

What is the Meaning of Black in Korean Traditional Mourning Dress?

The meaning of
black in
traditional
mourning dress

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Abstract *The meanings of colors vary with time and space. For the most important events in a person's life, such as wedding or funeral, people use color to symbolize their identities or roles. Traditionally, the colors of dress had indicated the wearer's age, class, or marital status in Korea. However, Korea's exposure to western cultures has affected in many dimensions of its modern history. Especially, influenced by social change, the traditional dress has undergone many modifications in forms, silhouettes, materials, and color. However, women's mourning dress has been maintained as a long lasting tradition and the use of white in mourning dress has been regarded as a norm until recently, while men have worn a regular black suit with a black tie. But, the shift from white to black in mourning dress has been observed in recent mourning practices. To examine this change of color in Korean traditional mourning dress, a historical approach utilizing multiple resources, such as interview, observations of events, documents, and archival records was applied.*

Key words *Black; Mourning dress; Korean traditional dress; Diffusion of innovation; Christianity*

Introduction

Human beings have utilized colors to construct meanings or symbols from the early stage of human culture. These symbols or meanings of color are varying with time and space. In particular, color has been employed to signify a power, with reference to social, political, and economic situation of the user. During the late Goryeo dynasty and Joseon dynasty, Korea fell into a tributary relationship with China (Tudor, 2012). This phenomenon was evaluated not only as the preference and favoritism for the Chinese culture, but also the approval of particular diplomatic relations that China established with its neighboring countries (Lee, 2012). Especially the tributary relationship with China influenced the dress code of the kings and the governmental officials of Korean dynasties. The restriction about the use of specific color for the royal families and officials, for example, the limitation of gold color for kings of Korea, indicated the power relationship between two countries (Lee, 2012).

Certain color also has been used as the expression of the role or status of wearer in social events. Especially, for the most important events in life, such as wedding or funeral, people have used color to

indicate their positions. As like other paths of rites, funerals have distinct features according to the cultures. One example is the use of different colors to fulfill the same symbolic functions, that is, the expression of mourning and woe. In the Eastern cultures, white has been the most ancient and widespread funereal color symbolizing innocence, simplicity and the purity of the soul and is still worn in China, Korea, Japan, and other parts of the East for this purpose (Taylor, 1983). The Chinese has believed it to be an inconspicuous color and that when worn by mourners to a funeral it will hide them from the unwelcome attentions of evil spirits that congregate on such occasions (Taylor, 1983). While white has been the traditional color of mourning in most of Asian countries, black has been associated with death and used for funeral in many Western countries including the United States (Mendes, 1999).

Since mourning dress is worn at the most traumatic moment in people's lives, one might think that grief and the terrible sense of loss of family or close relative would overwhelm any interest in sartorial detail (Taylor, 1983). However, mourning dress has been modified to reflect many changes that took place in Western society, and so did in Korean mourning dress. In 2009, Korea has lost two former presidents, Roh, Moo-hyun and Kim, Dae-jung and had funerals as national observances. During these practices, the widow of the President Roh, Kwon, Yang-sook, showed in her black Korean traditional dress (Figure 1), which was the opposite color of Korean traditional mourning dress and the funereal color of the West.



Figure 1.
Kwon, Yang-sook, the widow of President Roh, Moo-hyun (Courtesy of www.hankyung.com)

the past. Many researches have been conducted to examine the transition of Korean traditional dress reflecting the changes of society (e.g., Kim, Kim, & Cho, 2005; Kim, Hong, Yu, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Kim, 2011), but little has been focused on investigating the current shift of color in traditional mourning dress.

The change of color in Korean traditional mourning dress¹⁾ is not just a matter of adopting the taste of the West. The congruous blend of two different cultures, Korean and Western, neither preserving the original tradition nor completely adopting the other's tradition, can be viewed as an emblematic transition of Korean culture. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine the case of powerful association of two cultures, Korean and Western culture, in Korean traditional mourning dress. The specific questions for this research are as follows.

- 1) How have the traditional mourning dress and mourning practices been used to express wearer's social identity in Korea and in the Western including the United States?
- 2) Under what conditions, and by virtue of what attributes and values, has the change of color in Korean traditional mourning dress been occurring?
- 3) What are the meanings of this change in Korean society?

Freeburg and Workman (2010) claim the difficulties in identifying dress norms, since dress norm involves aesthetic impression, which is "unspoken, implicitly understood, taken-for-granted knowledge about how people should look" (p. 39). However, they suggest several ways to identify norms, such as the inference using printed materials, observation of sanctions, observation of efforts by members of society to conform to expectations, and observance of public reports of both desirable and undesirable behaviors regarding dress (Freeburg & Workman, 2010).

Black mourning dress can be interpreted as the violation against the social norms, since it is not "established rules of behavior or standards of conducts" in the Korean society (Kendall, 2007, p. 480). The purpose of this study is to explain the rationale behind the change of color in traditional mourning dress. For this purpose, a qualitative approach using multiple sources such as interviews, observations of events, documents, and archival records was applied. Diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) was used as the conceptual framework for the research.

Literature Review

According to Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992), the changes in types and properties of dress "occur related to factors such as economic cycles, trade patterns, fashion, demographic shifts in age and racial/ethnic

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- 1) The transition from traditional mourning dress to the Western style was more clear in men's mourning costume than women's dress. The change of color in women's traditional mourning dress is currently observable and this phenomenon is the focus of this research. Therefore, the use of term "Korean traditional dress" is limited to women's dress.

characteristics of consumers, and societal concern for conservation of natural resources, as well as changes in technology and beliefs” (p. 7). Mourning dress has been modified to reflect the wearer’s social positions, economic situation, and the attitude toward the changes of fashion as well as the changes in technology and social structure. By studying these changes of mourning dress both in the West and Korea, the way that the mourning dress transmits the information about the individuals and the societal changes can be scrutinized.

History of Mourning Dress: West

The color symbolism is culturally constructed and color functions as differently as the cultures themselves. Mourning dress has been one of the most distinctive examples that show the cultural differences. The historic costume, especially the available body from the late 19th century mourning dress collection located in the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota allows the authors to confirm that this is obvious (see Figure 2 and 3). While black dresses were used for funeral and mourning period, many of them were fully decorated and sometimes far beyond the bounds of necessity in authors’ imagination. Every piece was made up with very detailed trims and elaborated skill. In contrast with this, in Korea, mourning dress should be clean and humble. Mourners did not adorn themselves with dress, jewelry, or other accessory.

The first appearance of the color black in relation to death was its introduction by St. Benedict in the 6th century, wherein he admonished his monks to wear black to symbolize the spiritual darkness of the soul unilluminated by the sun of righteousness (DeLorme, 2004). By the 11th century, black capes with cowls were commonly worn for outdoor funeral processions, and by the 14th century, black was entrenched as a mourning color for grief, although reds, browns, and grays were still occasionally employed (DeLorme, 2004). During the 18th century, white became the color of mourning, although temporarily in western culture, as it was again replaced by black in the 19th century (DeLorme, 2004). In America around 1650, the mourning rites and dress were heavily influenced by the Puritanism. However, in 1700, the interest in romantic notions of death and by the power of mourning etiquette rose and funeral rites became elaborate affairs (Flanagan, 1992). According to the researches (e.g., DeLorme, 2004; Flanagan, 1992), Dresses and other fashion accessories could be purchased faster and in larger abundance than ever before. Displaying grief through dress and jewelry became the mode of mourning. How to properly mourn became subject matter for many etiquette manuals and news articles (Flanagan, 1992).

From the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century, as the American society experienced the industrial and economic growth, mourning dress ornamented with jet buttons, black crepe cape, black jet necklace and black hat pin became more than personal meaning (Flanagan, 1992). Its role was to define social class of the wearer. Originally mourning dress was meant to call attention to bereaved families’ loss by its somber color. But mourners had become very interested in the material world and class status by paying more attention to costume (Flanagan, 1992).



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Figure 2. & 3.
1890-99 Western mourning dresses (Courtesy of the Goldstein Museum of Design)

In Victorian era (1837-1901), in both England and America, mourning expression was highly ritualized (DeLorme, 2004). Wealthier widows could express their deepest sorrow by the more extensive use of the highest quality crape and women were viewed as “true vessels of grief” (DeLorme, 2004, p. 51). Books were written on the subject of appropriate clothing and jewelry to be worn for the various stages of mourning (DeLorme, 2004). This era has been described by historians as the period of the “Cult of Memory” or “Cult of Mourning” (Flanagan, 1992; DeLorme, 2004).

Popularization of mourning dress was a natural by-product of industry and time in the Western culture (Flanagan, 1992). Even though this decorative and showy tendency in funeral dress seems to be faded away at present, wearing black attire with some variations in the event of the death of a person still looks common in many Western societies and cultures. However, it has not been true for other parts of the world.

Westernization of Korea and Korean Christianity

To understand the change of color in traditional mourning dress, it is important to overview the socio-cultural context of Korean society as well as its history. Next, the historic background and

religious influences of Christianity and Confucianism to the Korean society are examined.

The emergence of Christianity in Korea has distinct characteristics and these are described in many researches (e.g., Oak, 2013; Tudor, 2012; Clark, 2000). During 1700s, *Silhak* (實學, the Korean school of practical learning), took shape, proposing social and institutional reform (Clark, 2000). Certain *Silhak* scholars established a Korean branch of the Catholic Church (Clark, 2000). Catholic Christianity first entered Korea via China, when Korean travelers made contact with Jesuit missionaries from the West and Chinese Catholics and returned home with some of their ideas to found the first Catholic congregation in Seoul (Clark, 2000). But Christianity was outlawed because it threatened the social order and broke the tenets of neo-Confucianism (Tudor, 2012). However, people kept risking their lives to join the Catholic church and the reasons were that these well educated Confucians were concerned that Korea was falling behind the times (Clark, 2000). Many of the early Catholics were also members of middle and lower classes, intelligent enough to know that as long as the Confucian system existed in Korea they would never be allowed to rise in society or realize their potential as human beings (Clark, 2000).

Although most Koreans saw Christianity as a strange and unwelcome creed, there were people who responded with active interest and became Korea's first Protestant Christians (Clark, 2000). The reasons for this interest were first, the spiritual appeal of Christianity, which had also attracted Koreans to Catholicism early in the century and second, Christianity's association with the West and modern things (Clark, 2000; Tudor, 2012). Western culture, particularly American culture, was considered modern, progressive, and rich (Tudor, 2012).

Korea's smaller towns and villages acquired churches in the early 1900s, as the result of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries (Clark, 2000). Students who were provided modern education by these missionaries became Christians and started churches in their home villages to convert the villagers (Clark, 2000). After the Korean War, there has been a rapid growth of Christianity (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2012). Several circumstances contributed the growth. First was that the urbanization which accompanied Korea's industrial revolution (Clark, 2000; Tudor, 2012). Religious organizations were the most effective components "in the process of urbanization" (Clark, 2000, p. 142). The new urban working class migrated from the country into the cities maintained their connection with their church members and sought community there (Clark, 2000). Second was that younger people and people who wanted to be modern and Western joined Christian churches. And third was the Christian commitment to human rights when Korea was suffering under a military dictatorship (Clark, 2000). Now, approximately 29 percent of the population in Korea is Christian including Catholic (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2012).

Confucianism in Korean Culture

Koreans in the family lives are highly influenced by Confucianism. According to the researchers (Clark, 2000; Tudor, 2012), Confucianism is a value system that seeks the harmonized relationships among people and places great stress on the continuity of the family and the connections between ancestors and

descendants (Clark, 2000). Confucianism in Korean society is not “a religion,” but “a type of humanism aimed at social ethics” and more precisely, “behavioral norms and morals” that distinguish right from wrong (Clark, 2000, p. 30). Confucius particularly taught that a person’s life is defined in relation to others, emphasizing the five relationships (五倫): ruler/subject, father/son, older/younger, husband/wife, and friend/friend (Tudor, 2012). But these five relationships are unequal, and in seeking to harmonize the relationships among people, Confucianism considers the needs of family, group, or community more important than the desire of an individual (Clark, 2000). Also Confucianism posits the family as the fundamental unit of society (Chang, 1997). In this regard, Confucianism teaches children that their lives are not their own but belong to their families and “questions of what to study, where to go to college, and whom to marry are all decisions that are made with the advice of parents” (Clark, 2000, p. 32).

For more than 500 hundred years, Joseon dynasty had controlled the governmental system and maintained the social order based on the neo-Confucianism (Kim, 2014). To the neo-Confucian scholars, dress was critical because it was the means to express the wearer’s ideology and philosophy and to maintain the social order rather than a tool of the adornment or protection (Kim, 2014).

During the Joseon dynasty, there were four ceremonial milestones in a man’s life: capping, wedding, funeral, and ancestral rituals (Clark, 2000). Among these, Neo-Confucianism placed great emphasis on the ancestor worship known as the *Jesa* (祭祀) as the duties of the male household head because of the stress on blood relations in Korea (Lee, 1989; Chang, 1997; Tudor, 2012). Especially, neo-Confucian scholars saw this rite as the opportunity to demonstrate respect for the ancestors (Tudor, 2012). The complete *Jesa* consists of several rounds of the ritual serving and bowing and involves statements addressed to the spirit that resemble prayers to the dead ancestor (Clark, 2000). According to the studies (Chang, 1997; Clark, 2000; Tudor, 2012), this feature of the ceremony has caused conflict between the Confucian tradition and Christianity in Korea, since Christians are supposed to reject spirits or worshipping those, in keeping with the Ten Commandments, even though many Christian churches are still run according to Confucian rules and values.

Another sign of Confucianism’s influence in modern Korean life is the relationship between individuals in school, in work, and in an organization (Tudor, 2012). Powerful loyalties based on the value of Confucianism unite people together and it works well with other religions. Christian churches, which are operated “according to Confucian rules governing mutual expectations and obligations among members (Clark, 2000, p. 36),” provide a network for people to belong. Especially, many middle-aged women who were excluded from public life have a sense of involvement in this organization (Tudor, 2012). Individuals in Christian organizations tend to be more homophilous than those in any other systems (Tudor, 2012). With these reasons, the new practice, such as black traditional mourning dress, can diffuse much faster from organization to organization through interorganizational networks and from individual to individual inside organization.

Color Symbolism

Koreans in pre-modern society were called as the white-clad race. White has been used as the symbol of Korean people representing their sentiments and spirits (Kim & Kim, 2006). Studies give several justifications for this inclination toward white clothes (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2006; Lee, 2014; Kim, 2010). Especially, Kim and Kim (2006) emphasize the characteristics of Korean people wearing white clothes has been based on the profound philosophy and tradition, not originated by the lack of the dyes nor imported from outside of the peninsula. Kim and Kim (2006) also examine the aesthetic values of white clothes in the aspects of sacredness, brightness, purity, assimilation with nature, and asceticism. The preference of white had began with primitive religions worshiping the sun and the heaven and lasted to the modern age near to the end of Joseon dynasty mixed with the various social, cultural and religious influences (Kim & Kim, 2006). However, at the end of the Joseon dynasty, Korea had to open its door to the outside and experienced various changes. One of the changes was the *uijegaehyeok* (the reform of dress system)

During the late Joseon dynasty, people regardless their social classes started to wear *durumagi* (Park, 2003). *Gapouijegaehyeok* (甲午改革) in 1894 had an influence to the system of dress, resulting the simplified dress reform (Lee, 2014). In the following year, according to *Eulmiuijegaehyeok* (乙未改革), black *durumagi* with tight sleeves was adopted as the uniform for governmental officials (Lee, 2014). The purpose of this policy by the royal court was to promote the humanism and equalitarianism by eliminating the social classification (Park, 2003). However, many conformist intellectuals at that time considered these reforms as the despair of cultural identity that had been sustained for the regime of Joseon dynasty (Kim, 2010). They were particularly opposed to the adoption of black color that had represented darkness in contrast with white (Kim, 2010). But, the adoption of black *durumagi* helped the traditional clothes and newly introduced Western dress to coexist (Lee, 2014). Up until now, black *durumagi* has been worn by activists, protestants, or politicians in many occasions. However, the adoption of black in women's traditional dress has not been observed until recently. Based on the literature reviewed, this research examines the origin of the black mourning dress and the process of diffusion.

History of Mourning Dress: Korea

As aforementioned, Korean has been known as the white-clad race. Source materials in archives (e.g., images of the late Joseon dynasty) show the unambiguous visibility of white clothes worn by Korean people in the late Joseon dynasty. Comparing the decorated and conspicuous purpose of Western mourning dress with that of Korean mourning dress, the mourning practices in Korean culture have been conventional and rather metaphysical for a long time. Especially, the mourning dress during the mourning and funeral performed psychological functions to heal bereaved family members' sorrow from the loss of the death (Cho, 1994).

The Korean traditional funeral rite was especially from the *Chujakareh* (朱子家禮, the book of

family rituals compiled by Zhu Xi) and traditional form and procedure influenced by the neo-Confucian values and rules were complex and had various symbolic meanings (Lee, 2000; Lee, 2005). According to the previous researches (e.g., Park & Cho, 1995; Cho, 1994; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2005), among the four ceremonial milestones in one's life, the funeral ritual had maintained its traditional form and procedure until the early 20th century. As a way of expressing the grief, mourner used to stay beside the tomb for a couple of years and this practice was regarded as social virtues. The number of years that the mourner (usually men played this role) could spend mourning the passage of his parent without working is suggestive of the mourner's social class (Lee, 2005). In modern society, it became unlikely to happen. The period of mourning became shorter inevitably. The practice usually lasts three to fourteen days: the day of death, the day(s) following, and the last day, which is the day of burial (Lee, 2005). During this period, the family members wear full mourning costumes made of loose-woven hemp cloth, white in color, made into pantaloons (*baji*), jackets (*durumagi*), and a special kind of peaked hat for men and skirt (*chima*) and top (*jeogori*) for women and this is the traditional form (*Gulgunjebok*, 届巾祭服) of neo-Confucian ritual (Kim, 2010, see Figure 4). This has continued until today.

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Figure 4.
Traditional mourning dress (Courtesy of www.yonhapnews.co.kr)

Conceptual Framework: Diffusion of New Idea

According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process in which a new idea is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. He claims that when new ideas are invented, diffused, and adopted or rejected, leading to certain consequences, social change occurs (Rogers, 2003). In traditional Korean society, white mourning dress has been the norm, which is “established rules of behavior or standards of conduct” (Kendall, 2007, p. 87). However, violation of a norm, that is, the black traditional mourning dress, is occurring. Members of Korean society show deviant behavior and

therefore, this can be considered as a new practice, an innovation. To interpret this phenomenon in current Korean society, as Rogers (2003) suggests, four main elements in the diffusion of innovation: the innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system, will be applied to analyze the change of color in traditional mourning dress. However, in our framework, innovation means simply a new idea, so the word, innovation, does not include any value judgment in it. This is because there is no reason to think that white or black in traditional dress is superior to the other.

Method

Data Collection

The purpose of this research is to identify the change of color in traditional mourning dress and its origination and diffusion in Korean society. To collect data, several resources were used. First, historic documents and archival records such as news articles regarding the black mourning dress were collected. Second, the images of black mourning dress depicting the funerals and mourning practices were collected through digital media (e.g., Internet websites, news articles, and blogs). The criterion for the selection was the color and form of dress worn by the intimate family members of the deceased. Sixty seven images of mourning practices and funerals between 2002 to 2014 were collected. Due to the accessibility to the public source, most of the images (55 images) were the photos of personalities' publicized funerals and mourning services. Third, interviews with three participants who had experienced the loss of family member and observed mourning practices and funerals were held. Participants were a nonprobability sample recruited using a convenience sampling. People were asked to respond to the questionnaire consisting the participant's demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and religion) and mourning practices and funerals (e.g., the date of funeral, the position in the household, the decision on color of mourning dress, and the reason of the color choice). Their age ranged from 60 to 70. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. The use of multiple methods is critical in this research, because there is a need to study the behaviors and thoughts of the wearers and their social contexts and settings with diverse viewpoints (Creswell, 2007). The collected data were analyzed using ethnographic content analysis. The similarities and differences of the images were integrated with the analysis of the interviews and archival records.

Data Collection and Findings

Based on the collected data and the current literature, the values and roles of religions, especially Christianity and Confucianism, were identified as the condition of the change. Next, the change of color in traditional mourning dress was examined based on the four main elements (the innovation, communication channels, time, and a social system) that influence the spread of a new idea proposed by Rogers (2003).

Innovation & Time

To estimate the beginning of the black mourning dress, two Family Ritual Acts that regulated the dress code in funeral and mourning practices were examined. In 1969, Act on the Simplified Family Rite was enacted by the Korean government. The purpose of this act was to urge families to stick to simpler observance. In this act, white traditional dress or black Western suit was recommended for both men and women (Korea Ministry of Government Legislation, 2014). In 1999, Family Ritual Standards Act replaced the previous Act on the Simplified Family Rite and it also says that white traditional dress or black Western dress is appropriate as the funeral dress (Korea Ministry of Government Legislation, 2014). These Acts show that white has been the norm of the traditional mourning dress for women until recently, while the use of black Western suit has been another option for women. Also the data show that while men adopted the black suits as their modern style mourning dress, women retained white traditional dress for longer period time. The data from the early 2000s display the coexistence of two different colors and forms, black Western suit for men and white traditional dress for women. But the new form in women’s traditional mourning dress is clearly observed around the middle of the decade. Rogers (2003) defines the concept of innovation as any object, idea, technology that is new. The use of color black for mourning dress is well-established practice in many Western countries. Also it became the norm for men’s mourning color during the late 20th century in Korea. The concept of an innovation’s newness can be “relative to place and population” (Diebel, 2011, p. 64). The adoption of black in women’s traditional dress can be considered as an amalgamation of two different cultures, the traditional dress of Korea and the color of West. It recently happened. Therefore, black is an innovation, a new idea in women’s traditional mourning dress, but not in men’ mourning suit. During the interview, two interviewees remarked the black tradition mourning dress was visible in current Korean society, especially was noticeable at the funerals of Christians. Therefore, black traditional dress might be also relatively new to other religious groups than Christian communities or organizations.

From the photos of mourning practice and funeral, the diffusion of black traditional mourning dress could be also detected (Table 1).

Table 1.
The Diffusion of Black Mourning Dress (from 2002 to 2014)

Color \ Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
White dress	1	1	3		1		1	1	2			1	1
Black dress	1		2	3	2		3	6	6	3	5	8	9
White & Black dress						1	1						
Black Western suit							1	2	1	1			

This table displays the increase among the sample photos in the number of black mourning dress worn by women during their mourning services and funerals. Interestingly, the data in 2007 and 2008 show the coexistence of white and black traditional dresses during the same mourning practice. As time passes, the decrease of white traditional dress in number is also observed. It marks the transition to the diffusion of new idea as group phenomenon from the individual adoption in the decision of traditional mourning dress.

Social System

To support the concept that black mourning dress became first dominant as a new practice among Korean Christians, the collected data from interviews, records, literature, news articles and websites of professional funeral service companies were examined. First, according to the interviews with participants who recently observed the funereal practices, people are usually asked to choose the color of their mourning dress between white and black, which are usually purchased to wear for the funereal ritual through a professional funeral service company. One of the interviewee commented that her decision of wearing white traditional dress for her mother-in-law's funeral over black was based on her Buddhist belief and the traditional norm for the practice. Second, many websites of professional funeral service companies (e.g., Kukmin funeral service company, Boram funeral service company, and JK funeral service) confirmed these observations. Some of the websites classify the black mourning dress for women and black suit for men as a modern style, while indicating the traditional mourning dress that is made of white or tan hemp cloth as a traditional style. Some categorize the different color options in traditional dress to indicate the wear's religion. About this phenomenon, Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism (2011) criticizes black mourning dress as anti-tradition and as the influence of Christianity and publicizes that there is no obvious meaning or motivation in it. This Buddhist organization recommends women to follow the traditional norm, namely, the white traditional dress (Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2011).

To sum up, black color is rapidly adopted by Christians or Catholics and it can be considered as a new idea and practice. However, this practice may be desirable for one adopter in one situation, but undesirable for another potential adopter whose situation differs. People in Christian organization might see the association of traditional dress form with the Western funereal color as desirable, since many Koreans still believe Christianity as "most instrumental in the country's modernization" (Tudor, 2012, p. 59). Therefore, as Rogers (2003) states, Christian organization is the main social system in which the innovation - decision occurred, though this new idea is not adopted or rejected by the entire Christians or Christian organization.

Communication Channels

On the other hand, the innovation is also diffusing to people who are not members in Christian community. Protesters, for example, adopt black traditional dress by means of expressing their grief and

woe during the demonstrations. From the Figure 1, which shows Kwon, Yang-sook, the widow of the President Roh, and also known as a Buddhist, and other images that show the wearers' Buddhist religion, the diffusion of innovation to the outside of Christian organizations is evidenced. In the process of diffusion, public figures including Kwon seem to act as the opinion leaders for the new idea, because they are exposed to various forms of external communication and oftentimes have higher socioeconomic status. Personalities such as celebrities and politicians, serve as social models whose innovative behaviors are imitated by many other members of the society. Interviewees state that the change of color in traditional mourning dress is quite observable. Observing this new practice might stimulate people's awareness of the innovation and accelerate the rate of the diffusion (Rogers, 2003; Diebel, 2011).

Consequently, the individual adoption of the innovation seems to be affected both by an individual's characteristics as well as by the nature of the social system in which the individual is a member. As a result, the decision about whether to adopt or reject black traditional dress is still depending on the individual's choice.

Discussion

Color communicates the characteristics of an individual, society, and culture. Color also reflects time and place. Especially, color in dress has been used as a powerful and effective tool to transmit the information about personal identity, socio-economic situation of society, and even political relations among countries. This has also been true for mourning dress throughout different cultures and times.

In the Western culture, the industrialization and consumerism affected the meaning of death in society and material aspects of mourning. Consequently, the focus shifted from death and the physical obligation of caring for the deceased to the decorative exhibition of mourning dress to express the mourner's identity. The wealthy decorated themselves with the mourning dress and artifacts both to express their grief and claim their position in society. The middling and lower income groups wore it to be in vogue, compete with each other, and mimic the wealthy.

In the Korean culture, strict conformity to tradition was important in the mourning process. The length of the mourning itself was regarded as indicative of the socio-economic class of the mourners. Therefore, even though the period of mourning practice became shorter inevitably in modern society of Korea, people have remained wearing traditional mourning dress made of loose-woven hemp cloth and white or tan in color. Humble dress could replace the verbal expressions of grief and physical acts of mourning.

However, in recent years, the mourning dress that was once regulated by the social norm shows the features of stylistic variation, that is, white or black in color. This research found that the transition of color to black in traditional mourning dress was first the influence of Christianity. Christian organization became the main system in which the new idea occurred, though this innovation has not been adopted or rejected by all Christians or Christian organizations. Thus, the decision about whether to adopt or reject the black mourning dress still depends upon individual choice. In the background,

Westernization, industrialization, religion, and value of philosophy as a whole have influenced the shift towards the use of black in women's mourning dress.

As Maynard (2004) states that consumption of dress can be a form of creolization, where nothing is dominant and nothing is entirely traditional, black traditional mourning dress as a hybrid dress form shows the current feature of Korean society in transition between tradition and innovation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present research examined that the change of color in women's traditional mourning dress was dominated among Christians and has been diffused to the outside system. The emergence of this practice could be considered as the course of action responding to the societal change and as the creolization of two different cultures, which are Korean and Western cultures.

Previously mentioned, there are difficulties in identifying the point or place where black mourning dress has begun with any degree of certainty, because dress norms are subjective and inferred sympathetically (Freeburg & Workman, 2010). The diffusion of black mourning dress is now transpiring. Currently, the values or perceptions that underlie this change are not captured yet. Regarding to the method, this research is not providing a generalizable foundation. Therefore, there will be other possibilities to investigate this change in traditional mourning dress using various resources for further research. Certainly, the change of color in women's traditional mourning dress is negotiated and adopted by the wearers. It would be intriguing to study the role and place of the women in the family when they adopt the black mourning dress in their mourning practice and the relative advantage of black traditional mourning dress over other options. Another suggestion is to investigate whether participants consider this change as a socially desirable practice or as a violation of the tradition based on their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, education, or religion). These suggestions for further study may address limitations for the current study and the potential to contribute to the understanding of the societal and cultural changes in Korea.

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