



Research Article

## How Fashion Designers Think: The Influence of Cultural Value in the Creative Design Process

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship between fashion designers' cultural value, Confucian thought, as these are both influences that can be integrated into the design process and practices. This study is aimed at filling a gap in the current literature by describing how successful fashion designers solve design problems, and how cultural values related to or reflected in creating apparel.

**Methods:** A qualitative approach with semi-structured, in-depth and one-on-one, long interview is used to gain an understanding of the complex meanings held by the participants. Twelve South Korean fashion designers, each with a minimum of three-years experiences, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. Constant comparison process was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** Results show that cultural values have an indirect influence on South Korean fashion designer's design process in creating fashion objects. Cultural factors, including system, groups, individuals, and family, all deeply affect the designers' creative design process.

**Conclusion:** Overall, South Korean designers are not aware of the impact accrued from their personal cultural values and background. However, the Confucian perception of chemistry has an influence on consumers' tastes, and such influence can lessen creativity in design, particularly for the creative thinking process of South Korean designers.

### Keywords

Design process; Practice; Korean fashion-designer; Culture value

### Introduction

As economics, politics, and businesses become more globally oriented, it is critical to study how cultural connotations accompany or change a designer's ideas with respect to his/her design work. Understanding how designers incorporate cultural inference into their designs and how design embodiment is shared among people of different cultures is advantageous insight. Cultural expression shapes a design and individuals differ from but similar to one another. Cultures are one of the important factors that determine whether or not a designer will be successful in the global market. In particular, the essential competitive advantage in today's apparel industry is that of skilled human resources, such as creative designers who serve

as cultural interpreters when designing products [1]. Working with these global sources requires intercultural communication skills, but the development and marketing of a product or service by creative workers, makes or breaks the company today [1,2].

To understand how fashion designers' cultural value influences are integrated into their design practice and process, it may be useful to investigate the relationship between cultural identity and the use of cultural elements used in designing the product. Furthermore, fashion designers' creativity may be affected by cultural factors such as the system of institutions, organizations, groups, individuals, and events [3]. The characteristics of cultural values suggest an important application of the meaning of cultural influences on a fashion designer [4]. The understanding the impact of cultural values on product development may facilitate self-reflection on the part of the designer with a possible adjustment when designing for the global market place [2,5-6]. Therefore, investigating the fashion designers' design process, affected by the designers' cultural values, is a significant aspect to study. This study is aimed at filling a gap in the current literature by describing how successful fashion designers solve design problems, and how cultural values are related to or reflected in creating apparel.

Previously, researchers have described how psychological and socio-cultural factors affect creative work [7]; however, they did not address whether successful apparel designers solved design problems by use of life experiences, training, or work habits, and suggested future research on how socio-cultural factors might influence apparel designers' creativity [7]. Razzaghi et al. found that designers' cultural background influences design solutions; especially cultural and societal values and the concepts they create [6]. Razzaghi et al. reported the significance of incorporating culture into product design; nevertheless, the research does not explain the process by which an individual's cultural values influence the design process [6]. Few studied South Korean designers regarding the aesthetics characteristics and examined the usage of material cultures to fashion design process [8,9] however, to date there has been no in-depth study of the relationship of socio-cultural factors of Korean fashion designers' work and design process.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship of South Korean fashion designers' cultural values to their design process when creating designs. This study aims to extend the knowledge of how Korean cultural values of Korean designers are related to or reflected in fashion designers' practices and processes. The study's research questions were as follows: (a) how do South Korean fashion designers explain the role of cultural values in design process; (b) how are cultural values related to South Korean fashion designer's design process in the conceptualization in creating fashion object? (c) How are South Korean fashion designers' inspirations affected by the individual's background, specifically in regards to cultural values?

### Literature Review

#### The South Korean values and culture

Culture can be defined as a system of ideas and behaviors including habits and customs that are shared by groups and determine the actions of an individual [10]. Culture allows individuals to make

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sense of the world around them by providing a “*frame of reference or perspective*” [11] People with a culture in common will likely share and interpret the meaning of symbols, roles, and values in the same or in similar ways [12]. Culture can be approached from a multiple-method approach, examining both objective and subjective aspects of man-made elements. Objective elements are associated with material culture. Subjective man-made elements include social structure and ideology such as social stimuli, associations, beliefs, attitudes, stereotypical norms and values, and roles that individuals play [13].

Values influence an individual’s attitudes, cognitions and behavior [14], helping to define and strengthen their sense of self and shape their guiding principles [14]. East Asian Countries stress the importance of harmony, emotional dependence, cohesion, and cooperation. East Asian collectivism values family security, social order, and a high respect for longstanding traditions [15]. Cultural differences affect the way designers work because the cultural values and living patterns of a designer can play an important role in his or her work [16].

Culture is the process through which designers can attain a full understanding of the patterns of interaction and meanings of those patterns. These influences arise in the product development process as designers are shaped by their own cultural and societal values [6]. The final product created by designers is influenced by their cultural background, starting from the beginning stages of the design process during concept development. Culture can play a role in demonstrating a framework through which meaning is connected to the user [6]. These characteristics of culture suggest an important aspect of cultural influences on the individual designer. Therefore, the cultural values and living patterns of a designer can play an important role in his or her work; cultural differences affect the way designers work [16]. To understand how Korean designers’ think, it is important to examine Korean culture and society in respect to how critically these cultural values have influenced contemporary South Korean society and subsequently the designers.

Korean culture is influenced by Confucian thought that permeates business, impacting economic development, includes ideas such as collectivism, communalism, paternalism, social harmony, and respect for tradition, individual behavior, and family structure [15,17-19]. Confucianism is a “*complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical thought that influenced the culture and history of East Asia*” [20]. For example, Confucianism has influenced Korea and shaped material culture such as the traditional Korean costume, *hanbok*. The concept of Confucianism is an integral part of the aesthetics of Korean dress reflected in these characteristics of dress that exhibits “dignity” in men’s and “modesty” in women’s costumes.

Confucianism is evident in contemporary culture. Among many other Contemporary cultures in Korea, especially K-Pop Culture’s phenomenon is positively impacting Korea’s fashion industries by pushing their design styles. According to a survey conducted by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), among the 300 services and corporations contacted, 85% of the respondents believed the Korean Wave had contributed to the “*friendly image of Korea and Korean products*” [21]. Furthermore, a survey conducted by Japanese fashion trend watcher FRIL lab revealed Japanese teenagers are overwhelming influenced by Korean Culture and up to 27.5% (n=1700) of adults over 20 get fashion inspiration from Korea, Korean dramas or K-pop brands. [22]. Moreover, K-POP also created a luxurious fashion goods market in Korea by recruiting foreign tourists to boost the sales economy and increase foreign exchange

reserves [23]. In fact, South Korea the maker of “the most influential TV soaps in Asia and sets its stall out as the leading arbiter of Asian tastes”, driving Chinese and Japanese shoppers to Korea [24].

### South Korean fashion business

Understanding the Korean consumer is essential to comprehend the nature of the fashion business in South Korea. Because Confucianism’s cultural influence, brand names are important to Korean consumers [17, 23, 25]. In a Confucian collectivist society such as Korea, each fashion brand represents a social bond between group members who value affiliation and conformity [25]. This group’s influence represents a distinction from Western culture, which is highlighted during the decision-making process [25]. For example, Korean consumers may use a brand name to symbolize solidarity and the relative status with one another [17]. The majority of South Koreans believe they will lose face if they are not dressed properly in public [17,26]. Therefore, Korean consumers demand high quality and unique designs at affordable prices [26].

Social face (*chemyon*) pressure is prevalent with respect to purchasing tangible products like clothing [17,27]. In Korean culture, *chemyon* symbolizes identity; distinguishing reputation, honor, competence, social status, and the proper way to act with a group [27]. Yee found that among other psychological characteristics of Koreans, social face is highly correlated with consumption habits and purchasing behaviors [27-29]. One study illustrated that a group with high social face sensitivity may be influenced more by their peer group with respect to purchasing fashion goods, in contrast to a group with low social face sensitivity [29].

### Designer’s design process

Designing is “a creative, magical, intuitive, and elusive process” [30], whereby the primary goal is to solve a complicated problem and to create or explore innovative options. Solutions can be developed based on the designer’s skills, pre-existing knowledge, imagination, experiences, inspiration, and problem-solving abilities within the parameters of the question. Ultimately, design successes can be characterized as the designer’s ability to identify a solution to a problem [30].

Jones suggested designers go through three fundamental stages of the process-analysis, synthesis, and evaluation- in order to reach an applicable conclusion in respect to the problem [28,31]. Some designers, rather than learning from theoretical discourse, learn design through project-based practice, “learning by doing” [28]. Whereas researchers view the design process as a spiral structure involving image, presentation, testing, and re-imagining [32,33]; Press and Cooper view the design process as embodying four processes: formulation, evaluation, transfer, and reaction [34].

A few design research practitioners such as Lamb and Kallal created a conceptual framework for apparel design, dividing the functional design process into six steps: problem identification, preliminary ideas, design refinement, prototype development, evaluation, and implementation [35]. Parsons and Campbell described the creative design process with four main phases: problem identification, conceptual design, prototype, and solution. Overall, the design process begins with problem definition, followed by gathering information and analyzing the problem to be solved. The next step is to synthesize gathered information and generate ideas and concepts. Finally, formulation and evaluation of the output is performed. A vital observation is the design process is not linear, but rather one requiring several iterative stages [36].

As such, the real impact of a culture’s effect on a designer yet had not been factored into the study of the design process and the outputs of fashion designers. Only few studies had been conducted relating to fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences as they related to their creative design processes. Many of these studies focused on market or consumers’ points of view. Additionally, there was only limited literature relating to how a designer’s own cultural values and personal experiences would influence the subsequent creative design process through cultural impacts. Because the previous research on the impact of cultural value on designers’ design process is minimal, current and future research in these areas will assist in filling in the existing literature gap.

### Methods

A qualitative approach with one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews was conducted. The interview took approximately one to two hours per participant. Qualitative research was used to gain a deeper understanding of social setting and behavior from the viewpoint of the participants [37] and provided in-depth understanding of how cultural values influenced the creative design process. Twelve South Korean fashion designers, each with a minimum of three-years experiences, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. The designers were identified and recruited through the researcher’s alumni directory.

Prior to the interview process, the Institutional Review Board approved the study. An informational consent form was explained and signed by the participants before the interview. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was asked to fill out the demographic questionnaire. The majority of the interviews took place in each of the

designer’s studios. Participants were interviewed about their designs, creative process and inspirations.

### Data analysis

The initial survey was written in English, then translated into Korean by three translators: (a) a researcher; (b) a professional translator; and, (c) an emeritus professor from a Korean university. Three translators were chosen to increase the accuracy of the translation. All interviews were completed in South Korea in the Korean language. The transcripts presented were then translated into English by a native Korean speaker and modified by a native English speaker to ensure readability.

Interview data was analyzed using the constant comparison method of qualitative analysis. As coding continued, concepts were constantly compared to one another, and built into emergent themes. Themes or categories were developed into a coding guide for open coding of the entire data set. Through the axial coding process, the researcher identified patterns and relationships across interview data themes as in Table 1. To increase trustworthiness, multiple procedures were used. First, three researchers discussed and edited the coding guide. Second, an additional coder implemented the coding guide and audited 25% of the data. The inter-coder reliability achieved 93.94%.

### Results

A total of 12 South Korean fashion designers participated in this study. Demographic background information results were based on only 11 participants because one declined to fill out the demographic background information survey. Of these 11 participants, four were male and seven were female designers. On average, the 11 participants

Table 1: Inductively developed thematic.

Category	Selective coding	Axial coding	
Q1. Do you notice any Korean cultural elements embedded into your final output?			
Role of cultural value	Direct	Material culture	Details Body type and shape Colors Music Artwork Hanbok Silhouette
	Indirect	Social value	Workplace, workload Quality Environment Family Consumers
Q2. What are the advantages and difficulties of being South Korean designer?			
Global Phenomenon	Contemporary Korean culture	Foreign countries Developing country vs. developed country Korean wave, han-ryu	
	Non-existence of Korean Style	Style Trend Influence of cultural aspect	
Q3. Where do you get your creative inspiration from? What fuels your design idea?			
Sources of Inspiration	Everyday experience and surroundings	Observation	Object People
	Personal Experiences	Traveling Vacation Lifestyle Experience	
	Material culture	Books	
	Personal Beliefs and values	Art History Religion Value Belief	

**Table 2:** Summary of demographic information.

Average years of Experiences Age	Years
25-30 years old	3 years
31-34 years old	6.7 years
35-40 years old	10.7 years
50+ years old	30 years
Average designing hours per week Average	Total number
10-20 hrs	N=3
20-30 hrs	N=0
30-40 hrs	N=4
40-50 hrs	N=1
50 +	N=3

had 9.6 years of experience working as designers shown in Table 2. The relationship between age and years of experience show a linear relationship. The result reveals that designers with more than 10 years of design experience tend to spend less time on designing compared to that of other designers.

Three overarching themes emerged in the interview data: (a) role of cultural values; (b) fashion as a global phenomenon; and (c) sources of inspirations. The overarching theme is organized through answering three research questions.

### Role of cultural value

This theme of role of cultural value emphasizes how most designers' in this study were not consciously aware of their cultural values and background when designing. Two primary themes emerged from the data that explain the role of cultural values and background in designing: (a) direct and (b) indirect.

Direct effects take place when material culture provides an influence on garment design. A few (2 of 12 [16.66%]) participants tried to directly introduce Korean culture into their garment designs. Participant 3 is the only designer wishing to directly apply Korean culture into garment design. She uses *hanji* (Korean traditional paper) fabric, she borrows details from *hanbok* and then applies these concepts to Western wedding-dress designs. She said: "I have tried because I have a personal ambition to embed Korean costume design and traditions." (Participant 3, 30s) Previously, Participant 8 also attempted to embed Korean culture into his design development. He tried once, but lost interest in transforming *hanbok* into western-style garments, although one sometimes can find details in his designs, such as a jacket without a lapel, to be reminiscent of *hanbok*. Yet, it is hard to tell if a jacket detail is inspired by *hanbok* because of similarities within other cultures, such as Scandinavian design. Therefore, he noticed that he does not find it necessary to inspired by *hanbok* to create the unique style and characteristics of his own design.

Indirect effects take place when social values influence working environments, so they indirectly influence both garment design and the fashion development process. In this study, participants were unaware of indirect influence from cultural social values. A majority of participants (10 of 12 [83.33%]) had not considered or were unaware of their own culture. What was unique about Participants 7 and 9 is that they both heard from foreign buyers that their garment designs had an Asian aesthetic. However, neither participant understood this perception. It was difficult for them to pinpoint why buyers thought their designs were influenced by Korean culture. The following quote is one of the examples of participants' comments regarding culture and design.

"Westerners say that I design in Asian style, but I am not sure of this. They also say they know right away that the design has been done by an Asian designer by just looking at it. I don't know why they say this because I didn't intend to design in such a style..." (Participant 7, 30s)

Participants were indirectly influenced by social cultural values in the process of design. In most cases, participants were unaware of influence from social cultural values. However, Participant 10 was fully aware of how her family, particularly her mother, played an important role in the design process and in increasing her creativity.

"My mom is a hanbok designer, so I guess she influences me a lot... The very relaxed silhouette of hanbok also provides me some inspiration, as did the beautiful colors of rolled fabrics of hanbok." (Participant 10. 30s)

A majority (10 of 12 [82.33%]) of participants agreed that knowledge of Korean contemporary culture, thoughts, and lifestyle is important in design development. Moreover, these participants believe understanding Koreans' body types and preferred colors is important. Indirect influences of Korean culture were best summed up by Participant 2:

"I cannot tell that this design directly came from Korean culture, but I think I've embedded some Korean practice and culture into its design somehow. I think a lot about overall Korean customs, including their thoughts; a way of clothing, attitude, favorite music, and artworks can be an inspiration in designing..." (Participant 2. 20s)

Participant interviews revealed East Asian societies like Korea value hard work and devalue play, this phenomenon can indirectly affect a designer's design process and creativity [38]. Previous research states degrading of play and rest indirectly affects a designer's design process and creativity because rest and play are "psychological attributes that flourish creativity" [38]. Participant 2 summarized the relationship between social cultural values and the design process: "Being a designer is a physically and mentally daunting job...Korean employees work in tough environments with huge workloads, more than 15 hours per day...I get inspired when taking a vacation. So on weekends I usually read books, visit exhibitions and plays, and do a lot of other things to be inspired" (Participant 2, 20s)

### Fashion as a global phenomenon

The theme of fashion as a global phenomenon explains how contemporary Korean culture influences fashion designers' design processes in the creation of objects; fashion has no boundaries in people's daily lives. Two categories are crucial factors in this theme: (a) contemporary South Korean culture as a business asset; and (b) the non-existence of South Korean style.

**Contemporary South Korean culture as a business asset:** This category describes the effects of contemporary South Korean culture that promote South Korean fashion business in other countries. Ten out of 12 designers said either their company or their brand sells to other Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, or Japan. China is the biggest market for Korean designers and companies, and this phenomenon is related to the development of the Korean economy. Business is easier for Korean clothing companies in China compared to Western countries, since China represents a similar cultural background and similar body shapes. In addition, Participant 12 claimed that South Korea is a developed country, and Chinese fashion companies are trying to emulate Korean fashion style and trends.

Chinese fashion companies try to benchmark Korean companies in order to achieve success in their domestic fashion market. Participant 12 explained the success of clothing companies in China: *“China and Korea share similar cultural backgrounds and body shapes. I think Chinese and Korean people have similar tastes. Chinese people want to follow the fashion trends of developed countries. I think all of the above can be prerequisites to marketing the Korean fashion brand in China.”* (Participant 12, 50s)

**The non-existence of South Korean style:** All participants, in their understanding of the current South Korean fashion style, spoke unfavorably about the current nonexistence of South Korean style. Some (3 of 12 [40%]) of the participating designers believe that South Korea is in a transitional period of adopting and creating a new fashion style. As explained:

*“I do not think there is a Korean fashion style, but Korean fashion design is making progress in adopting new aspects in fashion design.”* (Participant 2, 20s)

In addition, a number of participants stated the non-existence of Korean style is due to cultural background. Participant 7 mentioned that the contemporary Korean fashion style is all about trends. Participant 10 said, Korean style and fashion does not seem to be excessive, but conscious of other people’s attention. It is possible to predict that this phenomenon is related to the Confucian value, *chemyon*, meaning “social face” in English. Korean consumers are cautious about their public appearance and follow trends as a way to illustrate their solidarity with one another. Education and lifestyle also influence individual style; Participant 9 mentioned how these factors impact Korean style and a designer’s creativity: *“Korean styles are very precise and inflexible. Roughness and avant-garde sense is missing from Korean fashion style. I think this is because of education and lifestyle; in other words, the Korean society is very conservative.”* (Participant 9, 30s)

### Sources of inspirations

Sources of inspiration emphasize the effects of background and culture on a designer. This theme comprises four crucial components: (a) everyday experience and surroundings; (b) personal experiences; (c) material culture; (d) personal beliefs and values.

**Everyday experience and surroundings:** Fashion designers derive inspiration from everyday experience and surroundings; bringing reflections and impressions to the subconscious mind where these inspirations take on new identities and produce new relationships and patterns. All designers (100%) in this study said inspiration arrives naturally. Designers search out inspirations from everywhere, discovering connections between creative ideas and images. Because inspirations are drawn from everyday experiences, designers often carry sketchbooks and sketch. Participant 10 summarized the creative role of inspiration by stating: *“... if I met someone or someone just passed by and I liked the details of his or her look, I would sketch them. I always sketch a design of what I want to wear, so I sketch anytime anywhere.”* (Participant 10, 30s)

**Observation:** Participants in this study frequently commented on how observing objects helps them find new relationships and unique patterns that can be incorporated into design activity. What is monotonous for others may inspire designers as they observe and think about the textures and various aspects of natural phenomena that can be embedded into their design.

Participant 2 commented on her observations when looking at objects and surroundings: *“By looking at leaves and trees, I try to use them as a valuable resource when designing, and I think I might use that resource when designing the garment.”* (Participant 2, 20s).

In fact, Participant 1 described the process of how sources of inspiration could be embedded into the final product of design. He stated: *“I get design ideas in numerous ways. For example, if I see texture of water draining on the street, I can use it for designing a shoe outsole, so I think that design ideas come from endless sources.”* (Participant 1, 30s). The participants’ creative inspirations come from observing people. For Participant 6, people are his source of inspiration and design philosophy. For him, fashion design exists in order to meet the needs of humans who comprise the center of everything: inspiration, concept, purpose, intention, and the philosophy of his design. *“People, people always give me inspiration and people inspire me. People, numerous thoughts come from observing, watching people.”* (Participant 6, 30s)

The word ‘people’ is often used to reference those whose life stories provide inspiration for fashion designers. Participant 12 worked as a designer for over 20 years and now teaches at a fashion school. She commented that people are her inspiration. Her indirect experience and lifestyle influences, inspires, and fuels her design ideas [39]. *“I usually get inspired when teaching and observing students. I also get lots of motivation from friends and other artists who do not work in a fashion business.”* (Participant 12, 50s) From a different perspective, Participant 9 derives inspiration from studying the life or artwork of a famous artist. *“Artworks might reflect artists’ lives when they were emotionally unstable, when they enjoyed peaceful lives, or when they earned money to live, so I get my creative inspirations from their life and their paintings.”* (Participant 9, 30s)

**Personal experiences:** Personal experiences such as traveling, shopping, going to museums, visiting with friends, or eating at restaurants may become a designer’s creative source of inspiration, allowing relationships to be discovered and connected to current problems. Reinterpreting and applying past experiences to develop inspiration is a natural process. *“My creative inspirations are from personal experience.... Every aspect that I saw and experienced there has become my inspiration and created a synergy that generated a further inspiration. I never created the concept and inspiration deliberately; the practice of creating a concept just happens naturally whenever necessary.”* (Participant 8, 30s).

**Material culture:** Participants are inspired by sources from material culture, including, literature, art, architecture, music, and history. Moreover, inspirations sometimes come from personal beliefs and values. *“I think I get creative inspiration from everywhere, including, words, buildings, music, poems, books, lyrics, or even foreign countries.”* (Participant 6, 30s). An overwhelming majority (11 of 12 [91.66%]) of participants claimed that there was not a single source of constant inspiration; Participant 8 was the only designer in this study who had a consistent inspiration source. He indicated that “armor” represented his identity and referred to it frequently.

*“Armor is the biggest resource of an inspiration. I am an introverted person rather than being outgoing. Therefore, I wanted to create designs that could represent more strength on the outside appearance, and I really like the concept of armor.”* (Participant 8, 30s)

For him, armor symbolizes strength, protection; and strong, confident women. He explained that he studied armor in Japan,

France, and Korea, and he uses it as an inspirational source. He also uses music to activate his creativity. By listening to gloomy songs, he was able to express his deepest feelings and creativity. In this situation, music triggers his sad emotions to help him design creative garments. *"I listen to gloomy, sad love songs a lot. I listen to a lot of gloomy songs whenever I am having a hard time with sketches or designs, and I can do some sketches after I get really sentimental."* (Participant 8, 30s)

**Personal beliefs and values:** Personal beliefs and values are also an inspiration source. Participant 10 believes her sources of creative inspiration are related to her religion, Christianity. She believes that God is the creator of the universe and human beings; therefore, she believes her creative design inspirations are also from God. She prays nightly to receive new design ideas. *"As a matter of fact, inspiration of ideas come from nowhere at a certain time. I believe those ideas come from my belief of Jesus."* (Participant 10, 30s)

## Discussion and Implications

The primary finding of this study was that cultural values indirectly influence South Korean fashion designers' design process in creating fashion objects. Among many other cultural values, Confucian ideas directly influenced South Korean designers' working environments and creativity, and this influence had a negative impact on the designers' decision-making process within design process. For instance, the Confucian value of hard work tended to create a demanding work environment that might reduce a designer's creativity. Moreover, the Confucian idea of cheomyon deeply affected consumers' taste and style. Korean target market tastes sometimes limited designers' in expressing their creativity. If a design was too innovative, Korean consumers might refuse to try or purchase something new. This was because of the cultural tendency to follow group ideas, another characteristic of a collective society.

Another finding suggested designers' design processes were affected by cultural factors such as organizational systems, groups, fashion system, individuals, and family. Participants described the importance of fashion systems, structure, and industry factors like labor or materials that affected the ability to become a successful international designer. This finding supported previous literature that stated the ideal type of fashion system was influential in creating a designer's reputation. The findings suggested that a South Korean designer's idea, specifically his or her understanding of current contemporary South Korean culture, were communicated through design to consumers who may or may not "buy in" to those values.

## Conclusion

The findings suggested an overwhelming majority of participants were unaware that they were being impacted by cultural values or personal background. However, even though they may have stated they were not influenced by cultural values, participants acknowledged that their designs were made for Korean consumers. Therefore, current Korean thoughts, contemporary culture, tastes, trends, as well as body shape and color preference were embedded in their products. Foreign buyers also informed participants that their designs had an oriental look, even though the designers themselves were unable to tell what factors created this impression and stood out in their design.

This research added to the available existing knowledge in the current literature, relating to design methods and design research, cognitive, and affective process of South Korean fashion designers.

Few research studies had been conducted with respect to South Korean fashion designers' creative design processes. Thus, this study will extend the knowledge of the relationship between cultural values within the design process. Exploring designers' experiences contributes to understanding other ways cultural factors affect designers' sources of inspiration and creativity. Understanding the impact of cultural values on creative design may facilitate self-reflection on the part of the designer and enable possible positive adjustments when designing for global markets.

The key finding was the cultural environment's influence of Confucian ideology on contemporary South Korean fashion designer's design process, especially the creative thinking process. The Confucian notion of creativity highlights the relationship of an individual's creativity, which "allows the environment to change himself or herself". However, the hard work ethic emphasized by Confucian ideals may sometimes drive designers so intensively that they have no time to experience conditions that allow design creativity.

The qualitative interviews with individual designers helped to understand the deeper meaning of cultural influence on design. Due to a limited representation on a global scale with respect to ethnicity, nationality, and geographic identity, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of all South Korean fashion designers. However, the findings may serve as a foundation for studying South Korean fashion designers and for expanding the knowledge base of design theory, creative and design process, global fashion industry, and design education.

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