

Korean Traditional Clothing: Hanbok

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Fashion has been described in many different ways, such as movies, sporting event, and singers and it symbolizes society and social change in movies and sporting events in general or movies, events, and celebrities use specific accessories and fashion to express what they want. For instance, the Korean movie named *The Royal Tailors* is not well-made and popular movie, but it deals with Korean traditional clothing Hanbok as main topic and its story is a fiction made by a director of this movie.

### *The context of The Royal Tailors*

This movie describes Korean royal family, their clothing, and tailoring room in royal family's house based on 1700's in Korean history. There are basically two main characters who described as designers in the movie. One character's name is Dolseok, who is a director in tailoring room and pictured as a conservative designer, whereas the other character named Gongjin Lee is pictured as a new, innovative designer in the movie. Dolseok, has led the tailoring room for thirty years in royal family's house, he has made clothing only for royal families and upper class, and he believes there are strict rules for fashion that cannot be changed, but it should be stuck to traditional styles. On the other hand, Lee has been worked in outside market for everyday people, especially for escort girls. Under these basic information, one day a queen in 1700's Joseon Dynasty that is one of Korean history makes problems on her husband (king)'s clothing while checking this clothing. To return its original condition, she calls Dolseok first and she excuses him to fix it in one day. But, he gives her a negative answer because fixing it in one day is impossible for him. So, she calls Lee to the royal family's house and excuses him to fix it in one day and he gives her sure and positive answer. About his answer, Dolseok doubts about Lee's talents and he doesn't believe Lee's answer. However, next day, Lee finishes the clothing as he

promises her and she gives the clothing to the king and the king is happy because the clothing's feeling is new and it is well-fitted to his body. So, Lee stays in the royal family's house, he tries to make a new, beautiful, comfortable clothing for the queen as a lady. This new style is getting popular in royal family's house, as well as in the market outside among public, Dolseok feels competition and threat of his status as director from Lee although Lee doesn't care at all.

Dolseok tries to expel Lee out of royal family's house, Lee is eventually expelled from there, but Dolseok stays there and he even earns higher than his status in royal family's house. From this movie, I'd like to select two styles of Hanbok that is made by Lee and Dolseok.

### *The Two Garments*

As the main character Gongjin Lee is an innovative designer in the movie, he makes many Korean traditional shirts called JeoGoRi and dresses and skirts called Chima, but new styles for the queen. In general, the dress, Chima and JeoGoRi by the director Dolseok are very colorful like red and green and it has patterns, but it has no detailed accessories and very uncomfortable for daily life because its size is not fitted into individuals and it has no details to express women's body lines. A line of the dress or skirt is flare and JeoGoRi's size is quite big and it does not reveal women's beautiful body lines. In contrast, clothing by Lee is definitely different.

It's still colorful, but it is very elegant. The dress and Chima have bell line and the amount of fabric for inside of dress and Chima are enough to express bell line. Details of JeoGoRi is changed a lot too; its total length and width are shorter and thinner than before, it has many pearls on the collars and sleeves as an accessory. It is also very well fitted into individuals which means it expresses women's body very well and it makes the queen ladyish as a woman. Even in the movie, this new style clothing gives the queen more confidence as a woman and

shows her power and elegance as the queen. Even this new style especially the dress and Chima is more selected by people today when they need to wear the clothing because it is more comfortable and more like modern style and it is more beautiful. But, unfortunately, most people, including me today just call it Hanbok like other Hanbok when they wear it although it has another name.



### *The Name and Origins of The Garments*

In Hanbok, there are many different names within group classes, seasons, and styles. But, most people who do not know Hanbok well or are not interested in Hanbok among Koreans, they just call all different kinds of the clothing as the Hanbok. Because there are too many Hanbok style for different functions and classes that I do not know well too and because it is based on the movie, I'll explain you only one style of Hanbok that I have written so far and is for royal family and very high upper class.

Its name is JoongJeon Hanbok or DangEe Hanbok based on Korean history. In 1392, a new country named Jo Seon Dynasty was founded in Korean history and queens were called as JoongJeon during this era. Also, queens mostly wore this clothing during this era. So, it is called

as JoongJeon Hanbok or DangEe Hanbok and it has been existed since 1390's, but there is no exact data for when the garment's style is changed from old to new during the JoSeon Dynasty. As the exact date of the clothing's style change is unclear, fashion designer is unknown too.

### *The Fashion Designer or Costume Artist*

A designer who made the JoongJeon Hanbok first in the history was not known well, but all costumes (Hanbok) used in the movie was directed by Sangkyeong Jo, a fashion designer in South Korea. She is the fashion designer, but she makes and directs clothing for movies and musicals in general. With her career, she also tries to demonstrate Hanbok's diverse style and colors in the movie "The Royal Tailor".

### *Color Illustrations*

The special clothing JoongJeon Hanbok (DangEe Hanbok) in the movie shows many different styles, as well as colors. Its colors are mostly very vivid like clear red, yellow, green, and blue like Hanbok in general, but one thing you need to focus on is that the designer and movie director try to give a change using new colors and mixed colors that are not normally used well. Black JeoGoRi (shirt) and white Chima (skirt) combination from the previous image, for instance, are very unusual because white JeoGoRi and black Chima are matched normally from the history.

To express natural colors like lilac and yellow green, they also use natural dyed method and they graft these colors (lilac and yellow green) onto the JoongJeon Hanbok. Moreover, if the clothing with vivid colors is used for the queen's clothing in normal, the designer and the director use ivory and white color that are not vivid at all for the queen because they would like to show

the garment with non-vivid colors is also able to show the queen's power and elegance enough or the clothing with non-vivid colors can even show the more power and elegance of the queen than using the garment with vivid colors. The designer and director also mix match colors of the clothing like red with yellow green to break the given color matching like red with black or dark brown before.



If you see the clothing's colors now, you just think I see there is the clothing with many different colors and design. To make the colors and design, though, it was not easy at all at that era because there were only natural fibers by human hand working.

### *Natural or Manufactured fibers*

Before 1980's when synthetic fabrics were not made yet, most clothing was made by fabrics from nature like animals' skin, hair, plants' stems, roots, and so on. Korean traditional clothing's total history also started from 300's, so all fabrics like hemp and silk were from nature and Korean used different fabrics for all different seasons and functions like today.

For spring and autumn, the garment was generally made with silk and cotton, whereas for summer it was generally made with hemp and cotton and for winter silk and cotton were still used to make the clothing, but to protect from cold weather, Koreans put more cotton inside of outers or made outers using animals' skin and hair. As you read, although silk and cotton were normally used for most seasons, different fabrics were used for some other seasons. This is because of fabrics' functions.

In summer, the weather was very hot and people had more sweat than other seasons and that could make fungi. For this case, if the clothing was made with hemp, this natural fiber could cover these problems; hemp did absorb and discharge water, prevented ultraviolet rays, had antibiosis to protect itself and human's body from fungi, and had a strong durability, so it was good for warm and hot weather like summer. Likewise, in the winter, because the weather was very cold, to cover Koreans' bodies from the cold, they needed something very warm like animals' skin and hair and putting more cotton into outers as these fabrics made keep warm naturally. However, during spring and autumn, they didn't need to consider about the weather problems, so they mostly wore the clothing made with cotton and silk that was proper for spring and autumn because cotton and silk were suitable for durability and microorganism damage although these fabrics absorbed water well. But, because the clothing with natural fabrics is too expensive, since 1900's with technology development, fabrics for the garment are changed.

Natural fabrics like hemp, cotton, and silk are changed into regenerated fabric and synthetic fabric like satin. Although natural fabrics like cotton and silk are still used for the clothing today, manufactural fabrics like satin and hemp with polyester that are cheaper and easier to make the garment are more used for the clothing. Also, because manufactural fabrics contain both of natural fabric and chemical fabric, it still has a beautiful luster and a good drapery. Though, natural and

manufactured fabrics are made in different ways although these can be combined and have similar functions.

### *Construction*

Since there was no machine to make chemical fibers before 1980's, every natural fabric for the garment was made by handcrafted process. Labors or servants under upper groups and farmers harvested plants' seeds, stems and made animal's skin and hair clean or merchants at that era brought plants' seeds and silkworm from other countries to Korea and then artisans and general people, including servants sewed to make the clothing by their hands. However, after 1980's, with technology improvement, almost all fabrics are manufactured.

After machines are invented with technology development, synthetic fibers that chemical substance only exists without natural fibers are made or regenerated fibers (manufactured fibers) like Rayon and Satin that chemical and natural fibers are combined are made. After these new fibers are come out, the new fibers are more selected for the garment although natural fibers are still used among Korean Hanbok designers. To make natural and manufactured fibers, there is simple or complicated techniques used today.

### *Technology*

Today, as manufactured fibers are made by machine, natural fibers are made by machine too. For instance, cotton is harvested mechanically and then is stripped the whole cotton ball including trash like stem's leaves or the cotton is mechanically picked using a cotton picker without any damage. After that, the cotton is wrapped and then shipped to the ginning mill. At the ginning mill,

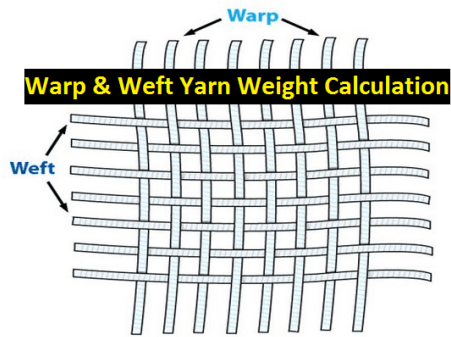


the cotton seed is removed and cotton fibers are cleaned, dried, graded, and packed and then spun into thread to be woven into fabric for the clothing (*itextile; "Cotton - Production"*). As you see, there, even though natural fibers are made by machine today, is no added chemical substance. However, manufactured fibers' case is different.

Whether or not fibers are regenerated or manufactured, chemical substance is added into the fibers or the whole fibers are made by chemical substance when the fibers are produced as I mentioned before. For example, rayon and satin are major fabrics of the garment and they are regenerated fibers. Both are made based on cellulosic materials like bamboo and silk with chemical substance like polymer. But, techniques to make them are different.

In rayon's case, the wet spinning method is used; cellulose xanthate is dissolved in soda to allow to obtain the right viscosity and then the viscous fluid is filtered and extruded through a spinneret into an acid fluid. After that, the acid goes through the filaments to remove xanthate and to form rayon filaments and then the filaments are drawn or stretched and washed (*itextiles; "Rayon, Modal and Lyocell - Production"*). However, in the case of satin, as it is from silk, it is weaved.

First of all, cocoons are boiled and then silk fiber is separated out using machine. Machine unwinds the silk thread from cocoons. The process by which silk fiber is obtained is called "Reeling the silk". After that, the satin fabric is produced with the yarns through a warp-faced weaving technique; warp yarns are floated over weft yarns (*itextile; "Silk - Production", utsavpedia; "Satin Fabric"*). As you read, the fibers are made in different techniques. So, their properties are different too when they are formed into the garment. (Pictures are below).



### *Physical Properties*

Fiber's properties effect physical appearance depending on what kind of clothes are made with certain specific fabrics. The most common used fiber to make clothing is cotton because cotton blended with polyester is an easy-care fabric that has the absorbency of cotton and the strength and wrinkle resistance of polyester and natural cotton fabrics have a medium durability, do not irritate skin, and are inexpensive although the fabrics have very low drape and are weak at moths and microorganism. So, for these reasons, cotton was used among low and middle class in Korea for the garment in the past too.

Because of low drapery, the clothing made with cotton fabric did not make nice physical appearance for humans. But, as I mentioned before, because it was cheap and it was comfortable to work and because Koreans did not need to take care of the clothing made with the fiber, poor and middle class wore the garment with the fabric in their daily lives for almost all seasons, except for summer. In other words, they more focused on the clothing's function than physical appearance. Poor and middle class wore not only the garment made with cotton for its function, but they also wore the clothing made with hemp for function during summer. (Pictures are below).



Although cotton fiber was hydrophilic, the clothing with cotton was very hot in summer. But, unlike cotton, the garment made with hemp was not hot because it absorbed water well as it was hydrophilic too. Although its function was good for summer, its physical appearance worked less than silk did, but better than cotton fiber. So, upper class used hemp fiber for summer and cotton fiber to fill in outers for winter, but not as their daily clothing. They mostly used a different fabric which was silk as their daily clothes.



Not all, but some silks, such as silk crepe are drapable, very soft, have high luster, and are expensive, so the fabric makes visible and beautiful physical appearance and luster for humans when the fiber is grafted onto the garment. Because of its properties, special class like upper class and royal families in Korea preferred the garment made with the fiber as their daily clothing in the past. If they wore the garment, silk's properties gave them elegance as upper class and royal

families and its characters particularly satisfied women because the Hanbok made with silk made women's bodies look ladyish and dazzling. In other words, upper class and royal families more concentrated on how they looked than the garment's function. Because of the fabric's properties, the garment is still made with the fabric today, but it is blended with synthetic fibers like polyester with technology development.



A fabric blended with synthetic fibers called satin produces the garment easier and cheaper, but has almost same natural silk's properties. So, it still makes humans' bodies look elegant and dazzling when they wear the clothing. Also, since the fabric is cheaper than natural silk, Korean Hanbok designers are attempting to make the Hanbok's new style using the fabric; they are trying to make new colors mixing the existing colors and controlling the garment's length from long to short because the designers can less consider about the fabric's cost when they make their works as the satin fiber has better mechanical properties than only natural silk.

### *Mechanical Properties*

As I mentioned before, satin and some silk like silk crepe are drapable, but most silk especially wild silk are not draped well in general because the fabrics' drape change as they are influenced

by yarn and fabric structure and finishes. Also, as the fabrics' flexibility is quite low, its resiliency is low too. However, unlike its flexibility and resiliency, the fabrics have good dimensional stability when washed or dry cleaned, have good elastic recovery, tenacity and good flat abrasion resistance, but poor flex abrasion resistance. Although silk and satin are weak at flexibility and resiliency, the fabrics' mechanical properties are better than cotton and flex (hemp).

Cotton and hemp fabrics are quite similar; both wrinkle very easily because their resilience, flexibility, and elastic recovery are low, so both can be drapable, but flex is less flexible than cotton. Also, like drapery, they show different performance in dimensional stability, tenacity, and abrasion resistance; cotton fiber is lower than flex in dimensional stability and tenacity and cotton fiber has quite moderate abrasion resistance because of its medium strength and low flexibility, whereas flex fiber has a good flat abrasion resistance, but it starts to degrade at edges and creases of folded fabric. As you read so far, fabrics' mechanical properties are not easy to control in order to make the Hanbok as well as other garments. However, Koreans and other people in the world had made their own clothing using the fabrics to adapt to their culture and external conditions they were in. However, despite their efforts, people today do not try to keep those traditional clothes. For this, many traditional clothing designers worry too according to my aunt, who was a Korean traditional clothing maker (not exactly designer).

### *Conclusion*

When I met her in my country in last vacation, she worried for the garment was deprived of its position in Korean culture by brand clothing. Although Korean government tries to make special events for keeping and popularizing the garment, it is also limited only in central city and big cities in South Korea. Except for these cities, in other small cities, people especially young people are still not interested in the garment so much. So, the traditional clothing is in danger now and traditional clothing designers are attempting to design new style, make new colors like lilac, and use more diverse and cheaper fabrics like satin so that they can keep the clothing within Korean culture. The situation for the clothing that I heard from her was quite serious and the conversation motivated me to write about this topic.

The garment today, even though designers are doing their best, is not still more selected than in the past by Koreans because most Koreans particularly young Koreans from under eighteen years old to thirties prefer brand clothing as their daily clothing because brand clothing is more comfortable, better to identify who they are, and there are more options for their favorite style. I understand they prefer brand clothes since I prefer the clothes as my daily clothing too. However, my point is that they must try to wear the traditional garment at least for Korean holidays and special days, such as family events. I also do not wear the clothing as my daily clothing, but I wear it on Korean holidays and for special family events at least. If they keep looking away from Hanbok, then they will lose their own culture and history one day since the garment also reflects Korean's culture and history and it is not only for Koreans, but also for all the people in the world.

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