so open to Mozambican hair and clothing styles. Likewise, her colleague Mr. Wei said that buying capulanas can also be an interesting cultural experience. A similar level of cultural awareness is displayed by his Mozambican students, who are especially appreciative of Chinese fashion and aesthetics, which they got to know during their stays in China.

International experience alone, however, is no guarantor of fashion-related open-mindedness. Take the case of Zheng, a 28-year-old hairdresser from Liaoning province in northeastern China, who has been living in Mozambique for nine years after dropping out of high school and being unable to find a well-paid job in his native country. He has been travelling to various African countries, has a good command of Portuguese, and claims to “have adapted” (*shiyiing le* 适应了) to life in Mozambique. Nonetheless, he cannot recognize any beauty in Mozambicans and their fashion. He does not consider Mozambican fashion “fashionable” (*shishang* 时尚) at all. His benchmark for fashionability is Korean fashion and

he is not able to appreciate any fashion styles that deviate from this aesthetic ideal, which is why he gets all his clothes imported from China. The same applies to a masseuse from Sichuan, as well as to a 22-year-old supermarket employee from eastern Chinese Anhui province named Jiashun. He thinks capulanas are backward and old-fashioned and says that he prefers “modern” (*xianzai de* 现在的) things. Unsensitized to cultural differences by higher education, he strictly adheres to his “modern” fashion and even refuses to wear flip-flops.

Conclusion: Implications for Chinese Soft Power

In this paper, I have examined why and how Chinese and Mozambicans adopt elements of each other’s fashion. This study sheds light on the circulation of fashion and styles among non-Western countries. Against the backdrop of transnational economic systems of production and consumption, Chinese aesthetics reach Mozambique as a side effect of the influx of Chinese-made fashion products into the country, where they are able to fill a price and quality niche between Western and local fashion products. These products are increasingly popular in Mozambique due not only to their affordability and emulation of a Western style, but also their inherent quality. The improving reputation of Chinese fashion products therefore has the potential to positively influence Mozambican perceptions of Chinese product quality in general.

Facing the global prevalence of a highly homogenous world fashion, Chinese migrants and Mozambicans look for novel fashion ideas, which they often find in the ethnic dress of the other country. Both sides are primarily motivated to adopt elements of each other’s fashion by a wish for self-expression and a novel look that sets them apart from their peers. Their practices and attitudes differ from the adoption of foreign fashion in colonial and post-colonial contexts, which was and is premised on the pursuit of modernity. Resembling such contexts, however, Chinese-Mozambican fashion adaptations are accompanied by a certain degree of mutual exoticization, which is evidenced by the generalizing and undifferentiating way Chinese and Mozambicans each talk about the fashion of the other.

As personal fashion is always determined by culture-dependent dress norms, foreign fashion is rarely adopted completely and permanently. To bring foreign aesthetics into accordance with these norms, Chinese and Mozambicans employ a set of strategies that allows them to gradually vary the degree to which they incorporate foreign elements into their own style universe. By adjusting the individual level of adaptation, people can find a middle ground between what is stylish and novel, yet nonetheless deemed appropriate by society. Moreover, these strategies enable women to overcome the moral requirements imposed on their dress and initiate mutual fashion adaptation in the context of Chinese-Mozambican relations.

Even if this ethnographic study conducted in Maputo cannot claim to be representative for the whole of Mozambique or the whole of Africa, it suggests that bottom-up fashion exchange between non-Western countries is multifaceted and has specific characteristics that distinguish it from fashion exchanges between Western and non-Western countries. By doing so, it might contribute to a better understanding of Chinese soft power. To begin with,

this article shows that China has indeed “low” soft power in the form of Chinese fashion, which is widely appreciated by the Mozambican public. Completely independent from official cultural diplomacy, purely bottom-up, and depending on fluctuating trends, Chinese fashion as a source of soft power is, however, difficult to control by the Chinese government. Another indicative implication for Chinese soft power is that certain popular Chinese products have the potential to improve the reputation of Chinese-produced goods in general. Therefore, it might be beneficial for the Chinese government, in its effort to enhance soft power in Africa, to promote and regulate the export of high-quality Chinese fashion products to African countries. To determine the extent to which these findings apply to other African countries and other areas of “low” soft power, such as food, movies, or home decoration, further research is needed. Such research could also shed light on whether and how encounters with African fashions abroad have a lasting effect on the personal style of individual Chinese.

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Fashioning the Embodied Liminal/Liminoid Self: An Examination of the Dualities of Cosplay Phenomenon in East Asia

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Introduction

The practice of cosplay or costume-play (*kosupure* コスプレ) where young adults dress-up and perform in the defined public spaces of conventions as fictional characters from manga, anime, online games, films, or other mediated popular culture narratives (Figure 1) has become increasingly popular over the past decade, expanding from its origins in Asia to become a transglobal phenomenon. The term “cosplay” is a compound word formed by contracting “costume” with “play.” The Japanese origins of cosplay are attributed to the first use of the term in a 1983 article by Japanese reporter and manga publisher Nobuyuki Takahashi. In his article for *My Anime*, Takahashi described his experience of attending the WorldCon in Los Angeles and distinguished the performative aspect of costumed role playing as a Star Trek character as something different from merely being dressed up in costume.¹



Figure 1. A cosplay duo at a Hong Kong University anime event.



Figure 2. Individual cosplayer at commercial cosplay event, Hong Kong.

With its hybrid origins in American and Japanese popular culture, cosplay has gained global accessibility and popularity due to the ubiquity of entertainment content on digital communication sites. Arguably, whether emerging from twentieth century American costuming activity at WorldCons, Star Trek conventions, costume parties in Tokyo, or Japanese glam rock bands, cosplay represents a dressing up practice taking place in real and virtual, cognitive, emotive and behavioral spaces and places in the process of fashioning an individual costumed identity (Figure 2) within a collective setting (Figure 3).

Cosplayers typically choose, plan and create their character outfits from Japanese manga, anime or Hollywood superhero sources, for example, and attend organized events to facilitate this fashioned costumed display. Secondly, they behave according to prescribed expectations and social practices of

1. Laura Orsini, *Cosplay: The Fantasy World of Role Play* (New York: Carlton Books 2015), 8–9.



Figure 3. Cosplayers pose together for a team photograph at a Hong Kong University anime club event.

the cosplay community by enacting their characters² individually or in groups, taking “hallway photos” in carefully practiced poses³ or performing well-rehearsed competitive skits and sketches at events⁴ organized by university anime and manga societies, or at commercial anime, comic book, and online game conventions. Thirdly, cosplay enactments of the fantastical self are openly on display in the public domain, and these costumed performances require a validating audience. Onlookers and photographers who may be friends or strangers attend, watch, and photographically record

and share the event in both online and offline spaces. The proto-cosplay “backstage” community of players inhabits the same performance space by actively supporting the “front stage” presentation of the cosplay self,⁵ assisting with costumes, attaching accessories, applying make-up, working on hairstyling and photography, much like any stage crew (Figure 4).

This paper examines the growing cosplay trend and will do so by depicting the cosplayer’s experience of the embodied aspects of this contemporary play activity and the dualities of its performance.⁶ The work of Victor Witter Turner will serve as a conceptual starting point, which will be addressed and adapted for the purposes of this analysis of cosplay practice. Two concepts, the liminal and the liminoid, will be central to the discussion. Liminality, as defined by Turner, concerns traditional, collective, pre-industrial, ritual based practices such as rites of passage, while the liminoid is defined as post-industrial, individual, optional, leisure-based social acts.⁷ The



Figure 4. A cosplay team assist each other in getting dressed up as Star Wars characters at a Hong Kong University anime club event.

2. Matthew Hale, “Cosplay: Intertextuality, Public Texts, and the Body Fantastic,” *Western Folklore* 73, no. 1 (Winter, 2014): 35-37.

3. Craig Norris and Jason Bainbridge, “Selling Otaku? “Mapping the Relationship Between Industry and Fandom in the Australian Cosplay Scene,” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (2009): 20. http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20/norris_bainbridge.htm.

4. Scott Duchesne, “Little Reckonings in Great Rooms: The Performance of Cosplay,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 121 (Winter, 2005): 23-24.

5. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (University of Michigan: Doubleday 1959), 1-3.

6. Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 24-26.

7. Victor Witter Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine, 1969), 95.

following analysis will suggest that cosplay is a manifestation of ritualized practices involving collective and individual effort in both liminal and liminoid pursuits and which incorporates characteristics of each. Cosplayers' engagement with the liminal/liminoid state is based on the need to fashion and inhabit new personal, social and physical territories using the fashioned self, aided by crafted artifacts, in the location of tangible and intangible bounded play spaces, including the mind and body. In this way, the cosplayer inhabits and occupies the liminal/liminoid zones of the dressed body and the cosplay convention as a means of transcending an ordinary, everyday existence. This enables the cosplayer to realize both individual and collective agency, given that culture is founded on modifying the human body and appearance.⁸ Cosplay dressing up represents options for communicating both individual and collective identities, based on a deep emotional connection with the fictional character being cosplayed. Here the terms "affect" and "affective" are used to describe the emotional display evidenced in the cosplayer's deep connection with their costumed character. These terms convey a more heightened notion of conventional feelings of affection.⁹ Affect arises from interaction with others causing potential changes in the mental and emotional state of those involved when they move from one experiential state to another. This can operate independent of, and enhance or diminish the power of the subject¹⁰ as, for example, when dressing up and experiencing feelings of being someone else.

This analysis is intended to shed light on some of the drivers behind the dressing up practice of cosplay. It offers an empirically based description of how a given community spends time and money on extraordinary sartorial behaviors, as a way of illuminating the reasons for doing cosplay.

First, this paper will examine the notion of subjectively creating ritualized performances of self and identity, as found in cosplay character dressing up, to understand this phenomenon as an embodied practice involving "temporal and spatial beings."¹¹ Next, the discussion will position cosplay as a form of social interaction in site specific performances, proceeding from a reworked version of Victor Turner's notion of liminality and the liminoid, as referenced above.¹² Turner's theories will be adapted to explain how and why cosplay transforms the body using dressing up in costume by examining the contexts in which the cosplay performance takes place. It will do that by focusing on the "where" of cosplay by reworking notions of the liminal within the frame of embodiment at the site of the liminoid body. An analysis of the use of specific sites for cosplaying will assist this explication. It will

8. Thomas J. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6-7.

9. Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin M. Curley (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press 1994), 154.

10. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 1987), xvi.

11. Joanne Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 44.

12. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 94.

also explore the significance of the ambiguous, liminal boundaries highlighting the collective and creative tensions between structured and unstructured forms of play found in cosplay. In doing so, this paper will suggest that cosplay occupies a dual liminal/liminoid zone residing at the fashioned, embodied and locational interstices of ritual, performance and creative play. In these spaces, cosplayers fulfill a range of affective based functions for participants, on both individual and collective levels, underpinned by a universal social need for agency, kinship and social recognition.

Methodological Approach

This paper will be supported by the findings of an ethnographic study from fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong and Macau from 2014-2017, as part of a wider ongoing empirical study (2008-2018) using individual interviews, focus groups and participant observations of over 100 cosplayers in Hong Kong, Macau, Tokyo and Beijing. The empirical basis for this paper is founded on a descriptive approach based on specific data from a collection of 5 focus group sessions in Hong Kong and Macau, comprising 25 participants in total. In addition, 30 individual, in-depth interviews at cosplay events in Hong Kong and Macau were conducted with randomly identified informants lasting 10-15 minutes on average. The interviews comprised a convenience sample¹³ of individual cosplayers based on their availability at cosplay events when approached on site by the author. Interviewees included males and females ranging from 15-33 years old, who regularly dress up in public spaces in a range of themed costumes as manga/anime and superheroes. The sample comprised a mixture of students and workers in the beauty, fashion, publishing, creative, communication, media, design, and service industries. In the interests of ethical research practices, the real names of the informants have been replaced with pseudonyms, assuring anonymity and confidentiality. The data analysis is also supplemented by personal observations arising from the author's attendance at conventions and organized gatherings in East Asia from 2008-2018. Also, data is ethnographically used "to represent . . . subjective meanings, feelings and cultures."¹⁴ This methodological approach is intended to reflect the lived and subjective realities of the cosplayers themselves as a means of analyzing spectacular groups or neo-cultural tribes in terms of what they do, why they do it, how they do it¹⁵ and what they do it with, as an embodied means of expression, from the subject's own perspectives.

Embodied Cosplay

One of the unifying features of the human body across time, space and place, as Joanne Entwistle observes, is that it is a dressed body, reflecting prevailing social norms. Here, dressing up is based on the notion of embodiment where the body as the center of identity

13. Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa, and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling," *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-4.

14. Paul Willis, "Notes on Method," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 91.

15. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), xv.

is inseparable from sensory and cultural experiences.¹⁶ Hence, the mind is situated in the body, making the latter the conduit through which we constantly observe and interact with the world. In turn, this bodily site directs how others observe us, subject to ambivalent and uncertain readings.¹⁷ In this sense, the embodied, dressed body is an active rather than a passive site of self-articulation and identity. It is also an extension of the self that is located within, and responds to, the codes and contexts of space and time in which it is situated at any given point. Unlike Michel Foucault's notion of the body reflexively reacting to and reflecting the dictates and discourses of powerful social regimes and institutions,¹⁸ the social interactionist interpretation of embodiment acknowledges its possibilities in discovering and exhibiting personal power through the subjective controlling and directing of the presentation of the dressed, affective and lived self.



Figure 5. A cosplayer at a Hong Kong University anime club event.

The development of identity and self-concept can be viewed on the basis that growing up is dressing into another identity. Often this transition is signaled by the wish to dress like others who are, in turn, like one's self. Therefore, by dressing the self in an extraordinary way in the public domain, as in cosplay, the player may be rejecting the parentally sanctioned management of appearance in favor of emulating prescribed peer group dress codes by "dressing in," while rejecting others by "dressing out." Childhood representations of self are formulated in play that is often facilitated by superhero costumes, for example. Therefore, in cosplay, one does dress like others, but like others who are "unlike one's self."¹⁹ This act of playful dressing up represents a departure from the wearing of the everyday, public clothing that represents recognized roles, as the cosplayer focuses on fashioning spectacular costumes for acts of themed play, which serves as a transformative

instrument of imaginative and embodied transformation (Figure 5). In the presentation of self via embodied performance using the layering of clothing and masks,²⁰ the cosplayer when dressed as a fantastical persona²¹ is perhaps continuing ritualized roles initially experienced

16. Ruth Finnegan, *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection* (London: Routledge, 2002), 127-128.

17. Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," 44.

18. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 26-27.

19. Gregory Stone, "Appearance and the Self," in *Human Behavior and the Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach*, ed. Arnold Marshall Rose (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 88-89.

20. Teri Silvio, "The Body in Taiwanese Digital-Video Puppetry and COSplay," in *Embodied Modernities, Corporeality, Representation and Chinese Cultures*, ed. Fran Martin and Larissa Henrich (Hawai'i: University of Honolulu Press, 2006), 290-291.

21. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of Play Elements in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 13.

in the socialization phase of childhood development that legitimizes the function and purpose of adult dressing up.²² This process can be further explained using Joanne Eicher's typology of three personas, manifested through dress based on the public, private, and secret selves,²³ whereby the cosplayer appears to be using the chosen costume worn at that moment to project the secret or hidden self into the prescribed public domain. According to this classification, in communicating a clothed identity in everyday life, the public persona is broadly signified through the wearing of everyday professional clothing, such as business suits for work. The private self, most familiar to friends and family, is based on the casual clothing of relaxation and leisure, such as t-shirts and jeans. The secret self represents a restricted zone of clothing reserved purely for the individual and invited viewers, and the clothing includes items such as intimate apparel or adult fantasy dress.

The costumed self exhibited by cosplayers when dressed up as their chosen fictional characters creates a synergy between the individual body and its material covering that "does not simply reflect a natural body, or for that matter, a given identity; it embellishes the whole body, the materials commonly used adding a whole array of meanings to the body that would otherwise not be there."²⁴ The costumed self, however, operates in social settings where a subjective stance is often experienced in the context of groups and spaces, which serve to shape both individual and social actions that support or reject social norms in terms of how to dress in particular situations, for example. Bourdieu's concept of the "habitus" as the ingrained and accepted ways of being and behaving, from dressing to working in a given culture and society, which stand to be challenged and demystified,²⁵ is a useful concept here.²⁶ Applying this notion of habitus specifically to the costumed body²⁷ situates the individual wearer in a broader frame of reference that acknowledges that dressing up is the consequence of a complicated negotiation between singular and collective embodied states and socially prescribed ways of dressing. These presentations of self are constantly in flux and subject to the contextual considerations of a structured social system, with its markers of age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, and race²⁸ added to the consequent social norms and expectations of how we should dress in given situations. Inevitably, costuming yields unpredictable outcomes in the interplay between the normalcy of how to dress in a given

22. Joanne. B. Eicher, and Kimberley A. Miller, "Dress and the Public, Private and Secret Self: Revisiting the Model," *Proceedings of the International Textiles and Apparel Association*, (Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, 1994), 116. <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/162462>.

23. Eicher and Miller, "Dress and the Public, Private and Secret Self: Revisiting the Model," 116.

24. Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," 33.

25. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 50-53.

26. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72-75.

27. Rachel Suet Kay Chan, "Expressive Rationality: Habitus and Field in the Malaysian Cosplay Community," *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 14, no. 1 (2018): 133-134.

28. Efrat Tseelon, "From Fashion to Masquerade: Towards an Ungendered Paradigm," in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 105-106.

context on the one hand, and the expression of individual agency using out of the ordinary dress codes on the other to challenge more accepted ways of dressing, as we see in cosplay. In this way, cosplay deliberately traverses the boundaries of normal, everyday clothing worn in public and private contexts in favor of the secret presentation of the individual self or collective selves in public spaces. This transformative pursuit is undertaken with intent based on various overlapping individual and shared agendas, exhibiting the different discourses offered through the act of cosplaying. As Nicolle Lamerichs suggests, these articulations can include “[. . .] another discourse on cosplay can be found in fandom itself: a discourse that emphasizes fiction, camaraderie, and the art of costume design.”²⁹ Hence, some cosplayers may engage in the practice as a social undertaking. For others, it is a way to publicly demonstrate, showcase, and validate through competition their cultural capital.³⁰ They are able to present themselves as devoted fans possessing the creative competencies required to faithfully recreate and rearticulate in a materialized, embodied form their deep passion for a popular narrative and its protagonists.

Spatial Liminal/Liminoid Cosplay Zones

Cosplay as a cultural performance³¹ takes place in specific places. So, in addition to the fashioned, transformative process using the body as a conduit for expression of identity, the bounded and demarcated physical locations in city spaces where the cosplay performance typically takes place hold significance for understanding its rationale. By extension, anthropologist and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep, observed that tribal rites of passage operated on the margins of society or limen (Latin: threshold), often as “an extended liminal phase in the initiation rites of tribal societies” that could be “[...] frequently marked by the physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society.”³²

The tripartite ritualized passage from pre-liminal to liminal and post-liminal conditions transported an individual tribe member from one life-stage to another, typically involving physical separation and subsequent cognitive and affective change as part of that dynamic process. Building on Van Gennep’s work, Turner extended the idea of liminality to explain limbo-like, ritualized moments in human culture. This included activities occurring on the boundaries of life that were temporarily “betwixt and between” and which individuals pass through, and are incorporated into before they return back into the society that they originated from.³³ Turner further applied the concept of liminality in a modern secular context, where

29. Nicolle Lamerichs, “The Remediation of the Fan Convention: Understanding the Emerging Genre of Cosplay Music Videos,” in “Performance and Performativity in Fandom,” ed. Lucy Bennett and Paul J. Booth, *Transformative Works and Cultures* 18, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0606>.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 241-258.

31. Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 61-63.

32. Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 196.), 3.

33. Victor Witter Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbol-

ritual as “societal drama” assumes specific social and therapeutic functions, enabling humans to cope with prevailing encounters across new life-changing thresholds and allowing them to deal with conflict, disruption or social upheaval, for example.³⁴ Further differentiating between the liminal and liminoid states of being, Turner explained that,

*Liminal phenomena tend to dominate in tribal and early agrarian societies; they are collective, concerned with calendrical, biological, and social structural cycles; they are integrated into the total social process; they reflect the collective experience of a community over time; and they may be said to be “functional” or “eufunctional”. . . Liminoid phenomena, on the other hand, flourish in societies of more complex structure...not cyclical but intermittent, generated often in times and places assigned to the leisure sphere...tend to develop apart from central political and economic processes, along the margins, in the interstices, on the interfaces of central and servicing institutions— they are plural, fragmentary...experimental in character.*³⁵

While cosplay is a contemporary, not a traditional phenomenon, it shares the characteristics of both the liminal and the liminoid in terms of its structure and form, thereby challenging Turner’s fixed differentiation between the two, in favor of a more hybrid version. On the one hand, cosplay operates in a liminal sense as it occurs in the physical separation of an event on the boundaries of everyday life regularly and seasonally held in a convention center or university; it also operates within a community of like-minded people who share the collective experience of their fandom and long term connection to a fictional character. On the other hand, cosplay displays liminoid characteristics as a form of societal drama voluntarily open to participants, operating on the societal margins and engaged in during leisure time at the interface of central and service institutions, offering an outlet for experimental creativity. Therefore, this paper will suggest that cosplay practice in structure and form represents *both* liminal and liminoid aspects.

The liminal, staged middle phase of transformation, when a person’s social status, personal identity and physical being are “betwixt and between,” neither here nor there, as an ambiguous zone, is particularly relevant for understanding how cosplay works. The view that creativity finds space for expression in liminal zones³⁶ can be usefully applied to the process of creative cultural practices such as cosplay, which typically involve a preparation stage, an inhabitation, and a cooling down period.³⁷ The staged, ritualized practice for cosplayers

ogy,” *Rice University Studies*, 60, no 3 (1974), 54-55.

34. Victor Witter Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage: A Study in Comparative Symbolology* (New Delhi: Concept, 1979), 13.

35. Victor Witter Turner, “Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality,” in: *Performance and Postmodern Culture*, eds. Michael Benamou and Charles Caramello (Madison: Coda Press, 1977), 50-51.

36. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 61-65.

37. Victor Witter Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Cornell Univer-

involves weeks and months of planning, creating, or sourcing and customizing costumes in the space of personal time. This is followed by a character performance in a liminal play space and concluded by a post-performance return to the space of everyday reality and the assumption of non-costumed roles.

Equally, Turner's updated notion of "liminoid" or "liminal-like" thresholds traversed by individuals trying to make sense of modern life is useful when we consider the leisure-based and creative orientations of cosplay. Turner adapted the spatial concept of the liminal to explain the more individually directed playful or play-based recreational or non-authentic contemporary performances, such as theatre or sport that he considered as representing

*[...] parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestoes-books, plays, paintings, films, etc. exposing the injustices, inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and organizations.*³⁸

Here, the liminoid state represents a liberating space sanctioning the freedom to play and to be creative, both unfettered by and being external to regulating social structures. As Turner explained, it represents a liberation and the

*freedom to enter, even to generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games diversions of all kinds...freedom to transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play with ideas, with fantasies, with words.*³⁹

This observation is also highly relevant in explaining the motivations underpinning the cosplay act. Informants consistently talked about how liberated they felt when cosplaying their character, in contrast to their scheduled and structured lives. These freedoms to think, choose, create, and act invest the cosplayer with a significant amount of individual agency that contrasts with their presentation of self in their normal, structured daily working experiences.

Unlike these artistic pursuits, cosplay appears to go beyond Turner's notion of basic leisure activities as it represents both the liminal and liminoid. This includes aspects of the traditional ritualistic aspects of the liminal in its ritualized, rule based, repetitive nature of costuming and meeting up. At the same time, it fulfills the criteria of being a liminoid, leisure based pursuit in parallel with other hobby-based dress up practices such as Halloween or Civil War re-enactments. However, it is differentiated from these dressing up pursuits in the dualities underlying its specific form and function.

Turner suggested that in modern societies where ritual and community are absent or diminished, play in demarcated leisure time filled this gap. But work and leisure are not always mutually exclusive. As the core activity of cosplay is based on the "craft work" of sourcing, designing and making costumes, there is a blurring of this distinction. The form of play can also be structured and rule bound and more reminiscent of ritualized liminal pursuits. So, the form and function of cosplay differentiates it as a unique cultural

city Press: Ithaca and London, 1974), 115.

38. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 86.

39. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 68.

performance in both of its liminal and liminoid aspects, thereby challenging and extending Turner's work.

Play and Cosplay

Play, once relegated by Plato to the superficial, amorphous, diversionary pursuits of children, in stark contrast to the adult world of focused, structured, rule based games, has become synonymous with a post-industrial quest for the mythic work-life balance, offering a fun and civilizing counterpoint to workplace pressures. Play by children is often accorded more freedom. Adult play is still controlled and often structured by given communities of practice and their "structuring influence of principles."⁴⁰ It is often kept apart from the workplace, signifying a deeper Fordist/Puritanical suspicion of leisure and downtime that is often merely tolerated by the institutions of work.

The liminal/liminoid zone provides a liberating space sanctioning the freedom to play away and apart from everyday life. From an anthropological perspective, play is present in all cultures and most cultures find expression in the logic and fun of play.⁴¹ As such, play is seen as being essential to culture, not an insignificant or meaningless by-product. In many cultures play is driven by make-believe activities. It ranges from play patterns based on adventure narratives through the different stages of child development⁴² as a way of sense making, mastering control⁴³ or escaping everyday life for the player.⁴⁴ In addition to conveying learning experiences, play can also enable alternative and innovative fantasies, creating and inspiring new and creative cultural forms,⁴⁵ such as cosplay (Figure 6).

Significantly, cosplay as a leisure activity that involves significant effort and time in devising and representing characters has elicited various moral panics. It is frequently framed by Asian media as a waste of time and money and as the manifestation of disenfranchised youth headed for failure. Consistent with this attitude, involvement by young people in cosplayer is often made conditional on attaining good school grades, and many simply keep the practice secret from parents and families or co-workers, afraid of being



Figure 6. Cosplayers at AniCom & Games event at Hong Kong Convention Centre.

40. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 82.

41. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of Play Elements in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 1-2.

42. Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (New York: Norton Press, 1951), 62-63.

43. Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), 47.

44. Gary A. Fine, *Shared Fantasies: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 237.

45. Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4-5.

censured or ridiculed. For some, the covertness of cosplay highlights the positive potential of its liminoid opportunities to escape mentally, physically, and emotionally from the rigors of parental authority or restrictive workplace regimes.

Creative Zones and Cosplay

Turner believed that the liminoid transitional stage held possibilities for novel ways of being, new identities and altered social realities facilitating creativity, innovation and flow-like states.⁴⁶ This also echoes Brian Sutton-Smith's work on play theory and the notion of "anti-structure" or "proto-structure" representing "the dissolution of normative social structure, with its role-sets, statuses, jural rights and duties."⁴⁷ Also, Turner considered that "novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar events" where liminal states constitute "seedbeds of cultural creativity."⁴⁸ Inhabitants of this zone are free to play with "elements of the familiar and unfamiliar."⁴⁹ In cosplay practice, the creative fashioning of self



Figure 7. Cosplayers at a Hong Kong University anime club event.

manifests itself in players dressing up and posing at events in self-fashioned and customized fantastical costumes.

This represents the process of interpreting familiar fictional characters in real-time physical form. While wider accounts of play theory do not tend to focus specifically on costume or dressing up, reference has been made to the importance of material cultural artifacts associated with play and games.⁵⁰ Objects such as toys or masks are the residues of a ritual or liminal culture whose social and cultural function has changed over time, but are often used to signal playful activity. This is also evident in the use of detailed, authentic cosplay accessories such as ball-jointed dolls in anime costumes, wigs, swords, guns, heavy make-up, hi-tech headphones and oversized hand scripted books. Critical to this transformed identity construction is the apparent need to find expression, both visually and materially, through commercially produced media and entertainment images,

texts and products. The manga, anime or heroic character costumes become the material forms or artifacts that rearticulate the original media texts and inhabit a mythical, conceptual space offering an escape from a known reality. In this creative process, cosplayers can be highly inventive when sourcing materials for their props or costumes, from using household

46. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 112.

47. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 60.

48. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 60.

49. Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual," 61.

50. Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters. Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 124; 172.

items or scrap metal to make swords and light sabers, to fashioning headdresses and jewelry out of tin foil, household plastic cartons, ribbons or candy wrappers (Figure 7). The geographic location of the East Asian cosplayers also provides an added advantage of being close to the sites of production for textiles and materials, enabling them to source fabrics and trims with ease from markets or outlets at relatively low cost to be appropriated as extraordinary costumes. Hence, the necessity for creative play and its representation of the anti-structure, beyond its significance as a form of release or rebellion, is also a means of acquiring and demonstrating cultural and knowledge capital. This again represents a blurring of the ritualistic and craft-oriented pursuits of traditional societies with the creative exploration of new individual identities in leisure time within a community of practice⁵¹ defined as a group of people brought together by a passion for something, such as cosplay, and who are regularly engaged in similar pursuits to satisfy that need and develop their knowledge capital.

Equally, the interpretation of characters from original fictional sources to physical costumes exhibits personal creativity. Collectively, this also represents a challenge to the commercialized and commoditized world from which the characters are sourced. Cosplay constitutes a personal reclamation of popular entertainment sites manifested in the mash-up or hybridized versions or re-interpretations of chosen characters. This hybridized cosplay trend is not yet fully evident in East Asia. In this particular geographic location, cosplayers are more intent on recreating authenticity by explicitly expressing character fidelity as an expression of localized appropriations of the practice.⁵² Nevertheless, unlikely pairings of

characters do rub shoulders with each other at the cosplay event site. It is not unusual to see Darth Vader chatting or posing for a photo with Suiseiseki from the *Rozen Maiden* anime, or to see Kirito from the *Sword Art Online* anime with a Stormtrooper (Figure 8). Character authenticity appears to be critical for East Asian cosplayers, despite the fact that each costume is essentially interpretative. Again, the liminal, ritualistic rules are evident in the requirement for costume and character validity in the look and the pose, whilst the latitude

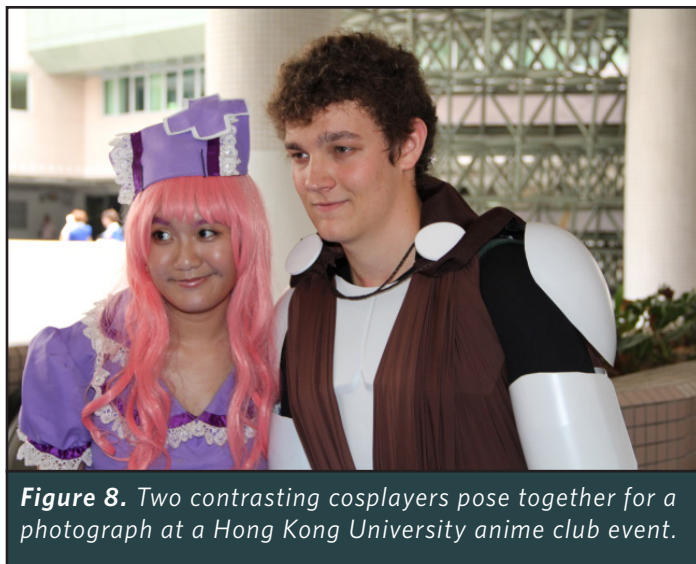


Figure 8. Two contrasting cosplayers pose together for a photograph at a Hong Kong University anime club event.

51. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41-42.

52. Anne Peirson-Smith, "Cosplay in Action: Raiding the Dressing Up Box in Hong Kong and China," in *Making Fashion in Multiple Chinas: Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape*, ed. Wessie Ling and Simona Serge-Reinach (London: IB Taurus, 2018), 153-154.

to choose and create a character of choice in a unique, open way is evidence of a liminoid pursuit.

Liminal/Liminoid Cosplay Sites: Ethnographic Findings

The locus of the cosplay performance offers insights into the reasoning behind the fantastical fashioning and presentation of a spectacular self, both as a liminal/liminoid practice and as further evidence of a blurring between the two.⁵³ On the one hand, the actual site of the individual costumed body plays a critical and defining role for each player. On the other hand, the individual cosplayer operates and is on display in a collective, collaborative liminal zone as in traditional rituals; and the performance of a selected character gives rise to an embodied liminality based on the prescribed expectations and rules at the core of the cosplay rationale.

The spaces and places that costumed bodies inhabit and locate themselves in are important for understanding cosplay in terms of: the fundamental structures of the practice (i.e. what it entails, how space is used, who performs it and how it is performed); the functions (what the practice accomplishes for individuals and groups); the processes (the underlying motivators driving cosplay); and the experiences (what it feels like to cosplay). Cosplayers' empirical responses will be used to illustrate the following analysis and discussion. As a means of further understanding the cosplay rationale and practice in terms of its liminality, the sites of cosplay will be examined according to the following four spatial areas: counter-sites as spaces of otherness; inclusive sites; bounded and unbounded zones; and disruptive spaces. Ethnographic data from cosplayer interviews will be used to support the findings in this section.

The sites of cosplay activity represent a variation in mimetic interpretation⁵⁴ including ways in which the practice varies and is locally appropriated across globally based, culturally diverse interpretations. Most informants practiced their craft in Hong Kong and China, but they are usually aware of differences in cosplay distributed across various geographical locations and cultures. Some informants observed that, in general, cosplay in North America was more informal and accommodating; in Australia, photography and skits comprised the main focus; across Europe, both real time and digital engagement were equally important; whereas in China, Macau, Singapore, and Hong Kong importance was placed on character fidelity and accurate costuming at the risk of provoking critical negative feedback.⁵⁵ These differences perhaps illustrate how cultural differences can affect the practice. Cosplay in

53. Anne Peirson-Smith, "Fashioning the Fantastical Self: an Examination of the Cosplay Dress-up Phenomenon in South East Asia," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Body, Dress and Culture* 17, no. 1 (2013): 78.

54. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 34-35.

55. Anne Peirson-Smith, "O Brave New World that Hath Such Costumes In It: An Examination of Cosplay and the Fantastical Presentation of Self," in *Transglobal Fashion Narratives: Clothing Communication, Style Statements and Brand Storytelling*, ed. Anne Peirson-Smith and Joseph H. Hancock (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2018), 270-271.

more traditional societies appears to be more controlled and structured akin to liminality, as opposed to the more open, unstructured approaches in other locations, which are more akin to liminoid activity.

In general, cosplay is an evolving, dynamic, creative phenomenon. On the one hand, this is because of the ever-emerging fictional character sources, and on the other, it is due to the increased use of social media and the technological competencies of a digital generation, who are always playing and sharing their lived experiences online⁵⁶ in what we might call a techno-liminal space. Here, cosplayers represent a universe of affinity groups or “communitas”⁵⁷ united by a common interest. Collectively, they are a knowledge system founded on fashioning and sharing knowledge across varied zones of multimodal communication, both verbal and visual, through character choice and the crafting and construction of costumes and accessories. In doing cosplay, liminoid embodiment goes beyond a self-reflective concern with just assuming another persona. Rather, this has to emerge from a deeper affective connect, occurring in the right location and shared with and sanctioned by similarly dressed others, which highlights its liminality.

Countersites - Otherness Spaces

Cosplay resides in the desire and ability to express difference from the majority by dressing up in spectacular costumes alongside others in affective homage to fictional characters from popular culture texts. The liminal/liminoid site of cosplay enables alternative spaces⁵⁸ to exist in “counter sites.”⁵⁹ These latter locations define otherness and extraordinary ways of presenting the costumed self by providing an outlet for unique and combined creative practices, from craft skills to varied performances, structured and unstructured, random and planned, individual and collective. Cosplay was originally founded on a strong DIY “prosumer” culture⁶⁰ based on consumers making objects for themselves that they desire, instead of having them made by commercial producers as the outcome of mass production.⁶¹ Prosumption practices also represent a rite of passage for a cosplayer when they authentically produce their character costume as an extension of their affective connection and display of fan-based knowledge. Recently, cosplayers have been buying outfits online as the product quality has increased at an affordable price point. Yet,

56. Nicolle Lamerichs, “Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay,” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 7 (2011), <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/246>.

57. Victor Witter Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, 94, (1969): 130.

58. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuite*, trans. Jay Miskowiec, 5 (October 1984):46-49. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

59. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), xix.

60. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1980), 269; 275.

61. Philip Kotler, “The Prosumer Movement. A New Challenge for Marketers,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 13 (1986): 510-511.

most costumes are still customized, which requires certain creative skills. Equally, niche entrepreneurial communities have also emerged, often from within the cosplay community, assuring the supply of quality custom made outfits and props, or higher quality wigs and make-up, in addition to studio-based or hired photographic services for the initiated. Clearly, cosplay involves work in order to play – and as such it blurs Turner’s distinction between the liminal blurring of work and play and the liminoid division between work and play.

Duality is a consistent theme, as a cosplayer through the process of dressing up in spectacular costume is at once integrated into another imagined realm or imaginary world and separated from an everyday reality. In this way, the players co-create fantasy worlds by putting on costumes as the ultimate expression of individual and collective creative imagination, with dressing up in costume providing an opportunity both for self-expression and collective identity formation. This process of transubstantiation in the reshaping and reapplication of material resources across mediated modes, from comic books and videogames to human performance and photographic records, is central to the process of occupying a demarcated zone. By engaging in this transformational activity, cosplayers are essentially active rather than passive culture creators⁶² who communicate through embodied performance practices.⁶³ They are also active audience members or fans and pop culture nomads indulging in active “textual poaching”⁶⁴ by consuming, pro-suming, appropriating, modifying, reworking and re-performing the visual and verbal narratives and pictorial aspects of popular culture commodities, such as cartoons and comic books. In turn, these commoditized forms are re-presented when cosplayers dress up in the public spaces and places of cityscapes at organized events. Cosplayers are actively contributing to and shaping the evolution of the popular culture landscape by sharing a common ideology or fan-based passion for the fictional characters in a textual source.⁶⁵ This passion is located in particular cosplay communities of practice⁶⁶ while dynamically expressing and re-presenting their admiration for a chosen anime, manga or superhero character through a unique form of embodied performance act.

Wearing a cosplay costume represents a dual function that traverses both collective and individual or liminal and liminoid states. On the one hand, it expresses a visibly communicated difference from non-cosplayers. At the same time, it signals a collective identity and belonging for members of a costumed neo-cultural tribe or fandom, who plunder familiar mediated sources of popular culture, such as cartoon characters or superheroes, for their stylistic inspiration. In expressing this duality of meaning embodied in the process and product of dressing up, and in presenting the costumed self in public, the cosplayer

62. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 15-16.

63. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 110.

64. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), vii-viii.

65. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 131-132.

66. Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 1-4.

inhabits a universe parallel with other recognized youth tribes or neo-tribal narratives.⁶⁷ In this way, they express both their individual and collective identities and ideologies through the material change of appearance and by adopting a range of differentiated identities constituting a multi-layered neo-style tribe.⁶⁸ Yet, while cosplay can be usefully regarded as a neo-style tribe founded on a shared interest, there are marked differences from other aesthetically driven sub-cultures in how, where and why this practice is encountered.

The physical creation of cosplay outfits and appearance, and their subsequent photographic recording and circulation, enables cosplayers to reaffirm their identity and find solace in social connectedness with like-minded players in a like-minded “communitas” within various iterations of the liminal. In this sense they can showcase their creative and cultural capital⁶⁹ within the domain via their ability to craft costumes and props and perform or pose authentically as their character in front of a knowledgeable, validating audience. These material tools also enable the cosplayer to visibly signal their creative competencies in compiling their outfits. Partaking in this craft process visibly underlines their legitimate membership of a particular community of practice or communitas.⁷⁰ Significantly, the cosplayers interviewed claimed that the main benefits of their creative “hobby” embrace not only the thespian skills required to role-play their characters, but also the project management skills and teamwork abilities needed to plan and execute group performances in costume. In addition, this membership afforded them opportunities to acquire the technical know-how to construct their outfits and deliver an authentic public performance of a recognizable and recognized fictional character from *Sailor Moon*, *Pokémon*, *Batman*, or *Game of Thrones*, for example.

Largely, this is an inclusive space, enabling participants to enter it, find their own level of engagement, and discover and develop new creative skills. In this sense, this space also accommodates multiple agendas and a range of creative practices in a number of ways: in giving digital characters a physical form when creating costumes; organizing and rehearsing; the real time cosplay performance itself; and the actual or virtual creative collaboration of the cosplay community with its individual and team-based performances. Finally, players and their associates often record their cosplay persona and share performances via social media channels as a collaborative output in the creative domain. However, communities of practice premised on creative endeavors are often founded on the tension between resources, group demands, and individual aspirations. In the domain of cosplay, this can be seen as the catalyst for creativity itself. So, while cosplayers are required by the collective to follow certain rules and guidelines during the creation process (e.g., authentic hair style,

67. Andy Bennett, “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes?: Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste,” *Sociology* 33 no. 3 (1999): 599-617.

68. Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, trans. Don Smith (London: Sage, 1996), 139-140.

69. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 241-258.

70. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play*, 47-49.

precise costume color, specific poses, venue policies, and common courtesy), there is also latitude for individual interpretation that can be respected by the group. Typically, cosplayers can and do imitate or cite their original source of character inspiration, while others modify and re-interpret the source according to their individual understanding of the character. In this way, cosplay can be seen as a combination of imitation, reproduction, and (re)creation rather than one of pure creation. The creative energy of the cosplay convention, like that of the carnival, is based on spectacular excess, chaotic revelry, role reversals, heightened fun, and changing identity, which demarcate it from the everyday world. This provides the participants or agents with a means of viewing the world in a new way and ordering it on their terms, offering a creative channel for individual and group empowerment, enabling players to transcend everyday school and work pressures and challenge societal norms. The collective aspect of the cosplay practice also represents a liminoid “communitas” based on a show of embodied solidarity and emotionally based fandoms.

This mimetic, embodied character representation is a particular manifestation of otherness in the form of replication. The notion of mimicry is one where the subject makes believe, or makes others believe that they are someone other than themselves, traversing the line between child and adult.⁷¹ This is found in both rule-based and free-form versions of play, and provides some useful insights into the creative and imaginative nature of cosplay. Young children mimic their parents and their fictional superheroes through play, and cosplayers appear to replicate this process. In this sense, the types of fictitious, comic-based characters emulated in cosplay dress-up routines suggest a reversion to childhood mimicry or imitating others, as cosplayers engage in the process of dressing up and assuming the identity of the comic book, cartoon, or online game sourced characters that they admire and take the time to studiously replicate in authentic, accessorized detail. This is an intentional form of imitation. As one respondent observed,

When I cosplay Hermione Granger from Harry Potter from the Deathly Hallows story I don't become her -- I channel her. Of course, I try to look as much like her as I can which is why I chose her as an older person as that's nearer to my age. But she is also a smart, strong, logical person who is also quite hard working and that is what I try to be too. (Candice, 20, university student, Hong Kong)

In the liminal zone between actuality and invention, the cosplayer does not aim to actually become their chosen character – instead they are paying affective homage to their character and channeling their persona through re-presentation in embodied form.

Bounded and Unbounded Cosplay Spaces

The liminal/liminoid spaces inhabited by cosplay are both bounded and boundary-less, in the sense that play operates within allocated spaces yet outside of everyday existence. Generally, cosplayers appear to meet up, pose and perform -- within demarcated areas of the organized convention or event that have variously been described in game and play theory as

71. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1958): 163-164.

the membrane or frame⁷² or the “magic circle” of the event, which offer the endless playful possibilities of transforming identity and meaning.

Inside this play frame, the rules of irrelevance or suspension of disbelief apply, allowing the players to escape from the tribulations of everyday life and temporarily inhabit a liminal zone invested with the power of magical transformation. The temporary nature of this magical morphing into “other” is a key part of the experience. Unlike other subcultural tribes, the cosplay tribe tends not to appear in costume or in character outside of the cosplay zone. Indeed, at events such as the Tokyo Comiket this is strictly forbidden by the organizers and can result in a fine or a disbaring from future events -- which serves to intensify the experience of actually being and playing in the zone. Yet, the leakiness of the cosplay event membrane or magic circle is also evident in the sense that the experience is usually visually recorded and shared on social media sites after the event. Cosplayers also inhabit active virtual sites online such as cosplay.com or Halo, sharing photos and knowledge, thereby extending liminality into a virtual dimension. Here the focus is still on representing the dressed-up body. It would appear that physical presence is an important grounded aspect of cosplay behavior, as in many performative, participatory fan-based activities. One respondent explained,

Sharing our cosplay photos and Instagram and Facebook are important. But you need to be at the event to take the photos in the first place and dressing as a character and taking the time to do that is totally the most important part of doing it - ask anyone who does it. (Gina, 22 female student, Hong Kong)

Membership of a fan community such as cosplay is founded on affinity rather than locality, as fandoms are “imagined” and “imagining” communities pre-dating the digital communication domain. As we have seen, the cosplay medium is primarily an embodied message, supplemented with digital encounters on Instagram and Snapchat that might enhance but not replicate the actual physical real time performance and the material DIY culture that enables costume play. Digital cosplay, as Paul Booth points out, is quite different, as it operates at a physical remove from the body and the performance. Although it inhabits a parallel universe of fandom, it is more tangible given its material aspect.⁷³ Cosplay is essentially a playful, pastiche-oriented activity involving (pro)consumption-based⁷⁴ performances where



Figure 9. Cross-playing
As an individual cosplayer
at a Hong Kong Uni-
versity anime club event.

72. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (London: Harper and Row, 1974), 248.

73. Paul Booth, *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 18.

74. George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption,” *Journal of Consumer*

the cosplayer as prosumer has often devised and created their costume and accessories. Hence, embodied cosplay may be more pleasurable and transgressive, especially when physical embodiment and the performative queering⁷⁵ of cosplay occur either consciously or otherwise⁷⁶ (Figure 9).

Inclusive Spectacular Spaces

The extraordinary performance, in terms of crafting individual costumes and the ritualized collective effort constituting a cosplay event, is part of its DNA. Observing a cosplay event, it would appear that everyone is invited to the party and into the liminal zone -- as long as rules are adhered to. This is true across age ranges, ethnicities and geographies, as the masquerade of costume is a great intentional leveler. Also, a sense of playfulness and celebration permeates the atmosphere of a cosplay event. Most cosplayers in interviews will often use the word “fun,” as the atmosphere at each event is generally positive. This may also be read as a celebration of freedom, especially given the pressurized urban lives that young people in contemporary East Asian cities experience, in terms of fulfilling familial duties and expectations to succeed academically and professionally in traditional, professional roles. This liminoid “pleasurescape” appears to be driven by a subjunctive mood amongst the players who embrace a world of “maybe” and “what if,” underlining the affective, aspirational and desire-driven motivations of representing another being, which in everyday life might be denied them (Figure 10).

Equally, the liminally collective, kinship aspect of the practice is important to its rationale. The notions of the cosplay family and new kinship bonds are regularly substantiated by observations of cosplayers at events. Cosplayers often refer to the notion of “family” when talking about their collective experiences at events and often introduce their fellow players as “sister” and brother.” In the hyper-pressurized urban zones of modern Asian cities, the traditional extended family is under siege, with social research consistently reporting the demise of the family. The fact that young people in Asia generally feel more affective affinity with their friendship groups is evidence of this. Yet, instead of rejecting the metaphor of family as a restrictive form in the liminal zone, they appear to recreate and reinterpret the cosplay family as a positive support system. As one informant explained,



Figure 10. Cosplay at AniCom & Games event, Hong Kong Convention Centre.

Culture 10, no. 1 (2010): 13-36.

75. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 172-175.

76. Joel Gn, “Queer Simulation: The Practice, Performance and Pleasure of Cosplay,” *Continuum* 25, no. 4 (2011): 586-587.

Coming to cosplay makes me feel like I belong to an accepting family and I feel such a part of it. The people that I cosplay with regularly – and we do not always do it from the same sources or as groups – but they are my family and they have helped me through a lot of things and we support each other as we are all the same age with the same issues in our lives. It’s my rock. (Tania, 22, female student, Hong Kong)

Cosplay can also be an actual family affair taking the familial unit into an alternative social and experiential liminal space by reworking notions of kinship, with members of a family collaborating as a Harry Potter team, for example, with a six-year-old son playing an owl, supported by his father as Harry and mother as Hermione. Family members can also operate as supporting “backstage” players, with mothers and sisters making outfits and props, applying makeup, and trimming wigs, while brothers construct weapons or take photographs of their costumed siblings.

Transgressive Liminoid Play

In occupying this liminal/liminoid zone, cosplayers appear to be playing with dress codes by indirectly transgressing them in a visually playful and communicative way⁷⁷ as textual poachers, which Mikhail Bahktin also observed in children’s language play.⁷⁸ This also evokes the notion of the carnival. By manipulating appearances to grotesque extremes, a pauper could be a prince for a day and celebrate the “temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from the established order.”⁷⁹ A sense of transgressive creativity is also manifested in the tendency for some cosplayers to cross-dress, whereby males play female characters and vice versa, in a metatropic, mimetic way, challenging the accepted and conservative societal norms espoused by older generations, especially in the conservative societies of East Asia. This may reflect the innate modern conservatism of Asian cultures towards the notion of gender play in everyday life. Historically, this contrasts with representations of gender fluidity and sexuality in fictional or dramatic arts such as in Kabuki theatre where men originally role-played female characters; or the all-female cast of Shaoxing Opera or *yueju*, and the male-dominated performers of Peking opera or *jingju*.⁸⁰ These traditional performance arts accepted male-female and female-male role-play appearing on the stage, being removed from everyday life, and constituting a safe space across time for such transgressions. Significantly, some of these cross-gendered performances are not tolerated today in some Asian countries, suggesting the emergence of a conservative reaction to perceived non-

77. Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997), 93-94.

78. Mikhail Bahktin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bahktin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1984), 10.

79. Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington, Illinois: Indiana University Press, 1968), 10-11.

80. Huai Bao, *Cross-Gender China: Across Yin-Yang, Across Cultures and Beyond Jingju* (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 2-4.

normative gender behavior. Hence, in Confucian based cultures and communities where politics and challenges to authority are discouraged from an early age, the location of an outlet for some sort of resistance and agency, no matter how abstruse, is increasingly being welcomed amongst the post-millennial generation, or Gen Z. It can also be seen in the use of the visible indicator of the body as a site for societal resistance in the liminoid zone. Cosplayers are intentionally or otherwise traversing and re-fashioning the boundaries of gender as a performative, liminoid statement. However, often when questioned about the reason for cross-play many respondents, especially in East Asia, will insist that the performance of gender in itself is not the point, but rather that character choices are based on cosplayers' profound affective connections to the chosen character, which they usually have an attachment to, going back to childhood. Alternatively, character choice is based on a deep admiration for the values represented by the character, irrespective of gender. As one respondent noted,



Figure 11. Individual cosplayer at Hong Kong University anime club event.

It may be hard to figure but we choose our characters based on who they are and not what they are. And often this is based on a relationship that we have developed with them since childhood – think Ben 10, Doraemon, Pokemon, Sailor Moon and Transformers. Honestly, if they are male or female it is of no concern to us – it's all about being the character! (Jett, 20 female student, Macau)

This viewpoint accords with the notion that cosplayers in their character-fan-based devotion, as opposed to obsessive fan or overt otaku passion for Japanese culture,⁸¹ are parodying the object of a desired fictional form they inhabit and replicate in performance. But, as with most fandoms, fans are aware that the object of their desire is fictional and lacks something, which in this case is a living reality. In cosplaying, desires are projected onto the fictionalized character as a fictional persona is brought to life in the

physical process of the material layering of costume, make-up, mask and accessories. This echoes Turner's notion of traditional, ritualized performances of tribal ergic-ludic liminal pursuits that historically blended work and play and were deeply rooted in a community, as contrasted to more contemporary, individualistic, anergic-ludic liminoid forms of modern leisure that are marginalized to the realms of leisure time⁸² (Figure 11).

81. Norris and Bainbridge, "Selling Otaku? Mapping the Relationship Between Industry and Fandom in the Australian Cosplay Scene," 1-15.

82. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play*, 52-53.

Disruptive Cosplay Spaces

There is also a darker side to the cosplay practice that is suggestive of liminal/liminoid challenges to the existing social structures. Cosplay events and online discussions can witness significant conflict and dispute concerning the authentic “look” of the character or the veracity of a prop. The carnival or masquerade aspect of cosplay is evident where everyday appearance is inverted and identity, through the spectacular and re-formed or disguised presentation of self, is part of the play process being socially sanctioned by the cosplay communitas. However, the more negative aspects of play can disrupt this space. Hence, in contrast to the more positive, self-affirming experiences within the fun-based, subjunctive, liminoid pleasurescape, cosplayers are sometimes involved in negative behavior. There is an increasing tendency to be over-critical of authentic costumes and physical character representations. This appears to be more of a quality control issue amongst Asian cosplay communities that manifests itself both in face-to-face commentaries at events and on social media sites. It can consist of negative critiques of wigs and make up or poses being poorly or inaccurately executed. It can also encompass the existence of “fake” cosplayers who are hired to open shopping malls, for example, or who cosplay for the wrong reasons and break ludic rules. It can also exist within the wider proto-cosplay community, when hobby otaku photographers, unknown to the cosplayers, re-use images on pornographic sites. Also, moral panics prevail in wider societal responses to the practice in the form of a conservative backlash about these largely youth-based activities. As one respondent explained,

It can all go wrong sometimes with cosplay. Younger ones don't seem as committed and have badly made outfits or at events to become famous or be discovered by wearing sexy and revealing outfits. They can argue and fight at events too or damage property. When that happens the events can be banned for a few years and that causes a lot of friction and a lot of negative hate commentary and even bullying on social media sites afterwards. (Tom, 23 male university student, Hong Kong)

Within the cosplay world, such attacks are often accommodated in the safety of liminal, collective in-group responses to online flaming, or with on-site support of cosplay colleagues in real time. Equally, negative feedback from outsiders appears to increase the resolve of some cosplayers to continue with the practice and validates the perception of the liminal zone of the cosplay event as a safe collective haven away from, and in opposition to, the misplaced societal judgments of other communities of practice.

Concluding Thoughts

The practice of cosplay can usefully be explained using both the concepts of liminality and the liminoid, thus reflecting the dualities inherent in its display of such qualities or states as: ritual versus reinterpretation; individual versus collective; serious versus playful; commodification versus non-commercialization; bounded and unbounded; inclusive and exclusive; structured and unstructured; or compliance and transgression. Initially, this paper

examined cosplay as an embodied, liminoid practice. This discussion focused on the sartorial journey afforded to an individual when inhabiting a costume that transformed them from an ordinary to an extraordinary being or from the public self to the secret self. Secondly, in reworking Turner's ideas, the hybrid liminal/liminoid conceptual framework applied here represents a useful way of typifying the ritualized versus the complex and sometimes contradictory interpretive aspects of cosplay practice. Turner's observations on the liminal ritual rites of passage that human beings in most societies engage in as a way to regulate and make sense of their lives are born out in cosplay practice: in the expectations for character validity, collective participation, and convention etiquette, for example. This is not just a free flow liminoid zone devoid of strictures, nor is it "unfettered by regulating structures" as it operates according to set rules, in addition to organizer and participant expectations. At the same time, cosplayers find outlets for individual creativity in the liminoid space of a dressed up body expressing a personal devotion for chosen fictional sources that are recognized and celebrated in a given community of practice. Thirdly, this transformative process of crossing the boundaries of self and other beyond the boundaries and margins of life is highly purposeful, and not an end in itself. The findings from cosplayers in this study suggest that motivations for the ritualized and creative, playful cosplay practice are driven both by liminal and liminoid concerns and characteristics. In sum, cosplay enables the fashioning, presentation and performance of a spectacular, embodied, secret self in the process of paying homage to a fictional "Other" within and across tangible and intangible liminal/liminoid spaces. This transformation of appearance, facilitated by costume, props, and make-up is unlike other liminoid leisure pursuits in its dualities of form, purpose and location – old and new; individual and collective; rule based and interpretive; and online and offline, for example.

Using liminal/liminoid spaces in this way affords a relatively safe and welcoming creative precinct for cosplay fans to inhabit and facilitates a subjunctive pleasurescape. In many ways, this is a journey of fashioned self to (re)fashioned alternative residing "betwixt and between" realities, during the course of which participants embark on a rite of passage or "pilgrimage."⁸³ The journey from self to other affords a pleasure-seeking escape from the anxieties of everyday life in the quest for self-affirmation through the acquisition of social and cultural capital and recognition of creative skills, which may be denied to them in everyday life. As one respondent observed,

Cosplay is a real journey for me in many dimensions. I started doing it when I was 14 as part of a female Japanese dance group and graduated to my favorite Japanese anime doing Chi from Chobits and Hatsune Miku from Vocaloid. After attending the Melbourne Comic Con I've added Daenerys from GOT to my list too. But it's also let me meet some good friends — people who I maybe would not have spoken to otherwise — who I can now rely on for a lot of things in my life. And I've learned so much too from these people like how to make costumes and props that look good –

83. Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage: A Study in Comparative Symbolology*, 16-17; 149-150.

such an achievement for me. It's been a distraction from the tough things in my life like work stress, bad bosses and mean people – sometimes doing cosplay too. And I've gained in confidence as I can stand up in front of people now and not feel afraid or shy of saying what I feel and believe in. Most of all its been good fun and it's made me very happy and feel good about myself and that's been a real voyage of discovery for me. (Katy, 24 female trainee manager, Hong Kong)

Part of the allure of cosplay is for participants to create and occupy utopian liminal zones of collective cosplay conventions and gatherings in transformative costume. This practice offers idealized bodily and mental transformations based on a projected desire to be part of fictional, dystopian worlds, such as the *Rose of Versailles*, *Final Fantasy*, *Game of Thrones* or *Harry Potter*,⁸⁴ where good characters battle it out with evil forces. In this sense, the fashioning of the fantastical, embodied self when cosplaying is not a fleeting escape or a mere diversion from real world issues, but rather offers an alternative and subjective way of making sense of lived experiences in alternative liminal/liminoid bodily and physical spaces, which have their own collective rules and expectations. It also serves to remind us that, as with anything that is fashioned, it is often a journey without an end, a perpetual process of encountering and traversing the many liminal boundaries between liminoid self and other, all in the pursuit of happiness.

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84. Paul Mountfort, Anne Peirson-Smith and Adam Gecy, *Planet Cosplay: Costume Play, Identity and Global Fandom* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2019), 144-145

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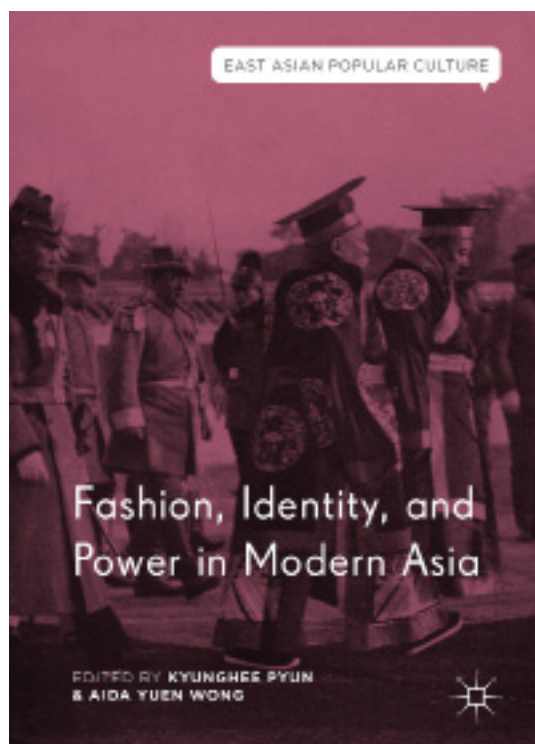
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***Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia*, ed. Kyunghee Pyun and Aida Yuen Wong (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).**

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From the time that Japanese satirist Kanagaki Robun mocked “half civilized” and self-important men for wearing hybrid sartorial disasters in his 1871 short story, “The Beefeater,”¹ East Asian political leaders, cultural trendsetters, and advocates and opponents of modernization have been keenly aware of the power of fashion to “assert allegiances, influence behaviors, and reshape society.”² The editors of this fine collection have brought together fourteen essays that span China, Japan, and Korea in the late nineteenth and early



twentieth centuries; Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong under colonialism; and trade in Western fabrics (woolens) in the early modern period in Japan (Tokugawa period) and China (Qing dynasty). All the chapters in this book, in varying ways, treat the intersection of Western clothing, accessories, hair fashions, and fabrics with existing local versions of those aspects of dress and representation of the body.

The editors group the essays in the collection into four categories: garments and uniforms, accessories, fabrics, and fashion styles. Several themes transcend those categories. The most frequently addressed theme is what I would call “invented tradition.” Tradition has several important characteristics. First, tradition is in the eye of the beholder. One person’s articulation of tradition may have little to do with another’s. People in positions of power often define tradition in ways that allow

them to retain power. Second, the use of tradition is often gendered. As historian Sharon Sievers noted over thirty years ago, women in rapidly changing Meiji Japan were set up as “repositories of tradition” in law, society, and dress.³ Modernity was the province of men, and women’s assignment as the preservers of tradition in Meiji Japan was a way to smooth the rough edges of change that often felt too rapid. Another common theme in these chapters is that of class. Several chapters address clothing to be worn in specific classed situations, such as at the monarch’s court or in carrying out professional duties, including those associated with diplomacy or interaction with foreigners in government or in international religious meetings. Other themes that appear in several chapters include: hybridity in clothing and

accessory styles—these hybrid styles were often not chosen by chance but were intended to make a political point; the role of empire and power in the wearing of Western-style uniforms; and the long-standing importance of imports of Western woolen fabrics, which are usually absent from historical studies of trade and commerce.

Invented tradition appears throughout this volume. Aida Yuen Wong's essay on Yuan Shikai's concern about politically appropriate clothing focuses on the *Illustrated Manual of Dress for Ritual Sacrifice*. Yuan's interest in converting his presidency of the fledgling Republic of China into a monarchy can first be seen in his choice of dress for sacrifices to Heaven in 1914, which indicated his conflation of the Son of Heaven (monarch) with the newly modeled modern leader. The *Illustrated Manual* gave detailed instructions for each garment to be worn during his swearing-in ceremony. This was clearly Yuan's inventing of tradition to bolster his political power. Gary Wang's essay on "Manchu self-fashioning" through the flamboyant modification of the Manchu *liangbatou*, a combination of women's hair and head dress that originated in the early Qing, examines a clear case of invented tradition. To be sure, the head dress had traditional origins, but its great expansion in size in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a reaction to the stigmatizing of men's Manchu queues. Despite the ending of Manchu rule in 1912, the *liangbatou* continued to be a fashionable women's hairstyle *cum* head dress into the 1930s, especially in the theater. Wang notes that it may be viewed as part of the effort to reimperialize the Qing.⁴ It may also be a good case of women serving as a repository of tradition, even invented tradition.

Mei Mei Rado's chapter on ladies' fans notes that "fashion accessories of a period are potent cultural markers."⁵ While courtesans had earlier been fashion trendsetters, educated society women were increasingly the trendsetters as they posed for photos in glossy magazines. Fans became a part of representing Chinese women to the world through these fashion images. The fan was increasingly an Orientalizing stereotype for Chinese women, so it is particularly interesting that a Western type of fan, the feather fan, came to be seen as traditional for elite Chinese women. Even religious men jumped into the game of inventing tradition, as we see in Brij Tankha's chapter. Tankha notes that while traveling to international meetings or studying abroad, Buddhist clerics designed their own clothing, using elements of western styles and Chinese clerical styles, changing their dress to fit the occasion.

Chun-mai Sun and Sandy Ng both discuss what is perhaps the best known "invented tradition" in colonial Taiwan (Sun) and Hong Kong (Ng). Both describe women's *cheongsam* as an invented dress that came to be closely associated with Chinese identity. Ng notes that the women's *cheongsam* evolved from the loose-fitting Manchu men's *qipao*. This dress not only represented an invented tradition but also indicated a gender flexibility in dress in the early 20th century. Ng states that the *cheongsam* was more than a fashion statement—it was intertwined with "evolving social, political, and gender debates."⁶ It was, notably, worn by Soong Meiling (ROC president Chiang Kaishek's wife) and Chinese actresses in movies shown around the world. Sun's chapter discusses various forms of dress in colonial Taiwan, including the *cheongsam*.

Fashion also intersected with class. Yoshinori Osakabe's chapter on early Meiji clothing

reform asserts convincingly that the Japanese government's encouragement of Western clothing was, in part, driven by the desire to rid society of the trappings of Tokugawa-era class differences. He notes that some aristocrats resisted the mandated wearing of Western clothes because they wished to retain class inequality. But the notion of modernity and enlightenment drove other Japanese men to wear Western clothes while in public and Japanese clothes at home. Western clothes not only were a way of eliminating the old-fashioned class differences, they were also a way of asserting the converse—modern Western-style power. Michiyo Nomura describes Japanese prison guards as wearing Western-style uniforms, while prisoners wore Japanese-style clothing. Western styles clearly equaled power in this relationship. Korean court attire was also embroiled in the question of Western versus Korean clothing. Kyungmee Lee's chapter describes the efforts by King Gojong to change men's hairstyles through the Haircutting Law of 1895 and to westernize the clothing of men involved in government. The resistance to those changes by men who saw Korea as the last bastion of Confucianism, at a time when the Japanese had long abandoned samurai hairstyles and clothing, forced Gojong, Lee notes, to hide in the Russian embassy to avoid the widespread protest. (This is a new explanation of Gojong's exile in the embassy.)

Hybridity was an important element of fashion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We see examples of this in chapters on Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Taiwan, while certainly not unique, offers perhaps the most pointed example of this. Sun writes that colonial Taiwan was "a showcase of the intersection of Sino-Japanese modernity during the time of sustained contact with the West."⁷ Kyunghee Pyun's chapter on the popularity of wool fabric in East Asia includes a fascinating section on the blending of styles, Western and traditional Korean, by dandies in colonial Korea (1920s). This hybridity was fashionable and deliberate, unlike the haphazard and bizarre blending mocked by the Japanese satirist of a half-century earlier, noted above. The clothing invented by Japanese monks for international travel and meetings was another example of planned hybridity.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries cannot be discussed outside of the context of imperialism. In addition to the Western pressure that informed the fashion debates of the era, Japanese colonialism played an important role as well. Kyeongmee Joo articulates the intersection of gender and resistance of Japanese colonialism in Korea women's clothing. Korean women's eschewal of fancy accessories, she argues, was a way of resisting Japan, as was the social stigmatization of "New Women" before Western-style clothes were accepted by elite women in Seoul in the 1920s. Nowhere was the Japanese empire more projected than in the wearing of uniforms. Japanese school uniforms, according to the Tomoko Namba, not only "propelled Japan's modernization" at home,⁸ they also were used in colonial Korea. Perhaps even more of an indicator of uniforms as a marker of colonial control were the police uniforms worn in both Japan and Korea, in the latter case by both Japanese and Korean officers. As police controlled many aspects of society, including monitoring sanitation and regulating daily life, these men in their Western-style wool uniforms were the symbol of the state.

Turning to wool fabric, this volume contains three interrelated chapters on that originally Western fabric. Most historians have stated that woolens were inappropriate for the East Asian climate and were thus not imported until the late 19th century, when they were first used for military and police uniforms in Japan, and that they spread to China and Korea later. Rachel Silberstein, Seiko Sugimoto, and Kyunghye Pyun show that this was decidedly not the case. Some woolens were produced in China as early as the Yuan dynasty (13th-14th century), and the Tokugawa government attempted (and failed) to set up wool production around 1800. It was a luxury import, popular among both fashionable courtesans and the elite in the early modern period. In Japan in 1870, 20 percent of imports were woolens. This was no small market. Japanese continued to import wool, and began to manufacture muslin in the 1880s. High school girls drove the market for muslin products, as seen in magazine advertisements.

Other than a few typos that the copy-editors at Palgrave Macmillan should have picked up, this is a very fine book. Its focus on fashion helps to modify the grand narrative of modern East Asian history.

NOTES

1. Kanagaki Robun, "The Beefeater," in *Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Donald Keene (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 31-33.
2. Pyun and Wong, "Introduction," 1.
3. Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), 45.
4. Wang, in Pyun and Wong, 184.
5. Rado, in Pyun and Wong, 194.
6. Ng, in Pyun and Wong, 358.
7. Sun, in Pyun and Wong, 351.
8. Namba, in Pyun and Wong, 92.