

WESTERN & NONWESTERN DRESS: A RE-EXAMINATION & A PROPOSED TYPOLOGY

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Ph.D. dissertations are an untapped resource for research about non-western dress and textiles. The study of nonwestern dress and textiles draws on several disciplines, from textiles and clothing to history, education, art history and anthropology. Forty-two representative dissertations were selected from these disciplines for analysis. A bibliography with conclusions drawn from this research is in process of publication.

As a consequence of this research, we realized the concept of "nonwestern" when applied to dress and textiles is poorly defined. A review of relevant literature reinforced this notion: the perspectives of authors of histories of western dress correspond to the philosophic and religious traditions of western civilization. The image emerges of European dress as a tree with roots (its origins), trunk (its evolution/development), and branches (its influence and spread worldwide). This historic view is incomplete because the impact of Asian and Islamic cultures, ideas, and inventions is minimized or ignored.

Judeo-Christian traditions have created a barrier between ourselves and the rest of the world. Implicitly or explicitly we have taken an "us" versus "them" attitude to the study of dress. This distinction is artificial and created by an ethnocentric bias. The distinction, in turn, limits one's understanding of dress.

Nevertheless, the western perspective has been useful in presenting concepts of style and fashion. Fashion serves as a theoretical concept that illuminates an order about change. The study of fashion in dress isolates aesthetic change over time for those people considered as Western.

We propose an alternative typology that is more value-free and less ethnocentric. This typology yields a broader, less anachronistic definition of dress, making it more workable cross-culturally. A two-by-three chart relates the element of time against scope of research. Synchronic and diachronic perspectives situate time either in the ethnographic present or along an historic continuum. Scope of research qualifies the investigator's focus along a three-step scale from specific to abstract, from research on an ethnic or social group to research on the functions of dress or the history of technology.

In conclusion, we stress our belief in the value of students continuing the study of western fashionable dress, but we emphasize that study be designed to acknowledge the comprehensive definition of dress. We feel the research typology presented is particularly important in view of the growing inter-connectedness of people worldwide.

CORRESPONDENT INFERENCE: AN EMPIRICAL APPLICATION

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Correspondent inference has been suggested as one way of understanding observer reactions to clothed appearances. This perspective concerns the effects produced by an actor's actions, and analyzes the relationship between these effects and traits inferred by others about the actor. A