

Critical Discussion on the 'Orientalism' in Fashion Culture

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패션문화에 나타난 오리엔탈리즘에 대한 비판적 논의

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Abstract

A view of the Orientalism that sees the Orient as the inferior Other, characterized by the heterogenic, eccentric, backward, and passive features, has been internalized in the unconsciousness of Westerners. 'Orientalism' which is the cultural device and the system of discourse to put Asia in the fixed frame of dominance was the West European centered term, designating Southwest Asia including South Europe and North Africa as Orient, and contained the idea that non-Western society could progress only with the acceptance of Western civilization. Accordingly, it is need to use this term deliberately. In addition, even though the Asian Look of the West, borrowing the images and costume styles of Asia has lost the original mentality of Asia, it was not initiated from the perception that sees Asia as the inferior Other. Since the Asian Ethnic Look is the Western costume, borrowing the image of Orient and style by being fascinated by Oriental Aesthetics, the attributes of it are different from those of Orientalism. Therefore, it is not appropriate to designate the Asian Ethnic Look as 'Orientalism Fashion' or 'Oriental Look' except for some eccentric manipulation of Asia costume and image. Instead, it is desirable to exchange the term 'Asian Look', 'Asian Fashion', and 'Asian Ethnic Look' upon occasions or the name of individual nation or region can be referred to as preferred alternatives. Today, Asia including Korea is taking the initiative in the World Fashion as one of central axes of World Fashion Industry, and cannot be interpreted from the perspective of West Centrism. Now, it's time to dissolve the dichotomous prejudice of the West centrism on Asia's own strength.

Key words: Orientalism, Oriental Look, Asian Ethnic Look, West-centrism, 오리엔탈리즘, 오리엔탈 룩, 아시안 에스닉 룩, 서구중심주의

I. Introduction

The tendency of 'Regionalism' along with the phenomenon of 'De-stereotype', sees society striving to

deviate from the influence of globalism at the end of the twentieth century. This movement is comparatively salient around Asia. Amid the high rising interest in the folk culture and costume, the curiosity about Asian culture and an 'Asian Look', which is inclusive in the 'Oriental Fashion' has been on the increase. The emergence of Oriental Fashion in Western Fashion circles can be traced back to several hundreds years ago. However the latter half of the

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twentieth century has seen a resurgence in such trends. One reason for this, was the folk costume of the Orient was regarded as a source of creative ideas among Western Fashion designers. The depravity of Western materialism brought about the yearning for the naturalism and mysticism of the Orient. Post-modernism and pluralism theories found at the closing of the twentieth century have also played an important role.

However, it cannot be ignored that terms such as 'Oriental', 'Orient', and 'Orientalism', emerged in the field of fashion along with this tendency to call it into question. The Orient is seen as separate, eccentric, backward, and passive under Orientalism. It is treated as 'the other', which is inferior to the West and is an object to be dominated. Orientalism constitutes one part of European cultivation and the discourse, signifying that the Orient is the internal part, in at least one respect, to West in terms of culture and ideology. It is the system of cultural hegemony, which is expressed and represented by the institution, academic studies, figure, and creed, and the style of the subject.

This research is the critical discussion on the 'Orientalism' which is the frequently used terms in all sorts of references and research materials, and relevant industries of domestic fashion field, and its research method is based on the literature study, centering around preceding studies of humanities and relevant references. The purposes of this research are: First, it attempts to elucidate the fundamental meaning and the geographical dimension of Orientalism, which have been indiscreetly used. Second, it tries to explore the mechanism of the Orientalism Fashion. Third, it presents the alternatives on the 'Orientalism' which is used in the fashion circle. Fourth, it inquires into the difference between 'Oriental Look' and 'Asian Ethnic Look'.

Even though our view has been Westernized and fashion is the product of Western culture, and furthermore, the view that accepts the Western perspective as itself under the idea that Orientalism is the viewpoint, designating the culture of the Orient has generated, the term 'Orientalism' implies the serious problems and the indiscreet use by the Orientals

should be restrained. The attributes of Orientalism, whose essence is distorted and depreciated by the image of the other, have not changed. This research leads a critical discussion on the phenomenon, which is widely distorted and used.

II. Orientalism

Orientalism presupposes the Orient that exists for the West, and is constructed in relation to the West, which is grounded in the special position of the Orient in the experience of the Europeans. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest, richest, and oldest colonies, a source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural rivalry, and recurring images of 'the other'. Furthermore, the Orient has helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, ideal, personality, and experience. Yet, none of this Orient is merely imaginative. In fact, the Orient was indispensable part of European material cultivation and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents the integral part of it with a mode of discourse in terms of culture and ideology (Said, 1995).

Orientalism is compounded from the 'Orient' and 'ism', but in this term, Occident, instead of Orient, becomes the subject, representing the response and attitude of the West toward the Orient, which is the other (Jeong, 2003). Edward Said who discovered and disseminated Orientalism consistently argues in his book, Orientalism that the 'Orient' was designated as its name in the discourse of Orientalism by the Western empire, and it was created as series of images (Evil, darkness, feminine, passive, and so on), and whose meanings were positioned as the other, and labelled as 'Barbarious' (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999). Accordingly, Orientalism is not the Orient-centered term, which is captured or fascinated by the attractive feature of the Orient. Rather it entails prejudice, value, idea, and image of the Orient, fabricated during the invasion of the West towards the Orient (Said, 1995). That is, Europe acquired its identity and power by alienating the Orient, which was 'the concealed self' of it (Kang, 1997).

Said calls into question like "How do we represent

other cultures?" "Is the concept of single culture useful?" "Is the notion of single culture a search for the justification or admiration of its culture or a sense of hostility or attack to other culture in the discussion of culture?" "Can we maintain that cultural, religious, and racial difference is more important than social-economic or political-historical category?" (Said, 1995). In addition to the questions about what is 'the other' or what is the 'Ideology', established in the interdependence of 'the other' are the questions about the interaction between the images of imperialistic culture, and marginalized and decentered culture. 'the other' means the appointed attributes, which cannot be represented by the culture.

The changes in all fields of Europe during the Renaissance, which was the starting point of modern times, were the subversion of feudal order, the discovery of an individual and freedom, the liberation of human reason from the power, and the liberation of knowledge from the intellectual oppression of the Middle Ages. However, the change caused the big trauma by cutting off the theological and political background by severing the long standing tradition. This trauma was combined with the Worldwide expansion of Europe, and offered the important clue in the emergence of modern Orientalism. It still remains that way now (Clarke, 1998).

Orientalism is the cultural device and the system of discourse, putting the World except for the West in the fixed frame for the dominance by clinging to the depth of politics and wielding the obstinate and crafty power. That is, Orient was represented and created by the West, which is the transcendental subject (Kang, 1997). Accordingly, 'Orientalism' is the controversial term, being questioned about the neutral meaning, and according to Bernard Lewis, who is a scholar of Oriental studies, specializing in the history of Islam, "It is contaminated going beyond the possibility of rescue now (Clarke, 1998)". Orientalism indicates the representation of 'an Oriental' associated with the negative factors of Western culture (Criminal, insane person, female, the poor), sharing the identity of outsider as Said clearly said in the 「Orientalism」 (Kang, 1997). Orientalism is the geographical violence. In spite of the independence of

numerous colonies, imperialistic culture is still influential. Therefore, Orientalism as an enlightened and open conversation without deflection or prejudice cannot be supposed (Halbfass, 1988).

The Oriental Look of fashion reveals the features of Orientalism. Oriental Look that holds some parts of Asia Ethnic Look, is the vulgar distortion of the image of the Orient, as Orientalism, manifested through the costume. Kwon (1998) argues that 'Oriental Look' has been dominated by the 'Orientalism', which is the thinking way towards the Orient, and the positional superiority in terms of the flexibility of location, pursued by the West, has given the location of the subject to the West through the creation of Oriental Look and consumption process. The author carried on her maintenance that the West has put the Oriental Look in the part of the Western culture in an attempt to overcome the self-consciousness about being influenced by the Orient, which had been recognized to be inferior to its self-culture through the creative work and the certainty of wearing subjects. She concludes that 'Oriental Look' has been continually managed without the appointment of its orthodoxy as a Western strategy to secure its identity and power, and keep the aesthetic hegemony and such management way or volition is the Orientalism of costume.

Eventually, even though Oriental Look is the concept to be included in the Asian Ethnic Look, it has the figurative features, different from the general Asian Ethnic Look, which have borrowed the Oriental image from the mysticism and naturalism of the Orient, and rooted in the interest in the Oriental thought as a result of the depravity of Western Christian ideas, and the necessity of new motive. Just as Said argues that Orientalism designates the representation of the Orientals, in association with criminals, female, the needy, Oriental Look represents costume with the images of the Orient such as eccentricity, insanity, ludicrousness, voluptuous beauty, and so on.

III. Asian Ethnic Look

Asian Ethnic Look is a style of Western Fashion. It borrows the features of Asia folk costume such as

image, decoration, pattern, color, the structure of clothes, and silhouette. A lot of studies and literatures use terms like 'Oriental Look', 'Oriental Fashion', 'Orientalism', to describe the Asian Ethnic Look. It needs to be noted that these terms reflect the Western centrism, which considers Asia as the other. The error that Asia including Korea sets itself as the other was often committed.

West-centrism is composed of 'Western-exceptionalism', arguing the superiority of the West, and 'Orientalism' distorting the non-Western civilization. Originally, Orientalism meant a wide variety of assumptions based on the knowledge and prejudices on the Islam culture in the Far East, but now, it includes the knowledge and prejudices of Europeans towards the non-Western World including Africa and East Asia. Orientalism explains the non-Western society based on the absence of serious historical, economic, social, political, cultural, and ideological factors.

Along with the salient feature of Decentralism, the Western Fashion of the twentieth century paid attention to the costume culture of the other, breaking from the universal style of the Western costume based on the Christian culture. This phenomenon was more conspicuous in the Postmodernism of the latter half of the twentieth century, and the representative thing in the Western Fashion was the emergence of Asian Ethnic Look, setting the subject matter with imagined geography, imagined history, and imagined object. The interest of Asia being displayed in Western Fashion has a long history, which dates back to the ancient times. The aristocratic taste called Chinoiserie was prevailing in the eighteenth century and it exhibited traditional costumes of several Oriental cultures that were inclusive of Chinese style, affecting the textiles or interior decoration of Rococo period. The culture and costumes of Japan made a great contribution to the Art Nouveau style with exotic characteristics in the nineteenth century.

The costume system of Asian Ethnic Look began to have more effect on the European Fashion by P. Poiret in the beginning of twentieth century. The Russia Ballets performed in Paris, in 1909 and the party was thrown with the topic of "The Arabian Nights; The thousand and one nights" under the aus-

pices of Poiret in 1911. Using this as momentum a craze for Oriental style ensued. In addition, the actual application of Tunic, harem pants, turban decorated with feathers, long pearl necklaces, and colors such as strong orange, Jade green, emerald as well as Oriental motifs such as Kimonos Sleeve, Obi belt, and flower and butterfly invoked an illusionary atmosphere.

The 'Hippy Movement', started in 1960, played an important role in forming the subculture for Western society. The Hippies chose to protest against fetishism, while embracing indian theme, mysticism, arcadian style, community consciousness, love, and hedonism(Hall, 1969). Hippies especially adored the mysticism and fantasy held by the American indian culture, the mystical philosophy of the Orient, art, and religion. Accordingly, they travelled Turkey, Iran, India, and Nepal with an interest in meditation of India, music, and dance. They created the Hippy style in fashion by borrowing the folk items of these nations and making the hand crafted clothes(Kim, 1987).

The appearance of the idiosyncratic Japanese designers on the stages in Paris and the amity between the United States and China in 1970s and 1980s have doubled the attention to the Orient. Takada Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto revealed the capability and the potential of Asia Fashion by exhibiting the beauty of eclectic costume of traditional Japan and the modern West. They heightened the tension by renovating the style with the non-Western Fashion in spite of the request of the West, putting the non-West in the position of the other, and it served as a momentum to popularize the Japanese style(Lisa, 2003).

Several designers in the circles of World Fashion and celebrities accepted the style of Asia and propagated it in 1990s. Overall Asian cultures including Asian themed films were introduced and Asian Look gained great popularity amid the cultural exchange (Corliss, 1993). While the Western clothes were usually worn by the majority of Asian countries, traditional costumes were revived in their respective nations at the same time. These provided continual inspiration for the Western designers. Meanwhile, the

views that Asian costumes are less interesting, basically different, and more feminine have been remained like the colonial era (Jones & Leshkovich, 2003). However, the view that sees the Oriental method or style as 'Special' and 'Different', or Regional and Traditional', or Feminine has declined, and the innovative development of Information Communication contributed to the direct interaction of the Western Fashion and Asian Fashion so that the division of these two styles has lost its significance.

The trend of Asian style in the Western Fashion caused the positive effect like the representative cases, mentioned above. It is directly connected to the fact that the attributes of both past costumes and modern fashion have sought for beauty.

It is not deniable that there is a history in which the image of the Orient has been distorted and damaged by the Western Fashion. Such fashion is the real Orientalism Fashion. That is, the things that are eccentrically distorted and ludicrously manifested in the costume, borrowing the image of the Orient, and vulgar expression with the unreasonable exposure of body can be said to be Orientalism Fashion. Accordingly, Oriental Look is included in the Asia Ethnic Look in a broad sense on the account that it is the Western Fashion, borrowing and expressing the form of Oriental image or Oriental costume based on the Western view. However, Western Fashion, affected by images and forms based on the mysticism of the Orient and the yearning for naturalism or costumes that use the beautiful image and form of Oriental costume as sources of idea should be differentiated from the attributes of Orientalism.

Even though the image of the Orient was distorted and misrepresented in the history of Western Fashion, it would be a hasty judgement that all Oriental styles, revealed in the modern Western Fashion, are the Orientalism Fashion. The term, Orient, chiefly confined to the region of the Southwest Asia is the West centered notion, recognizing the Orient as the eccentric and inferior Other. Asian Look which was inspired by the folk costume of Asia was positioned as one of important themes in fashion with pouring attention of World in association with Postmodernism and Pluralism.

IV. Discussion and Comments

Edward Said triggered Decolonialism, which has been discussed these days. According to Said, West-centrism Universalism justified the inferiority of non-Western regions and the term 'Orientalism' is used to fix this logic. An Oriental is the 'Other Self' of a Westerner, in which the unconsciousness of a Westerner is projected. From the perspective of the 'Orientalism', the attributes of 'Cruelty,' 'Emotional character', 'The lack of logic' belonged to an Oriental. Likewise, an Oriental is identified with exotic, vague, and tempting existence. That is, an Oriental is not an individual but a homogeneous and anonymous group in the perception of Westerners, and the behavior of an Oriental is decided by instinctive emotion (Sexual desire, violence, indignation) rather than intentional choice or rational judgment. Arabian, African, Chinese, and Korean are treated as an uniform and homogeneous entity (Jung, 2006).

According to Said, the Orient exists only as the permanent Other of the West in the partial relationships in the Orientalism discourse. The discourse system of 'Orientalism' which is called "The Orientalization (The creation of Orient as a virtual image of idea) of the Orient (Real Orient)" is naturally irrelevant to the actual reality. The Orient is fabricated in the imagination of the Europeans. Orientalism is the image of 'Orient' which is arbitrarily manipulated by the necessity of the Westerners. It also shaped the false images as way they perceived them, which were irrelevant to the reality of the Orient. Accordingly, Orientalism becomes the style of the West for dominating and recomposing the Orient. The West solidifies the power and identity of itself by stipulating the dichotomous basis (Jung, 2006).

In the fashion culture, Orientalism was the culture of the other, and was mere the complementary idea to fill the void of the West, justifying the superiority of the West. Asian Ethnic Look has been linked to the present from the past, in the yearning for the Orient and the expansion of Europe, and ideology was buried in its internality. Especially, since Orientalism based on West-centrism is the deflected term and cannot be neutrally applied, it is the cultural divide

and discourse, locking the World except for the West in the fixed frame. Therefore, recently in the fashion, the term 'Asia Fashion' is preferred to the term 'Oriental Fashion' in terms of acceptance and cooperation of the diverse faces of whole World culture and the cultural essence of World politics(Bullis, 2000). There are two types of Asian costume to be clearly distinguished: One is the eccentric, ludicrous, and vulgar costume, manipulating the image of Asia Folk costumes or the Orient, and the other is the Asian Ethnic Look, esthetically representing the culture, image, and costume style of Asia. In case of the

former, it is easily recognizable as Oriental Fashion, but the latter, which occupies the most parts of Asian Look arouses controversy. The distinctive boundary line has not been drawn in the Western Fashion or costume relevant literatures because the term 'Orientalism' was initiated from the Western perspective. However, we cannot help pointing out that it is a great error to designate all Western costumes that are quoted in the fashion relevant literatures and researches, as 'Oriental Fashion,' or 'Oriental Look'. Even, serious errors that regard themselves as 'the other' are made by the Asian designers or domestic fashion

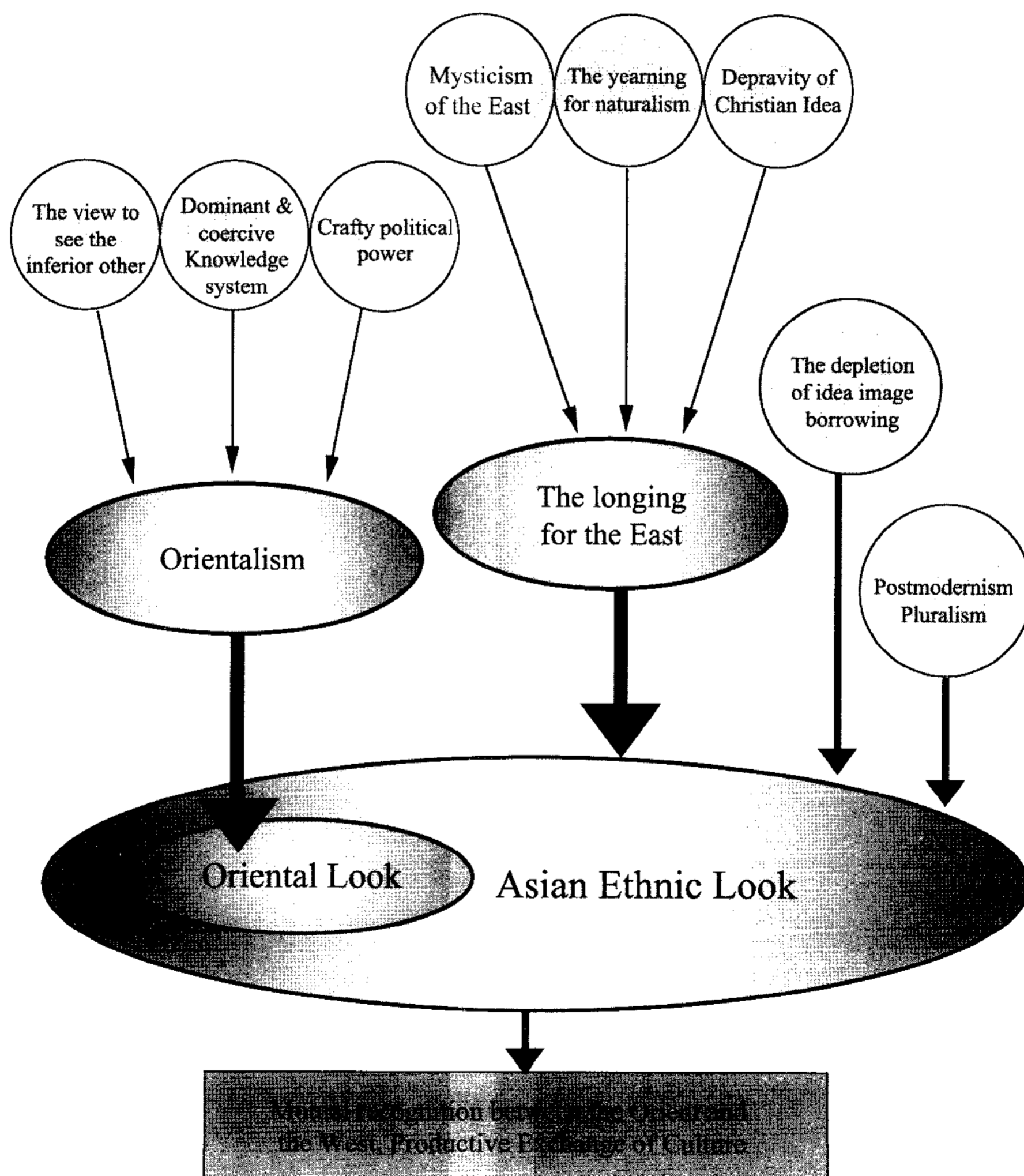


Fig. 1. The paradigm of Oriental Look and Asian Ethnic Look.

designers by explaining the traditional costumes with the 'Orientalism'. <Fig. 1> expresses the paradigm of Oriental Look and Asian Ethnic Look in diagram based on the description above.

The term Orientalism in fashion has been often used in the Asia as well as the West from the perspective that the attributes of fashion have its origin in the Western phenomenon. Since the boundary of various classes and strata is being disintegrated in the open thought of modern Postmodernism, the meaning of confirmation and denial is likely to be converted into that of difference, and the distortion of the Orient through costumes is inclined to be insignificantly treated with a superficial play. However, aside from this trend, the attributes of the term 'Orientalism' have not changed so that it is not appropriate and dangerous to designate such costumes as Orientalism Fashion or Oriental Look. In the middle of globalism and the phenomenon of pluralism, Asia acquired the position of an initiative, leading the fashion of World, and it is no longer appropriate to see Asia as 'the other' and indiscreetly use the term that implies the intention to depreciate Asia. Instead, 'Asian Look', 'Asian Fashion', 'Asian Ethnic Look', 'Asian style' can be chosen according to circumstance or individual nation or region, it is representative of, 'Korean Look' 'Japanese style' or similar can be referred to as preferred alternatives.

Each particularity coexists and 'ethnocentrism' and 'West centrism' are open to reflective discussion in the era of pluralism. Dichotomous division that defines non-Western culture as 'the other' and only fixes its position in the marginalized area should be dissolved. Now, the development of traffic and information communication made mysticism or fantasy about Asia impossible and in the era of coexistence of particularity, the idea that Asia is a backward and inferior object to be dominated by the West loses its validity.

Asia Fashion borrows the image of Asia as an inspirational source of play and an alternative of depleted idea. However, it is not always negative. Now, the Orient and the West understand each other more than any other times and accept different cultures and costumes without prejudice. Asian Look is

also a part of Worldwide cultural phenomenon, which is congruous with the Postmodernism and Pluralism. In addition, now, the territorial boundary that divides the World into two unbalanced geographical categories; the Orient and the West, is of no utility.

V. Conclusions

A view of the Orientalism that sees the Orient as the inferior Other, characterized by the exotic, heterogeneous, eccentric, stagnant, sensuous, and passive features, has been internalized in the unconsciousness of Westerners. However, today's World is no longer the era to see the different other as distorted image. The innovative development of information communication strikingly narrowed the recognition gap between the Orient and the West, and the image of Asia is not confined solely to an ascetic of India or a dancer, who appears in 'The Thousand and One Nights.' In reality, Orientalism negates the old hegemonic ideal of the West in several aspects, and opens the route to communication and interaction, espousing the recognition of difference and diversity.

The Asian Look is also understood as an attempt at conversation amid the tendency of Pluralism in the Cosmopolitan era. In terms of history, the salience of Asia or Asian nations was linked to the popularity and the positive view of the Asian Look. However, the use of the term, 'Orientalism' should be deliberately based on the accurate understanding. Even though the meaning of Orientalism, which sees Asia as the inferior Other, is considerably diluted in the modern Orientalism Fashion. This research gives reasons for the inappropriateness of the term 'Orientalism', which is even used in the domestic relevant fields without deliberation as followings:

First, Orientalism is the illusionary term, which contains the consciousness that Asia is the exotic, and alien object, and inferior Other, characterized by strange, stagnant, sensuous, and passive features.

Second, Orientalism signifies cultural divide. The discourse system, framed by political forces that lock Asia in the frame of fixed dominance and submission. Orient was arbitrarily represented and created by the West, which is the transcendental subject.

Third, Orient was a West European centered term, which designated Southwest Asia including South Europe, North Africa as Orient, but its meaning has gradually expanded into Asia. India and East Asia was not included in the category until more modern times.

Forth, Orientalism, presupposes that non-Western society that is in an inferior stage can progress only with the imitation and acceptance of Western civilization. Now, it is no longer appropriate to use this term indiscreetly in the globalized era in which the development of Asia is equal to that of the Occident.

Fifth, most images and costume styles of Asia, presenting in the West Fashion are not initiated from the perception that sees Asia as the inferior Other in light of characteristics of fashion even though the mentality of borrowed form is not preserved. The intrinsic attributes of the Asian Ethnic Look should be distinguished from those of Orientalism because Asian Ethnic Look is the Western costume, borrowing the image of Orient and style by being fascinated by Oriental aesthetics.

The initiative of World Fashion by the Western Europe, centering around Paris is out of vogue. Asia including Korea is not in a passive position, only presenting the Oriental image as a motif of Asian Look in the Western Fashion, but forms the central axis of World Fashion Industry and takes the lead in World Fashion as one of high fashion guides. It is the phenomenon of pluralism era and World forms the interdependent relationship with a new form. At least, the expression establishing the Orient as the subject, should be liberated from dichotomous prejudice, giving the priority to the West.

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요 약

Orientalism은 동양을 서양과는 다른 이질적인 대상, 괴상하고 후진적이며 수동적인 특성을 지닌 열등한 타자로 서양인의 무의식 속에 내면화되어 왔다. 아시아를 일정한 지배의 틀 속에 가두는 문화적 장치와 담론의 체계인 Orientalism은 원래 남유럽과 북아프리카를 포함한 서남아시아에 해당하는 서유럽 중심의 용어였으며, 비 서구사회는 서구문명을 수용함으로써만 발전할 수 있다는 논리의 사상이다. 따라서 이러한 용어의 무분별한 사용은 부적절하다. 또한 아시아의 이미지나 복식양식을 차용한 서구의 아시안 룩에 아시아 본래의 정신은 사라졌다고 하여도 아시아를 저급한 타자로 인식한 것에서 비롯된 것이 아니다. Asian Ethnic Look은 동양적 미학에 매료되어 동양의 이미지나 양식을 차용한 서양의 복식이므로 Orientalism의 속성과는 차이가 있다. 국내의 패션계에서는 이에 대한 분별없이 혼용하여 사용하고 있고, 특히 Orientalism Fashion 또는 Oriental Look이라고 자주 사용하고 있다. 아시아의 복식이나 이미지를 기괴하게 조작한 일부 특정한 복식만을 Orientalism Fashion 또는 Oriental Look이라 해야 하며, 이를 제외하고는 'Asian Look', 'Asian Fashion', 'Asian Ethnic Look' 등으로 바꾸어 쓰거나, 'Korean Look' 등의 개별 국가나 지역 명으로 바꾸어 쓰는 것을 분명히 해야 한다. 한국을 비롯한 아시아는 서구 중심의 수동적 입장이 아니라, 세계 패션산업의 중심축 중 하나로써 세계 패션을 리드하고 있다. 이제는 우리 스스로가 서구 중심의 이분법적 편견을 해체해 나가야 할 것이다.