

# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

## 透過韓國感知亞洲：流行服飾與音樂創作中女孩主體的跨 在地生產 研究成果報告(精簡版)

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中文摘要：近年來，韓國流行服飾成了台灣年輕女性與上班族的每日穿著與消費選擇。無論是實體或是網路商店，韓國流行服飾皆是透過定期前往東亞各服飾批發地（首爾、東京、大阪、香港、廣州、虎門、曼谷）而流進台灣市場。本研究的目的是在於解釋「韓國時尚」的跨國與跨在地生成，本研究首先將服飾採購以及店家放置在台灣的跑單幫歷史，接著，從中國製造業與南韓全球化政策兩個脈絡解釋：東大門是如何成為亞洲最大流行服飾批發地點。最核心的研究發現在於分析韓國服飾在台北師大商圈中的鑲嵌。師大商圈在 2009 到 2011 年間經歷了韓國流行服飾店暴增的現象，除了娛樂影視產業帶起的韓流解釋之外，本研究認為有必要探索成衣業者與採購者的跨國經驗，特別當台灣與韓國的政治、經濟與文化關係充滿了緊張的狀態。其實，「韓國服飾」在台灣有著相當寬廣的定義，除了韓國製、在韓國以外、仿韓系的成衣也在內。對於習慣前往東大門的台灣跨國採購人員來說，韓國流行服飾的意義有三，其一是生意上、能賺錢的考量，對於在意時尚意涵，或是經營頗具個人風格的店家來說，韓國流行服飾則挑戰了他們的既定印象與採購習慣。對於熟悉亞洲各地服飾批發競爭情形的大盤商，韓國雖獨具布料與快速時尚的優勢，但他們會更靈活的運用亞洲服飾集散地的知識，創造市場優勢。

中文關鍵詞：流行服飾，時尚工業，韓系時尚，零售採購，跨國採購，成衣業，東大門，師大

英文摘要：As part of the decade-long rise of South Korean popular culture in East Asia, Korean fashion has gained currency among young women as a trendy, practical choice of everyday wear. In Taiwan, the abundant supply of clothing marketed explicitly as 'Korean fashion' in offline and online retail markets has been facilitated by small-scale apparel buyers and shop owners who regularly visit wholesale fashion and garment markets in Seoul and other East Asian cities, primarily Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Humen, and Bangkok. This paper is an attempt to explain the transnational and translocal making of Korean fashion in Taipei. The business activities of the small-scale apparel buyers and shop owners are first contextualized as part of Taiwan's history of shuttle-trading. I then discuss how current flows of people and goods have been shaped by

manufacturing and labor practices in China and the state's globalization policies in South Korea, which have made Dongdaemun an attractive fashion sourcing destination in Asia.

At the heart of the paper is an analysis of how Korean fashion became embedded in the Shida area of Taipei—a university neighborhood with an active night market that experienced an explosion in the number of clothing shops featuring Korean fashion between 2009 and 2011. While the Korean Wave and the decline of Taiwan's apparel industry contributed to the merchants' choice of Seoul as a sourcing destination, what does the frequent border-crossing mean given Taiwan and Korea's ambivalent political, economic, and cultural relations? In Taiwan, Korean fashion is understood liberally to include made-in-Korea clothes, Chinese-made knock-offs, and clothes made under various authorized material and labor arrangements in and outside of South Korea. It carries three disparate connotations for retail buyers and shopkeepers in Taipei. For the start-ups, Korean fashion is simply an a la mode taste that guarantees business. For individualist fashion-loving entrepreneurs, Korean fashion challenges the aesthetic habits formed by Japanese fashion. For those toiling in the transnational reality of the apparel and fashion business, Korea is a formidable fashion and fabric sourcing stopover, but it is by no means the only wholesale destination in the region.

英文關鍵詞： fashion industry, fashion clothing, Korean fashion, retail buyers, transnational buying, garment business, Dongdaemun, Shida

**The Uses of “Korean Fashion”:  
Trans-local Laboring of Clothing Business Buyers and Retailers in Taiwan<sup>1</sup>**

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**“Don’t you know? This street has become a Korean street. It’s said that ‘sell Korean clothes or get ready to fold’”~BB, boutique owner in Shida, 3 years**

**“700 shops already!”~Madam Chen, boutique owner in Shida, 11 years**

BB is a young woman in her mid-20s who runs a tiny, about 9 square meter, boutique in the night market south of the National Taiwan Normal University, known by the locals as Shida (Teacher’s College). She sells trendy clothes and accessories for young women and men, acquired on monthly trips to Seoul. The more experienced Madam Chen, 51, advertises Tokyo fashion at her store and travels to Hong Kong and Tokyo to stock up. Her boutique also carries clothes bought from Dongdaemun, the biggest fashion market in South Korea, but she wants to get rid of her Korean merchandise.

Though a bit on the hyperbolic side, BB’s and Madam Chen’s comments reveal, from the merchants’ viewpoint, a slice of the market reality which they also help shape. For many years, Shida night market was a lively area with food and specialty merchandise stalls, American and Asian cuisine restaurants, independently owned cafes, bars, unique shops, bookstores, and parks. Compared to other night markets in Taipei, Shida is smaller, and was not actively promoted as a tourist attraction until the late 2000s. In the early 2000s, Shida night market was still a low-key, relaxed atmosphere that drew visitors who enjoyed treasure hunting in the leisurely and settling atmosphere. From 2010 to the end of 2011, many first-floor properties underwent fast remodeling and became spaces for lease. The newest tenants in town—mainly clothing sellers but also restaurant operators—made Shida brighter, louder, and faddish. This fashion-sensitive reputation is new to the university area known for its artsy and education-minded population. Scent of “Koreanness” can be felt in the Seoul-referencing retail signs, Korean-style fashion merchandise, and the sound of K-pop music. There may not be 700 Korean fashion shops, but to Madam Chen,

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<sup>1</sup> The completion of this research project will not be possible without many people’s help. I am indebted to the numerous shop owners in Shida who spoke with me. I am indebted to Hyunjoon Shin, Ho Jung Choo, Haerang Noh, and Ejin Wu, who helped me in various ways during my fieldwork in Seoul. This research project is funded by National Science Council, Taiwan.

who started her business before Shida got its mini facelifts, it did present an under-siege situation.

Since fall 2011, the identity and image of Shida night market has become a matter of intense public debate and protests. This development, which implicates the meanings of “Korean fashion” in Taiwan, is a point I will address in my paper. The main purpose of my study is to tease out the “Korean connection” in Taiwan’s garment industries and retail fashion market. Specifically, my research foregrounds the business activities of retailers<sup>2</sup> who make regular buying trips to Seoul and other East Asian garment markets such as Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Humen (China). In this paper, I will first contextualize the merchants’ border-crossing experiences in Taiwan’s history of shuttle trading as well as in Korea scheme of globalization. I will then analyze the ways “Korean fashion” has become embedded and de-nationalized in the immediate marketplace, fashion industry, and consumer culture of Taiwan. In Korea and Taiwan’s ambivalent political, economic, and cultural relations, “Korean fashion” facilitated enterprising opportunities, economic incentives, and aesthetic inspirations. Yet this relationship is elusive and one-way. The translocal laboring of Taiwanese merchants is nonetheless incorporated by the Korean fashion empire on the global margin. As Taiwan’s fashion industries dry up, the more experienced merchants flexibly maneuver the inter-connected Asian fashion industries. For the young retailers, the lack of communication among those with a stake in Taiwan’s fashion industry may be one reason why “Korean fashion” could not have been “more useful” in the sense of facilitating resources. The Shida night market controversy illustrates the intersection of “Korean fashion” and local spatial and cultural struggles.

### Korean Chic, Korean Chick

“Korean fashion” announced its arrival in Taiwan not through a designer brand’s flagship store or a fashion authority. Its arrival is mediated by the decade-long presence of Korean Wave entertainment and a youth-led fashion culture blending the activities of information exchange, sartorial display, and commerce. A major overseas market for Korean Wave, Taiwan has been actively circulating South Korean popular culture products (e.g., drama, reality programs, K-pop music and videos, celebrity, games) and consumer technologies. Korean fashion style, beauty care, and cosmetic surgery are often listed among other successful examples of export in the branding discourse on Korean Wave (Liu 2002; Chen 2004; Kong 2005; Kuo 2011). Analyzing the looks of popular K-pop

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<sup>2</sup> Used interchangeably with buyers and boutique shop owner or operators

singers in Japan, Judy Park (2011) further identifies slim silhouette and cute looks to be approachable and easily copied fashion elements. Jun, a graduate student at my university distinguished by a consistent Korean fashion look—lace-adorned chiffon shirt with puffy sleeves, pastel-color mini skirt, and high-waist belt—said she began to practice a particular Korean style after watching the TV drama, *Prosecutor Princess* (Interview, May 3, 2012). One of my informants, an experienced merchant who reluctantly organizes group tours for buyers interested in Korea, simply sighed: “We’ve all been branded” (Interview, March 17 2012).

Though the theory of branding does not seem far off, the enthusiastic ways young people share fashion information and buy clothes online cannot be overlooked. “Authentic Korean” (*zheng-han*), “Korean-style” (*han-feng*), and “Korean silhouette” (*han-ban*) have been popular keywords in online trade, bulletin board, and everyday style blogosphere. With their quick product updates and copious images featuring models in chic scenarios, some shopping websites have virtually become a fashion media of their own.<sup>3</sup> They might not be as glossy as magazines like *Vogue* or another popular magazine from Japan, *Vivi*, but they are up to speed and allows easy price comparison. Different from the purpose of branding, which placed emphasis on the celebrity looks and the trickle-down effect, Korean fashion blogging in Taiwan pays attention to the fashion styles of ordinary Korean girls. This figure is often nicknamed “han-nyu” (Korean chick, also resembling the sound of greeting in Korean), and her looks are documented and analyzed in detail by bloggers who could be a clothing seller, a tourist, and a fashionista all at the same time.<sup>4</sup> The construction of “han-nyu” in everyday fashion blogging helps authenticate the aesthetic instinct of Korean women in real time. “This is how Korean chicks wear it.” It also helps sellers identify new merchandise seen on real Korean women. “Korean fashion” doesn’t get more “real” than this.

“Korean fashion” for women is an ambiguous term in Taiwan. Easily bought from online shopping sites and night markets, it means trendy and affordable daily wear for office workers, students, and young people. At the same time, it commands boutique value partly from being associated with South Korea’s rising cultural and economic status, and partly from being “handpicked and carried back from abroad” by boutique owners, who are mostly young women. Fashion boutiques advertising goods from abroad could be opened anywhere

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<sup>3</sup> This takes several forms, such as e-new from auction sellers, trade by facebook, and online retailers like Cherrykoko. Some of them use professional modes. Some buyers double up as models.

<sup>4</sup> Some would have a separate auction and blog. Some examples: <http://ukiki1984.pixnet.net/blog>

(picture of muzha, Xinzhu), but they are more likely concentrated near major shopping areas, such as Ximending, Dongqu, and Banciao in greater Taipei. Sometimes, the stores are closed with a sign indicating the owner is on a buying trip (picture). Other times, the shops would be attended by an employee while the buyer runs a parallel business online. A business technique known as “Online with Korea,” the buyer abroad sets aside a time frame to post new merchandise seen right from the wholesale market in Seoul and take orders from customers in Taiwan. In this case, the transnational schedule of the boutique owner is made transparent to the customers.

Not all of the merchants selling Korean trendy clothes in Taiwan are small boutique retailers. Wholesalers from Wufenpu also go to Korea and they are important suppliers to the clothing retailers and vendors all over Taiwan, even to those who fly out to Korea. Located near Songshan Station, Wufenpu is Taiwan’s biggest wholesale market for imported clothes. A makeshift town for KMT veteran soldiers and new settlers from Changhua in 1958, Wufenpu has grown into a cluster area of small firms specializing in garment manufacturing and finishing (Ko 1993). In the 1970s and 1980s, Wufenpu provided cheap apparels to expanding domestic as well as Southeast Asia markets. Yet labor shortage, industry relocation to China, and lack of design upgrade in textile and garment industries are some of the reasons why Wufenpu gradually turned into a wholesale market of imported goods in the 1990s. In Jiang’s study of Wufenpu’s garment market, a merchant’s decision to close out his factory of almost 20 years and instead fly to Korea every other week to buy 50,000 US dollars worth of clothes illustrates an important turning point (2003, 76). It was not the beginning of Wufenpu’s connection with South Korea, as Wufenpu used to source mature women’s wear imported by the Korean-Chinese wholesalers in Zhong-xing Street, also known as “Yongho Korean Street” (Jiang 2003; Jian 2003; Chang 2011; Interview). However, when opportunities conducive to international traveling and transnational commerce opened up, Wufenpu gradually lost its price advantage (Huang 2008).

Next to the Wufenpu big buyers, the small retailers under focus in this paper can appear marginal and less resourceful. Some of my informants mentioned having been helped by Wufenpu buyers navigating the wholesale markets in Korea. Yet their “smallness” and flexibility allowed them to seize certain market opportunities uninterested by the more established businesses.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> During my fieldwork, I became curious about the lack of Korean brands in Taiwanese department stores. According to the managers at Sui—a Korean brand co-invested by Korean fashion company Domeya and Taiwanese clothing firm, Guang-qi, it is because Taiwanese departments prefer international fashion brands. The majority firms in Dongdaemun have no

Young, female, first-time business owners, they are often characterized to engage in *paodangbang* (running a solo gang), that is, a kind of shuttle trade in which individual merchants go abroad to bring back exotic goods for resale in the street market or small shops. *Paodanbang* was an important economic activity in Taiwan from the 1950s to 1970s, during which international travel was restricted. The solo merchants often worked with a network of commissioning stores to distribute merchandise, such as medicine, cosmetics, and small electric appliances from Japan and Hong Kong. The demand for such daily necessities from abroad was partly conditioned by an economic policy tilted toward manufacturing for export and steel industries (Guo 2009).

The enterprising spirit evoked in *paodanbang* activities is considered to have contributed to Taiwan's economic miracle in the 1970s and 1980s (Hsu 2010). Moreover, such informal economy articulates a transnational imagination through aesthetic and cultural expressions. (Hsu 2010). In the 1990s, young shuttle traders combined leisure travel with commerce and created a unique Japanesque space in Taipei's Ximending area. Young people not only went to Ximending sell and buy faddish items not available through existing retail channels like department stores, but also to watch people, be seen, immerse in the atmosphere, and feel a sense of membership. (Lee 2009 143-145).

While Korean fashion retailers are part of Taiwan's *paodanbang* tradition, their emergence needs to be contextualized in the globalized economy. Their decision to bypass Wufenpu and source directly from Seoul reflects Taiwan's and Korea's differential positioning in globalization. Unlike in the 1960s, 1970s, or even the 1990s, the shuttle traders from Taiwan have been actively incorporated into South Korea's vision and practice of globalization. In the fashion sector, no place better represents such a globalized system than Dongdaemun. Named after the eastern gate of the old Seoul city during the Joseon Dynasty, "Dongdaemun Market" was once a food market organized by Korean merchants under Japanese colonization. Its main trade shifted to apparel, a commodity introduced through foreign aid following the Korean War, and eventually supplied 70% of the apparel businesses in Korea in the 1970s and 1980s (Cho 2011). The opening of Art Plaza in 1990 introduced modern shopping mall atmosphere and flexible trade culture catering to retailers. Its success spawned the construction of similar types of shopping malls, making the area an enormous commercial district and helping it gain leadership over the Nandaemun wholesale market (Cho 2011, 6).

Dongdaemun traded with overseas buyers from Taiwan in the 1980s, but the



transaction was primarily established through the ethnic Korean-Chinese network. (The Korean-Chinese (*hanguo huachiao*) were ethnic-Chinese populations of the merchant class who migrated from northeast China to Korea during the Chinese civil war (1920-1950). Under circumstances such as foreigner's investment restriction in Korea, the outbreak of Korean War (1950-1953), and the outreach by Republic of China (Taiwan) under the cold-war framework, many Korean-Chinese migrated to Taiwan from the 1950s to the 1970s. Most Chinese-Korean settled in Zhong-shing Street in Yongho, setting up shops selling clothes, electric blankets, spices, and gingseng. (Jian 2004)) Zhong-xing Street in Yongho became known as "Korean Street" in the 1980s due to the bustling garment trade from Korea. Ms. Sun, a Korean-Chinese in her 50s who worked in Dongdaemun for a packaging and shipping company in 1980, recalled receiving orders, negotiating price, overseeing custom production and arranging shipping for clients from Zhong-xing Street (Interview 16 March 2012). Korean-Chinese still play the role of middle-person in Dongdaemun, providing all-in-one services of translating, ordering, shipping, etc. But a more formidable transformation took place in Dongdaemun following the 1997 financial crisis, making the market accessible to anyone, with or without ethnic ties, with or without trade interest.

First, in addition to the traditional market and the modernized wholesale market, a third trading area, a retail shopping district composed of many department-store types like Migliore, Doosan Tower, and Hello apM, was built and targeted at teenagers, families, and tourists. The small to medium-sized manufacturers in the market began to produce cheap clothes for export. To some extent, the new marketing and export-directed strategy helped save Dongdaemun from depression at the wake of 1997 financial crisis.<sup>6</sup> Rebranded as an around-the-clock "fashion town," Korea's largest wholesale and retail shopping district has 37 shopping malls (each of the 9-10 floors are made up of about 80 sellers of clothing and shoes), 31, 864 specialty shops, and over 50,000 manufacturers (Cho 2011; Tourist map). On a tourist map "Dongdaemun Fashion Town Special Tourism Zone," it introduces the area as a "mecca of the fashion industry on a global scale" and "an one-stop system from planning to production and sales." With 20,000 small producing facilities in the vicinity, the geographical cluster-based network was quickly identified as a competitive principle behind the "myth of Dongdaemun."

The clustering of retail, wholesale, manufacturing, shipping, fabrics, and

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<sup>6</sup> Or so that's the big discourse, which is also not questioned in the well-made documentary by Taiwan's Public Television Service. As Jieheerah Yun (2011, 75) points out, the 1997 financial crisis resulted in restructuring of financial institutions and *chaebol* companies, small shops and factories are unlikely to receive assistance. Many were closed despite the success of Migliore.

garment accessories markets in Dongdaemun enabled a self-fulfilling supply chain system (Choo et al., 2009). It also provides economic scale and minimize transaction cost. Joining the throwaway market instead of the standard fashion cycle, the small companies in Dongdaemun deliver variety and fashionability quickly and inexpensively. Calling it *pronto mode* formula, UK-based researcher Nobukaza Azuma notes that such market mechanism, which treats fashion items “in the same manner as fresh produce in grocery retailing” attracted prestigious Japanese, French, and Italian apparel firms and brand operators (2002, 141). Throughout the 1990s, Japanese retailers of the Shibuya street fashion known as *kogal* actually capitalized on Dongdaemun’s *pronto moda* capability because they could meet the fluctuating demands of styles at an affordable price.

How do Taiwanese clothing retailers play into Dongdaemun’s integration into the regional and global economy? Are there relationships beyond supplying and sourcing? From August 2011 to June 2012, I conducted fieldwork in the Shida Night Market, where “Korean fashion” shops have mushroomed from 2008 to 2011. I participated-observed the more than 100 clothing shops in the area and talked to shop operators whose jobs involve regular buying in Seoul.<sup>7</sup> Given the booming business under “Korean fashion” and the growth of casual sellers spawned by tourism and educational exchange, I also initiated contact with individual sellers of different background and location (See index for a list of informant and their background).

While there were instances of Korean-Taiwan interaction at the product development level, such as “patterned in Taiwan, manufactured in Korea,” the majority buyers project a cut-and-dry relationship with Dongdaemun. Miere, a woman in her mid 20s who opened her first shop in Shida three years ago, said firmly, “Korea is just a sourcing stop, like the way China is a sourcing stop” (interview 22 May, 2012). Jessie, an experienced buyer and business owner who regularly takes entrepreneurs on group buying tours to Seoul and China, said her visits to Dongdaemun are always about the products, never the suppliers. “My head is always turning, checking out the styles” (interview, 27 March, 2012). According to her, repeat visits would be a result of product variety, not reputation of suppliers. A Shida business owner who buys large quantity from Dongdaemun also confirms the practical business culture:

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<sup>7</sup> My fieldwork covers the area bordered by Shida Road, Roosevelt Road, Taishun Street, and the southern border of National Taiwan Normal University. The specific 9 streets I observed were located on Longquan Street, Alley 38 of Taishun Street, Alley 40 of Taishun Street, Alley 49 of Shida Road., Alley 44 of Taishun Street, Alley 59 of Shida Road, Yunho Street, Alley 75 of Yunho Street, Alley 50 of Taishun Street, Alley 83 of Shida Road, and Pucheng Street. The number of shops shifted quickly from 2011 to 2012 due to resident protests.

“As long as you make large quantity orders, their attitude is different. The boss—usually the manager—will come out to talk. My experience in working with Korean suppliers has been good. They are highly cooperative. It’s the same everywhere. Large orders will facilitate communication and speed” (SIKI interview, 3 May 2012).

SIKI and his partner have contracted Dongdaemun suppliers to manufacture clothes, either using SIKI and partner’s product idea or the suppliers’ product idea exclusively sold at their stores in Shida. Each month, they put out 150 to 200 new styles, each ordered between 500 to 1000 pieces. SIKI is impressed with the safe, comfortable, and systematic shopping environment in Dongdaemun.

Buyers from Taiwan are an integral part of Dongdaemun system, which is accommodating to foreign buyers, evinced not just in the modern, intuitive shopping space, but also in the shipping and multi-lingual services offered. However, to most of my informants, language is much less of a concern than a distinctive business and aesthetic sense about product selection in an easily overwhelming marketplace. Poetica, the young owner of a Shida boutique specializing in one-piece dresses, told me it took her four trips in six months to finally figure out the kind of clothes she would carry at her store. She describes Dongdaemun in terms of the department stores in Taipei’s east shopping district, Dongqu—except at a much bigger scale. Pressed to spend NT \$200,000 on her first buying trip, she navigated the connecting stalls like a “snake” so she would not miss any product (*saohuo*). “It’s easy to lose oneself in the foreign market. Winter in Korea is super cold and it’s natural to bring back thick knitwear. But they won’t sell in Taiwan because it’s just not that cold here. And that is all money we are talking about” (interview 20 January, 2012).

Having a distinctive sense of style is probably the most important asset for small shop retailers. After all, the reputation of small shuttle traders rests on their unique eye for sourcing from abroad. Yet one of the biggest problems facing small merchants selling “Korean fashion” in Taiwan is the high rate of identical products. Under cost-saving consideration, some buyers would shorten the length of their trip from an average of three to four nights to an one-night stopover. The late night, long-hour operation<sup>8</sup> of the wholesale market makes it possible for overseas buyers to maximize their traveling time, but it also creates stressful and hectic work condition. Yet, the labor of transnational buying is frequently erased under a discourse connecting traveling and shopping with leisure.

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<sup>8</sup> Most wholesale shopping centers open from 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. until 6 a.m. Yet some malls that open during the day time also open until early morning, such as Maxtyle (10:00am-5:00am); or Area 6 (9:00p.m. to 5:00 p.m.) The OT (0:00 a.m. to 3:00p.m.)

During my interview with a young female shop owner in Banciao, three bureaucrats from the New Taipei City government entered the shop to check the manufacturing location of the clothes. After hearing that the owner goes to Korea once a month, one officer remarked, “Wow, what a sweet job!” Although the officer was just making conversation for more questioning, this view was commonly held by people upon hearing the profession of “carrying goods from abroad.” Transnational buying is misunderstood for leisure shopping. The construction of Dongdaemun as a special tourist zone/fashion town contributes to this view, attracting even casual visitors with no intent to be in the retail clothing business.<sup>9</sup> Shop owner Miere once took a curious friend on a buying trip and became extremely frustrated due to such misrecognition.

I told her let’s not do this again. I said ‘I am working, and you are playing. It’s totally different. I was telling the shop to get me 2-2-2,<sup>10</sup> and you were still like “should we take this one?” I used to leave one day to go to Idae and Hongkik at a more leisurely pace. On that day I really needed to remind myself to slow down. But it’s hard to relax because at the back of my mind there’s always: Gotta source tonight, gotta source tonight, gotta source tonight’ (interview, 22 May 2012).

The distinction between shopping and “liver-busting”<sup>11</sup> buying has been reported in the Taiwanese media. Accounts of physical laboring such as how young female buyers struggle to schlep heavy bags of clothes across the malls or subway make interesting storytelling on talk shows.<sup>12</sup> Following Taiwanese merchants on an all-night buying trip, Taiwan’s Public Television Service has produced an informative documentary about Dongdaemun’s racing culture, which affects the work schedule and lifestyle of transnational buyers in every way (2010). During my fieldwork, my contact with the shop owners fell in various hectic time pockets organized around “going abroad.” Miao talked to me just hours after getting off the plane; Ping talked to me in her store basement while unpacking and pricing the sweaters from her previous trip to Korea. One time, busily reviewing buying plans for her upcoming trip, Miere simply had no time to talk to me. State of tiredness was common.

The more experienced buyers are able to mobilize their resources to set their work conditions. Sululu, a 32-year-old shop owner who has been doing

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<sup>9</sup> One of my informants tried to buy from the wholesale market while doing a summer exchange program in Korea.

<sup>10</sup> Meaning ordering two of each style or color.

<sup>11</sup> This was a phrase posted by a buyer who checked in “At Taoyuan International Airport” on Facebook.

<sup>12</sup> Paodanbang experts are popular guests on finance or business related talk shows.

transnational buying in Asia since she was 20, said:

I like my job. People in the same business always ask me how much longer I intend to do this because they are all tired out by the inverse schedule. I get a sense of achievement from my job. I can adapt to the hardship, which comes with every trade. I got married and had a kid after getting into this business. Because my partner accepted me, I was able to choose having a family, even a child (interview, 18 January 2012).

In some way, Sululu's self-presentation is not so different from the other "war stories" in the competitive trade. The matter is, transnational buying involves physical, mental, and aesthetic work. It requires complex coordination and interaction with other divisions of labor in the fashion business. Jessie, the semi-public expert figure in shuttle trading to Korea and China who has continuously disseminated knowledge of the business through teaching, media interviews, blogging, and tour groups, puts "work" in a more ordinary way. One "minor" account she mentioned in passing which struck me as telling about the condition of work was that her husband traveled with her to Dongdaemun during her pregnancy.

Rather than treating "laboring" as good "war stories" under capitalistic logic of competition, I want to position the transnational buying activities of Taiwanese clothing retailers in the complex labor forms in transnationalized fashion industries. Specifically, a transnational labor view is urgently needed as Dongdaemun became redrafted into Seoul's design discourse and policy. Since 2010, Seoul metropolitan government has been promoting design-related businesses through the construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (DDPP). A public mark and massive (16 acres) structure that adds amenities to the existing fashion industries, the star-architect designed DDPP promised to be not just the new landmark for Dongdaemun, but also for Seoul. To get its residents to accept the necessary inconvenience brought upon by such an urban re-landscaping plan, Seoul city put forth a "feeling based" campaign emphasizing the global status benefit of transitioning from a "hard city" to a "soft city" (Yun 2011). Yet there is much hidden cost in addition to the highly visible demolition of the historic Seoul Sports Stadium (built in 1926). Jieheerah Yun's dissertation provides many key counter-narratives to the city's design branding and co-optation of Dongdaemun's infinite growth myth. Of relevance to the current paper are displaced vendors, oversupplied lots in the shopping malls, and the unjust treatment of migrant labors, who make up an important garment production force in Korea (Yun 2011, 89; interview with Key Hyoun Park, secretary-general of Chun Tae-II Foundation 26 April, 2012). These instances

illuminate on a variety of labor forms positioned unequally in Korea's fashion industries.

How does Dongdaemun's discursive shift to a design capital affect the "laboring" of fashion buyers from Taiwan? First, the deepening stratification between material and immaterial work favors export promotion. At the policy and academic level, fashion is increasingly evaluated according to the Korean government's interest to support design related industry, rather than labor intensive manufacturing (Cho 2004). Yet "the work of fashion production—including design work and manufacture—continues to be labour-intensive, low-paid and often relatively insecure" (Reimer 2009, 65). The discrepancy can be observed in Dongdaemun, where government support goes to agencies like Dongdaemun Market Information Center (managed by Korea Fashion Association). The Center offers a design library, organizes fashion shows and confab meetings between new designer meeting and overseas buyers (interview with manager Teak Kim 27 April, 2012). But the fast output of versatile new styles often did not grow out of design hubs. It is more likely from the individual suppliers, who develop their specialization by being in the proximity of the fast changing market.<sup>13</sup> When the discourse on the fashion industry shifts to immaterial aspect such as feelings, design and creativity, the work of buying—an ambiguous territory that falls somewhere between manufacture and consumption—can be easily overlooked.

Second, factor in the geographical dimension and we find a variety of new labor forms emerging due to the growing demand of "floating" and "mobile workers." In Korea, migrants from Russia, Nepal and Bangladesh already formed an important workforce for garment manufacture with irreplaceable skill.<sup>14</sup> Korean fashion firms also have entered foreign markets through exporting finished goods, licensing, OEM producing in Korea, to joint venture and OEM producing overseas (Cho and Lee 2006). At Dongdaemun Sewing Association in Chang-sin Dong, I met two men who have returned after some frustrating years

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<sup>13</sup> At the wholesale market in Dongdaemun, I met several sellers who design and plan new styles on a weekly basis. At a pants shop in Nuzzon, one of the big wholesale shopping mall, a middle-age woman said she puts out two new styles weekly. Before opening her own business, she was trained in making pockets for slacks. Another couple who have been in the business for 10 years said they customize their designs for China clients. Some received design training at vocational schools but ideas for new designs come from close interaction with buyers (interview, 27 April 2012). Though Dongdaemun is branded as fashion town and articulated with the popular Korean Wave, it is not a career destination for university graduates from design departments (conversation with Ho Jung Choo, SNU professor in the Department of Clothing & Textiles, 26 April 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Pamphlet of scholarship for migrant workers from Supporter's Association for Deported Migrant Workers were distributed at the Chun Tae-Il Foundation in Dongademun.

of doing business in China.<sup>15</sup> De-nationalization of the apparel industries seems to have created further division of labor, as the unique characteristic of Dongdaemun is the subcontractor's capability to make garments from start to finish and yet it is a knowledge that cannot be easily passed on due to the compressed and expanding scale of the industry (interview with Na Pyong De 27 April, 2012). Garment factories in the Kaesong Industrial Park located in North Korea add complexity to the trans-nationalized framework of labor classification.<sup>16</sup>

At the policy and discursive level, the Korean apparel industry is shifting to nonmanufacturing or value-added activities like branding, design, product development and retailing (H-Brookshire and Lee 2010). Dongdaemun Market Information Center, for instance, is trying to draw in more foreign buyers by setting up fashion shows and the chance to meet up-and-coming designers. However, the process yields a demand for mobile workers. And the experience of the transnational subjects—be it a migrant worker for a garment factory in Dongdaemun, an owner of a small firm doing OEM production in China, or an apparel buyer from Taiwan—are hardly the same. As Doreen Massey points out, speedups, accelerated turnover time, and increased mobility do not affect all person and groups equally (1993).

So, does “Korean fashion” exist? How is “Korean fashion” possible when it is already transnationalized and translocalized from inside to outside? Based on my fieldwork, the following discussion will tease out how “Korean fashion” is embedded and deployed in the local apparel market, trans-localized industry, retail activities, and fashion sense in Taiwan.

### Meanings of “Korean Fashion” in Taiwan

When I told people in Taiwan that I was researching on the rise of “Korean fashion,” the conventional wisdom often pointed me to the value-adding effect of Korean Wave. At a shop in Shida, the young sales women skillfully and enthusiastically demonstrated how to wear hair accessories like Korean stars in TV dramas. Several retail buyers readily acknowledge their taking advantage of the Korean Wave. The majority, however, are not Korean Wave fans and have no time for star-chasing or fan activities. Hence, I approached them not with a

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of frustration included difficulty in transferring company ownership and in worker management.

<sup>16</sup> Clothes manufactured in Kaesong Industrial Park can only be sold to South Korea. According one garment manufacturer there, this special economic zone will not only help alleviate their global workers deployment, but will also maintain the positive image of “Made in Korea” compared with other imported goods from China (Chiu 2008, 11).

straight shooter like, “why do you sell Korean clothes?” but questions concerning their trade, such as “how did you get into the clothing business” and “how did the shop start?” I tried to locate their resources and responsibilities for starting up and maintaining their businesses. For the most part, I was looking for signs that would illuminate the ways Korean style has been constructed at the intersection of market, space, and culture.<sup>17</sup> In Taiwan, Korean fashion can carry the following three connotations: (1) a homogenized taste for the mass public, (2) a practical solution for the individualist shop maker, and (3) a sourcing stopover in the transnationalized fashion industries.

### Korean fashion as Homogenized Taste

To explain how Korean fashion works as a homogenized clothing style for women in Taiwan, it’s useful to look at the stories of the newest “Korean fashion” store owners in Shida. Miao, the youngest informant in my study, opened a little boutique with her family’s help right after graduating from university. Her shop sign is juxtaposed to the words, “Korean Brand.” In the teal-green shop where a wooden rocking horse sits, she is often seen earnestly introducing accessories, blouses, bags she personally selected from Korea. A couple of streets down, Tutu was busily setting up her shop and interviewing a sales applicant. She had been a sales manager for a clothing store in the area named after Ehwa Women’s University in Seoul (Lihua). When I first met her, she was a salesperson at another new Korean fashion shop in Shida. Two week later, she opened her shop around the corner, selling “authentic Korean” (*zhenghan*) blouses, blazers, and dresses she brought back from Korea.

Miao and Tutu both opened their shops in once quiet residential alleys that had only become “invaded” by new clothing shops a year ago. Competition was fierce and most new shops make some kind of symbolic affiliation with Korea, such as announcing “Just Arrived from Korea” on chalkboard signs. When asked about the characteristics of Korean fashion, shop owners or salespeople often mention superior slim-fitting silhouettes and quality fabrics, but many acknowledge that they are a matter of sales pitch rather exclusive quality of clothes made in Korea. Adding to the liberal definition of “Korean fashion” are multiple routes of supply and unclear labeling.<sup>18</sup> When a store advertises Korean

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<sup>17</sup> During my shop visits, I took notes on the shop name, product types, product styles, pricing, interior decoration, customers, service, sales pitch, presentation of the salespeople, etc. To allow natural conversation to emerge and time to observe, I often tried on clothes and solicited style tips.

<sup>18</sup> Although garment importers are required to identify the originating country, material, and care instruction under the commodity labeling law drafted by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, a good amount of them have no clear labels.



goods (*hanhuo*), it could mean a number of things, like made-in-Korea apparel imported by the shop owner, made-in-Korea apparel imported by Wufenpu merchants, OEM production in China by Korean company (*hanzu*), and knock-offs of Korean apparel made in China (*hanban*). It is well known that many shops carry a mixture of these possible products to take advantage of the symbolic value of Korean goods.<sup>19</sup> Under this circumstance, Korean fashion is driven into a game of speculation by price competition and branding—that is, promotion by small business services rather than by corporations.

The result became a homogenized and mainstreaming understanding of Korean fashion, seen in the high rate of identical outfits. Many informants mention the difficulty of selling something edgy and non-mainstream<sup>20</sup> to their Taiwanese customers, who are mainly budget-conscious students and office workers. EJ, a shop owner in the more upscale and trendy Dongqu, is a veteran clothes seller who has different resources and insights from most buyers I met.<sup>21</sup> Married to a Korean and living half of the time in Seoul, her passion is “all things related to Korea and making money” (interview, 12 January, 2012). Based on her experience, Taiwanese consumers easily fell prey to the power of branding. She used to pay fashionista bloggers to write advertorials for apparel and bags. At a meet-the-blogger event, she was surprised by the high number of readers dressed identically as the blogger. “I am not a fashionable person. But I know how you can sell something even if it’s ugly as hell.” She cites a Korean shopping website (CKK) as an example of successful manipulation and talked about how she took advantage of the branding effect:

I got into buying from Dongdaemun’s wholesale market because of CKK. I knew apparels sold on CKK are from Dongdaemun, not from their own production. For two months, I went there [Dongdaemun] every other day and browsed nonstop. I discovered clothes sold on CKK were really from there. I followed the pictures and tracked down the shop labels. I sold “CKK” clothes online at a lower price and told people that I sourced from the same place. I made a lot of money. But people also complained why there wasn’t a CKK logo. I was asked whether it’s a knockoff. The thing is, if

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<sup>19</sup> SIKI’s store is one of the few shops that makes distinctions between the different kinds of Korean fashion by way of production. The price range can be big.

<sup>20</sup> These are often clothes that didn’t sell well, such as a shirt attached to a long chiffon skirt with a high cut in the front, revealing shorts inside, or an all-gold tight blouse (Miao interview, 30 October, 2011; Miere, interview 22 May, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> She has an apartment in Seoul, which makes it easy for her to access the market compared to buyers from Taiwan. When I followed her to Dongdaemun, her husband dropped us off and picked us up afterward. Sitting in the traffic jam in Dongdaemun at midnight and commenting on buyers from Taiwan and China, EJ remarked that “we will do the shopping in a graceful style.”

they have been branded really well, they'd think it's fake. Taiwanese people really buy into the myth of logo. (interview, 12 January 2012).

If the value of *paodanbang* comes partly from its introduction of rare-to-find commodities from abroad, one of the unspoken mishaps in shuttle trade is necessarily importing commodities already available, even abundant, in the local market. Although it is not a phenomenon exclusive to Shida, the sudden increase of new clothing shops there made visible the paradox of sourcing transnationally but offering few diverse goods. As a result Shida became a cheap retail zone, "another Wufenpu" (Huang 2012, 28). What is Korean about Korean fashion became purely price based. The characteristic of Korean fashion, as many sellers instinctively acknowledge, is "whatever sells the best." This new market reality impinges on another group of shop owners in Shida, who are critical of Korean fashion but use it as a practical means to support real dreams.

#### Korean Fashion as a Means for Individualist Shop

Before Shida became "another Wufenpu," it was known as a low-key area with small shops. The anonymity of "small shops" is significant. The enterprising mode in the small shops often takes the creative, cultural, and community desires into consideration. Many sold clothes also sourced from overseas markets such as Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Bangkok, but they did not sell clothes based on the promotional value of the manufacturing country. "Play" was a key word I often heard when being in their shops. For example, Poetica, a self-described "fashion player," enjoys meeting customers who "get" her products and know immediately how to "play" with it. Madam Chen likes to comment in detail on the ways Japanese and European designers "play" with fabrics, cutting, and pattern. Once at Jewel's shop, as soon as I mentioned that I was looking for blazers, her face lit up and she said: "let's play this leisurely." They set up their businesses in Shida before the area became trendy in a mainstream way. Facing the influx of Korean fashion, they invented ways to embed Korean fashion in their unique shop style. I will devote the following to discussion to one shop's story.

From 2003 to roughly 2009, Ping and Ring's shop was the only bright spot in the dark alley leading from my previous apartment to the night market. Once in a while, a poster showing large suitcases would appear on their closed door, indicating they are on a buying trip to Japan. They sold mainly women's clothes and zakka items sourced from Osaka and Tokyo's wholesale markets. However, the shop is more than a clothing store embracing simple, vintage, girl-like

Japanese fashion, its interior setup, atmosphere and items/merchandise on display reflect an interest in independent, DIY fashion and art. Besides a painting of Yoshitomo Nara's rebellious girl, the work of local young illustrators and designers and the DIY flyers reflecting the owners' family network and community connection often decorate the walls.

Classmates in elementary school, Ping and Ring started the business around 2000. A school counselor by day, Ping rented a stall in Shida Night Market selling hand-made skirts made by her. Shida was dark and so uncommercialized at the time that finding a space to rent went through personal networks rather than the real estate agents. Once the business picked up, the landlord took back the stall. In 2002, Ping and Ring set up a shop a few blocks down in a quiet residential alley. They started to source from Japan to fill the increased business demand. Few years later, rising yen and rising Korean fashion started to close in on her business. According to Ping:

We resisted sourcing from Korea for a long time. Why did we resist? Our friends who went said there is good stuff there. We thought we would check it out whether or not we want to carry it. I was surprised the clothes there are not as ugly as I thought. Well, I don't like the kinds around here. I found the market caters to all sorts of needs, such as our preference for simple, good quality, Japanese-style clothing, not the loud Korean-style fashion (interview 18 January, 2012).

Although Ping and Ring were able to find Korean goods from Dongdaemun that fit the theme of their shop, the market environment in Shida was changing rapidly. Gone was the leisurely feeling at her store. On Friday nights I often couldn't get into her shop, which has become crowded with young girls (and boyfriends) drawn to the area's new fashion shops. On weekday afternoons, when their shop returned to its leisurely pace and community atmosphere,<sup>22</sup> Ping told me she was unhappy about the crowd. "We know how to make money. But the two of us wanted more than making money." It was a profitable time. They were urged to franchise and retire (become the boss). Ping was against the idea. The shop was a solution to financial needs at first. In the process of running their business, they became inspired by similar shops in Japan that combined work and dreams. She said:

It's tiring to tend the shop, but not tending the shop makes me feel I am out of touch. If I don't tend the shop I won't know how to select clothes because I have no interaction with the customers. In the long run this shop

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<sup>22</sup> One of the important characteristic of Ping and Ring's shop is the caring interaction between them and the customers. Return customers often help out at the store, stocking and bringing Ping and Ring meals and snacks.

will lose its sense of place. Tending the shop keeps me real (interview, 18 January, 2012)

Shop operators like Ping and Ring typically use Korean fashion items to complement their shop's individual character. However, Korean fashion in Taiwan is more than commodities; as indicated throughout this paper, it brought changes to the marketplace, customer makeup, and cultural struggles. Facing new competition and customers whose tastes are too syrupy and sensual for them, Ping and Ring have flexed their creativity and enterprising flexibility by opening various experimental "small shops" in the neighborhood as well as other locations. This includes a café, a shop mainly showcasing hand-made clothes by her family and local designers, and a clothing store offering various DIY/art classes taught by return customers. For them, the rise of Korean fashion as goods and business prompted them to reflect on and confirm their business and cultural vision. Korea is hardly the only fashion sourcing location. Poetica, who sells one-piece dresses in her DIY pink boutique in Shida, is looking for the right moment to go to China. "I have to admit I am a little tired of going to Korea. But I am afraid to go to China. So I want to go with a tour group" (interview, 20 January 2012). However, the scale of China's garment industries and market is still discouraging her from taking action. What sort of Taiwanese merchants have the resources to deploy Korea fashion's Chinese connection?

#### Korean Fashion's Chinese Connection

One of the ways Korean apparels are made in the context of transnationalized fashion production, as mentioned earlier, is through OEM production outside of Korea. Yet, there is still another means of producing "Korean fashion" which further decenters the Korean brand. Known to Korean fashion companies as a practice of making various knock-off versions based on Korean design, this method creates a tri-local, trans-local connection between Taipei, Seoul, and Humen—a garment wholesale town near Dongguan. It is well known that Wufenpu wholesalers would buy samples in Dongdaemun and take them to factories in Humen on the same journey for ordering cheaper knock-offs (Hu 2008). In my research, those informants with the Chinese connection tend to be large-quantity dealers with significantly more experience in different sectors of the fashion industries besides retailing. As a result, they are interested in the competitive possibility from manufacture's end.

Jessie, the retailer, business career instructor, and tour guide for buyers, has a rich career profile in the fashion industries. Her mother was a shuttle

trader-turned apparel wholesaler. Jessie grew up watching her mother bring home giant suitcases of clothes, medicine, walkman and what not from Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. Though she did not want to follow her mother's footsteps, she set up her own business selling accessories in several markets in her hometown, Kaohsiung. In her mid 20s, she opened an apparel company that provided retail, wholesaling, and make-to-order production. Many of her clients were the Wufenpu wholesalers. The pattern designs came from either her company or the clients.

One of the qualifications Jessie advertised on her blog as well as on the career training courses was her factory-running experience in Humen, China.<sup>23</sup> After building her connection with the Taiwanese business (*taishang*) circle through years of wholesale buying, she took over a garment factory of about 40 workers and took orders from Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the US. Although she closed the factory after just a year,<sup>24</sup> the experience shaped her niche and pitch. On her blog, she offers practical consideration about doing business in China and responds to questions from just about everyone. She actively dispels Korean fashion fetish and challenges Taiwanese people's bias about China. She writes:

Korean goods are still made in China. Those who shuttle trade from Japan also get made-in-China goods. China has the largest labor market in the world and will continue to be for at least 10 more years. In fact, Koreans also open factories in China. In our subcontractor factory, there are also pattern design orders from Korean companies (Jessie 2006).

For Jessie, China is the “real source” of all fashion because just about every brand depends on its production capacities. SIKI, a big retailer who runs two Shida shops with his wife, has also tapped into China's manufacture power to help him establish a brand. “We go straight to the factory. We don't go to China for ready-to-sell clothes. That's the Wufenpu mode. We make orders with our own designs and the fabrics we found” (interview, 3 May 2012). SIKI makes it clear that he is interested in product development (*kaifa*), not designing clothes. He said:

We are not designers. We do it in a simple way, usually with certain elements that catch our fancy. We mix and match. Take this t-shirt for example, we like it and would like to add a pocket. So we use lace, net, matched color, or contrast color. We would also buy some brand products, like an expensive

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<sup>23</sup> She teaches business career startup courses offered by the National Youth Commission.

<sup>24</sup> She said “managing workers in China is different from Taiwan, not to mention I was female, in my 20s. No one listened to me” (interview 27 March, 2012).

skirt that cost 4000-5000 NT. Then we go to Korea or China looking for materials, [order it to be made], and price it differently. A brand is just a logo.

The thing is they really used that particular material” (interview, 3 May 2012). In his office in the store’s basement which also doubles as a storage room, SIKI showed me fabric samples from Korea and China, which seems to be his passion and a more critical advantage than factory connection. To save trouble, he only contracts out to factories run by Taiwanese businessmen (*taishang*). The real competition in the fashion business, according to SIKI, rests in the material and manufacturing upgrade, which also becomes a matter of national policy on economic and technology development.

The merchants who regard South Korea as a stopover in the transnationalized fashion industries are highly aware of the state of decline in Taiwan’s garment industries. They maintain a flexible and ambivalent engagement with Korea in order to locate a new competitive advantage in Taiwan. Emphasizing quick style turnover almost every week, SIKI’s business is practicing its own version of “fast fashion” through interactions with Dongdaemun and Humen. The manufacture capacity under post-socialist, capitalistic China has allowed product distinction as well as cultural distinction (Chang 2004; Hu 2009). As for Jessie, she considered herself a reluctant Korea fashion buyer and tour organizer. When I asked her whether all the influx of Korean goods in Taiwan has enriched the garment industries and fashion sensibility, she shook her head and said:

I think it’s all bad influence, and I am part of the problem. I take people to do wholesale buying in China and in Korea. They import the stuff and make money off Taiwanese people. Then with that money they go on more buying trips abroad. Taiwanese money is going out constantly. A better alternative may be us bringing something out to sell—probably more likely in China, but not in Korea” (interview, 27 March 2012).

Jessie’s suggestion expresses a desire for more equal trading. It will not be easy in the competitive business world. But as “Korean fashion” becomes more and more elusive and market more saturated in Taiwan, the issue of how fashion is materially, economically, and culturally integrated with people’s lives will become increasingly important.

### Out of Culture, Out of Fashion

Throughout this paper, I have shown the various ways “Korean fashion” has been embedded in the young, urban market in Taiwan and mediated by the transnational and translocal business activities of Taiwanese retail buyers and

shop owners. Fast, faddish, and affordable, Korean fashion has lured in young consumers and entrepreneurs in Taiwan. However, the concurrent manufacturing and retail conditions in the region did more to encourage the emergence of Korean fashion. As this paper has illustrated, the “Korean identity” of Korean fashion rests on flexible connection with transnational capitalists of multiple origins (Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, or Korean-Chinese), manufacturers located in China, and shuttle traders zooming through inter-cities like Dongdaemun, Taipei, Dongguan, Osaka, and Bangkok. The brand making of Korean fashion is very much an inter-Asian affair, emptied of intrinsic Korean materiality, and instead, became intricately woven into inter-local connectivities. Cultural and economic shifts at any given locality could affect the value of Korean fashion. In this conclusion, I wish to re-consider the expediency of Korean fashion in Taiwan amidst Shida Night Market’s controversial rezoning process.

Since late September 2011, some local residents protesting against the environmental degradation caused by the expanding night market have successfully gotten the Taipei City government to limit the growth of Shida Night Market. Although many businesses have tried to make amends by regulating their hours, noise levels, and cooking smoke output, more than 90 businesses were still driven away from the area as of late June 2012. Most, even with legitimate business licenses, cannot easily resolve the violation of a city ordinance that forbids operating business in alleys of six meter-wide or less. This could result in an accruing daily fine of NT 60,000 dollar. Rumors and reports of Night Market shutdown drove away potential business owners and customers. During the latter part of my fieldwork, police officers and government officials made frequent stops at shops in Shida, checking business licenses and notifying many shop owners to remove any extended display on the exterior of their shop. Some of my informants had to put a halt on their buying trips because of business slowdown. By the end of my fieldwork, more than half of my informants in Shida have relocated or closed their stores.

The controversy has been framed largely as a conflict between the residents’ fight for existing quality of life and business’ role in urban regeneration. As in all urban spatial struggles, the interest alignment in the community is complex. The real estate developers have aggressively persuaded many ground-floor landlords to turn their properties into profitable and heavily partitioned spaces for lease. Yet upper-level residents and landlords have shouldered more of the environmental and safety costs. As an adjudicator, the Taipei City government double played several sides by initially supporting the

promotion of Shida Night Market as a new tourist area, and then using its legal enforcement power to selectively shut down small businesses following the organized protests from residents. The public discussions were invariably tilted toward the resident group, officials, and cultural elites (Lin 2012). Caught between residents and landlords, small businesses tenants simply pleaded for economic survival. This discursive imbalance bears consequences on the public understanding of the issues, as the spatial struggle in Shida is also a symbolic struggle. And cheap clothes are no match for the contending cultural powers in Shida, which included the

For one thing, clothing shops are generally newer tenants than restaurants. They might feel inconvenienced by the rezoning process, but the sentiment of disenfranchisement ran deeper among the long-term restaurant operators—among whom one operator even burned his shirt during one protest. Korean fashion might not be regarded as creative or in good taste, but they are not held responsible for immediate environmental degradation. The mushrooming clothing shops, however, are pitted against Shida's historical-humanist reputation as the “lower culture” upon the disdainful reaction that the area is turning into Taipei's biggest garment wholesale market, Wufenpu. While plenty of people have defended the history and cultural legacy of the night market in Taiwan, almost no one has spoken on behalf of the clothing retailers in public. The clothing trade seemed more itinerant and less committed to the local cultural economy in Shida. After all, Korean fashion is sold in any online or offline markets in Taiwan. Korean fashion or not, clothes in this context score little cultural credit.

It is not that there is no “culture” in garment trade or that clothing businesses have weaker ties with a local community or a geographical place. My paper has described how shop keepers were driven to creative entrepreneurial resolutions out of economic exigency from the neighborhood and global scale. Landlords and real estate developers often raise rent out of the belief that it is the “location,” rather than the dynamic social and cultural relationships that created appealing neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the clothes retailers straddle transnational and translocal cultural economies out of a sourcing need that reflects the globalization of garment production and exchange in the specific decline of Taiwan's garment industries. The clothing shopkeepers may not be vocal players during Shida's rezoning controversy, but they helped shape the cultural landscape of Shida and attracted new residents, visitors, and tenants to the area's vibrant culture. As with urban locales with mixed business and (sub)cultural interests like New Kujiang, Hongdae, and Dongdaemun, the



meanings of Shida is being re-written, re-negotiated, struggled by players of unequal symbolic power. The rezoning controversy has only begun to bring out the diverse and conflicting stories and feelings of people whose lives have been impacted by the cultural and economic activities at trans-local scales.

In the end, what does Korean fashion have to do with it? Rather than ending on a note about Taiwan's national discontent against Korea's economic and cultural rise—an emotional commentary that often leads to further competitive ideology, I want to reiterate that the creation of Korean fashion is a transnational and translocal process from the specific locale of Taiwan. In the absence of a manufacturing base and design investment, clothing trade needs to be acknowledged as a part of the transnational cultural traffic and that the Taiwanese clothing retailers/buyers' regular trips to Seoul has spawned a range of entrepreneurial and creative activities in Taiwan. This process allowed multi-referential reflection on the relationship between Taiwan and Korea, on global and regional fashion sense, and dissemination of garment industries in East Asia. Finally, if clothes gain no currency in Taiwan's local cultural politics, perhaps it is time to dialogue seriously about the kinds of clothes that ended up hanging on our bodies and closets. No, it's not skin deep at all.

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## 赴國外出差或研習 心得報告

蔡如音

為了完成本研究計畫，我於 2012 年 4 月 25 日～2012 年四月 29 日前往韓國首爾，此次主要的目的有實地觀察亞洲最大服飾批發東大門商圈的交易情形、商場擺設、店家背景，還有與前往批貨的台灣買家碰面、觀察她們批貨的過程。由於東大門成衣批發商圈的運作是從傍晚六點～八點至凌晨六點～九點，整個交易過程日夜顛倒，我搭乘最晚抵達首爾的班機，先與一位當地華僑翻譯碰面，由她帶路前往東大門。東大門商圈約有將近四十棟高樓服飾批發商場，雖然許多前往韓國批發的台灣頭家會雇用當地華僑做翻譯，但是多半在熟悉商場運作之後便可以自行交易。商場當中有相當多來自其他國家的批發商，許多店家也會雇用懂華語或其他外文的店員。

隔日（4 月 26 的清晨），我在韓國聖公會大學申炫準教授的陪同下，前往東大門舊商場附近的重點布料市場。這對於我日後接觸大盤業者有重要意義，因為大盤商（如五分埔）為了增加競爭力，也會自行尋找新布料，開發新款式。當日，在申教授的幫忙引介與翻譯下，我進行兩組訪談，其中第一組訪談對象是位在東大門成衣製造小工廠區的 Chun Tae-il Foundation 主任，Chun

**Tae-il** 是南韓工人運動歷史當中相當重要的精神指標，他一開始所從事的工作也是成衣製造相關，目前南韓的流行時尚採取快速時尚，工人的來源（含境外）、權益等相關問題也在此次訪談中獲得啟發。另外一組訪談對像是東大門服裝縫製協會的會長以及幾位有跨國經營工廠經驗的資深老闆。訪談當中得知中國經濟崛起與南韓成衣政策之關連性。

次日（四月二十七日），與首爾大學紡織系教授 **Cho Ho-Jung** 碰面，詢問教育體系與韓國時尚興起的關係，進一步得知產學合作的相關細節。當晚，我與一位台灣批發商在東大門商場碰面，觀察交易流程與重點店家。隔日（四月二十八日），則是安排助理盧開朗一同觀察商場中的店家，在開朗的幫忙翻譯之下，也得以初步的了解店家的背景、技術訓練、以及與批發客的交易經驗。

- 一、出席國際學術會議心得報告
- 二、論文被接受發表之大會證明文件
- 三、所發表之論文全文或摘要

蔡如音

一、出席國際學術會議心得報告

此次前往法國巴黎，參加第九屆 *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* 研討會，我以小組召集人的身份，邀請日本京都大學的成實弘至教授（Hiroshi Narumi）與韓國聖公會大學的申炫準教授（Shin Hyunjoon）一同提出“Fashion Industries Workers in East Asia: Place and Practices in Question”的 panel，並以發表人的身分，發表”The Uses of Korean Fashion: Trans-Local Laboring of Clothing Business Buyers and Retailers in Taiwan” 論文。

*Crossroad* 會議參與人數眾多，同時進行的的發表場次可高達十七場，參與我們這一場的，很幸運的，約有二十位觀眾，對於發表人從台灣、韓國、日本觀察到的時尚產業與時尚勞動者（從設計師、外籍製造業者、到成衣批發老闆），進行熱烈的詢問與討論。

二、論文被接受發表之大會證明文件

**December 15th, 2011**

**Dear Eva Tsai,**

We are very pleased to inform you that your session proposal “Fashion Industries Workers in East Asia: Place and Practices in Question” has been fully accepted by the Academic Committee of the 9th International Conference *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* that will be held in Paris, July 2-6 2012.

Thank you very much for your participation. We look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Yours sincerely,



**Éric Maigret**

Conference Director

*Crossroads in Cultural Studies*, Paris, July 2-6 2012

**Crossroads** crossroads2012@univ-paris3.fr

12/18/11

to me

**December 15th, 2011**

**Dear Eva Tsai,**

We are very pleased to inform you that your paper “The Uses of Korean Fashion: Border-Crossing Clothing Buyers and Shop Owners in Taiwan” for the session “Fashion Industries Workers in East Asia: Place and Practices in Question” has been fully accepted by the Academic Committee of the 9th International Conference *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* that will be held in Paris, July 2-6 2012.

Thank you very much for your participation. We look forward to seeing you at the conference.

Yours sincerely,

**Éric Maigret**

Conference Director

*Crossroads in Cultural Studies*, Paris, July 2-6 2012

三、所發表之論文全文或摘要

**The Uses of “Korean Fashion”:  
Trans-local Laboring of Clothing Business Buyers and Retailers in Taiwan<sup>1</sup>**

Eva Tsai, National Taiwan Normal University

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A paper to be presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference, *Crossroads in Cultural Studies*, Paris, July 2-6 2012

**Keywords:** fashion industry, Korean fashion, retail buyers, Taiwan, garment business

“Don’t you know? This street has become a Korean street. It’s said that ‘sell Korean clothes or get ready to fold’”~BB, boutique owner in Shida, 3 years

“700 shops already!”~Madam Chen, boutique owner in Shida, 11 years

BB is a young woman in her mid-20s who runs a tiny, about 9 square meter, boutique in the night market south of the National Taiwan Normal University, known by the locals as Shida (Teacher’s College). She sells trendy clothes and accessories for young women and men, acquired on monthly trips to Seoul. The more experienced Madam Chen, 51, advertises Tokyo fashion at her store and travels to Hong Kong and Tokyo to stock up. Her boutique also carries clothes bought from Dongdaemun, the biggest fashion market in South Korea, but she wants to get rid of her Korean merchandise.

Though a bit on the hyperbolic side, BB’s and Madam Chen’s comments

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<sup>1</sup> The completion of this research project will not be possible without many people’s help. I am indebted to the numerous shop owners in Shida who spoke with me. I am indebted to Hyunjoon Shin, Ho Jung Choo, Haerang Noh, and Ejin Wu, who helped me in various ways during my fieldwork in Seoul. This research project is funded by National Science Council, Taiwan.

reveal, from the merchants' viewpoint, a slice of the market reality which they also help shape. For many years, Shida night market was a lively area with food and specialty merchandise stalls, American and Asian cuisine restaurants, independently owned cafes, bars, unique shops, bookstores, and parks. Compared to other night markets in Taipei, Shida is smaller, and was not actively promoted as a tourist attraction until the late 2000s. In the early 2000s, Shida night market was still a low-key, relaxed atmosphere that drew visitors who enjoyed treasure hunting in the leisurely and settling atmosphere. From 2010 to the end of 2011, many first-floor properties underwent fast remodeling and became spaces for lease. The newest tenants in town—mainly clothing sellers but also restaurant operators—made Shida brighter, louder, and faddish. This fashion-sensitive reputation is new to the university area known for its artsy and education-minded population. Scent of “Koreanness” can be felt in the Seoul-referencing retail signs, Korean-style fashion merchandise, and the sound of K-pop music. There may not be 700 Korean fashion shops, but to Madam Chen, who started her business before Shida got its mini facelifts, it did present an under-siege situation.

Since fall 2011, the identity and image of Shida night market has become a matter of intense public debate and protests. This development, which implicates the meanings of “Korean fashion” in Taiwan, is a point I will address in my paper. The main purpose of my study is to tease out the “Korean connection” in Taiwan’s garment industries and retail fashion market. Specifically, my research foregrounds the business activities of retailers<sup>2</sup> who make regular buying trips to Seoul and other East Asian garment markets such as Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Humen (China). In this paper, I will first contextualize the merchants’ border-crossing experiences in Taiwan’s history of shuttle trading as well as in Korea scheme of globalization. I will then analyze the ways “Korean fashion” has become embedded and de-nationalized in the immediate marketplace, fashion industry, and consumer culture of Taiwan. In Korea and Taiwan’s ambivalent political, economic, and cultural relations, “Korean fashion” facilitated enterprising opportunities, economic incentives, and aesthetic inspirations. Yet this relationship is elusive and one-way. The translocal laboring of Taiwanese merchants is nonetheless incorporated by the Korean fashion empire on the global margin. As Taiwan’s fashion industries dry up, the more experienced merchants flexibly maneuver the inter-connected Asian fashion industries. For the young retailers, the lack of communication among those with a stake in Taiwan’s fashion industry may be one reason why

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<sup>2</sup> Used interchangeably with buyers and boutique shop owner or operators

“Korean fashion” could not have been “more useful” in the sense of facilitating resources. The Shida night market controversy illustrates the intersection of “Korean fashion” and local spatial and cultural struggles.

### Korean Chic, Korean Chick

“Korean fashion” announced its arrival in Taiwan not through a designer brand’s flagship store or a fashion authority. Its arrival is mediated by the decade-long presence of Korean Wave entertainment and a youth-led fashion culture blending the activities of information exchange, sartorial display, and commerce. A major overseas market for Korean Wave, Taiwan has been actively circulating South Korean popular culture products (e.g., drama, reality programs, K-pop music and videos, celebrity, games) and consumer technologies. Korean fashion style, beauty care, and cosmetic surgery are often listed among other successful examples of export in the branding discourse on Korean Wave (Liu 2002; Chen 2004; Kong 2005; Kuo 2011). Analyzing the looks of popular K-pop singers in Japan, Judy Park (2011) further identifies slim silhouette and cute looks to be approachable and easily copied fashion elements. Jun, a graduate student at my university distinguished by a consistent Korean fashion look—lace-adorned chiffon shirt with puffy sleeves, pastel-color mini skirt, and high-waist belt—said she began to practice a particular Korean style after watching the TV drama, *Prosecutor Princess* (Interview, May 3, 2012). One of my informants, an experienced merchant who reluctantly organizes group tours for buyers interested in Korea, simply sighed: “We’ve all been branded” (Interview, March 17 2012).

Though the theory of branding does not seem far off, the enthusiastic ways young people share fashion information and buy clothes online cannot be overlooked. “Authentic Korean” (*zheng-han*), “Korean-style” (*han-feng*), and “Korean silhouette” (*han-ban*) have been popular keywords in online trade, bulletin board, and everyday style blogosphere. With their quick product updates and copious images featuring models in chic scenarios, some shopping websites have virtually become a fashion media of their own.<sup>3</sup> They might not be as glossy as magazines like *Vogue* or another popular magazine from Japan, *Vivi*, but they are up to speed and allows easy price comparison. Different from the purpose of branding, which placed emphasis on the celebrity looks and the trickle-down effect, Korean fashion blogging in Taiwan pays attention to the fashion styles of ordinary Korean girls. This figure is often nicknamed “han-nyu”

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<sup>3</sup> This takes several forms, such as e-new from auction sellers, trade by facebook, and online retailers like Cherrykoko. Some of them use professional models. Some buyers double up as models.

(Korean chick, also resembling the sound of greeting in Korean), and her looks are documented and analyzed in detail by bloggers who could be a clothing seller, a tourist, and a fashionista all at the same time.<sup>4</sup> The construction of “han-nyu” in everyday fashion blogging helps authenticate the aesthetic instinct of Korean women in real time. “This is how Korean chicks wear it.” It also helps sellers identify new merchandise seen on real Korean women. “Korean fashion” doesn’t get more “real” than this.

“Korean fashion” for women is an ambiguous term in Taiwan. Easily bought from online shopping sites and night markets, it means trendy and affordable daily wear for office workers, students, and young people. At the same time, it commands boutique value partly from being associated with South Korea’s rising cultural and economic status, and partly from being “handpicked and carried back from abroad” by boutique owners, who are mostly young women. Fashion boutiques advertising goods from abroad could be opened anywhere (picture of muzha, Xinzhu), but they are more likely concentrated near major shopping areas, such as Ximending, Dongqu, and Banciao in greater Taipei. Sometimes, the stores are closed with a sign indicating the owner is on a buying trip (picture). Other times, the shops would be attended by an employee while the buyer runs a parallel business online. A business technique known as “Online with Korea,” the buyer abroad sets aside a time frame to post new merchandise seen right from the wholesale market in Seoul and take orders from customers in Taiwan. In this case, the transnational schedule of the boutique owner is made transparent to the customers.

Not all of the merchants selling Korean trendy clothes in Taiwan are small boutique retailers. Wholesalers from Wufenpu also go to Korea and they are important suppliers to the clothing retailers and vendors all over Taiwan, even to those who fly out to Korea. Located near Songshan Station, Wufenpu is Taiwan’s biggest wholesale market for imported clothes. A makeshift town for KMT veteran soldiers and new settlers from Changhua in 1958, Wufenpu has grown into a cluster area of small firms specializing in garment manufacturing and finishing (Ko 1993). In the 1970s and 1980s, Wufenpu provided cheap apparels to expanding domestic as well as Southeast Asia markets. Yet labor shortage, industry relocation to China, and lack of design upgrade in textile and garment industries are some of the reasons why Wufenpu gradually turned into a wholesale market of imported goods in the 1990s. In Jiang’s study of Wufenpu’s garment market, a merchant’s decision to close out his factory of almost 20 years and instead fly to Korea every other week to buy 50,000 US dollars worth

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<sup>4</sup> Some would have a separate auction and blog. Some examples: <http://ukiki1984.pixnet.net/blog>

of clothes illustrates an important turning point (2003, 76). It was not the beginning of Wufenpu's connection with South Korea, as Wufenpu used to source mature women's wear imported by the Korean-Chinese wholesalers in Zhong-xing Street, also known as "Yongho Korean Street" (Jiang 2003; Jian 2003; Chang 2011; Interview). However, when opportunities conducive to international traveling and transnational commerce opened up, Wufenpu gradually lost its price advantage (Huang 2008).

Next to the Wufenpu big buyers, the small retailers under focus in this paper can appear marginal and less resourceful. Some of my informants mentioned having been helped by Wufenpu buyers navigating the wholesale markets in Korea. Yet their "smallness" and flexibility allowed them to seize certain market opportunities uninterested by the more established businesses.<sup>5</sup> Young, female, first-time business owners, they are often characterized to engage in *paodanbang* (running a solo gang), that is, a kind of shuttle trade in which individual merchants go abroad to bring back exotic goods for resale in the street market or small shops. *Paodanbang* was an important economic activity in Taiwan from the 1950s to 1970s, during which international travel was restricted. The solo merchants often worked with a network of commissioning stores to distribute merchandise, such as medicine, cosmetics, and small electric appliances from Japan and Hong Kong. The demand for such daily necessities from abroad was partly conditioned by an economic policy tilted toward manufacturing for export and steel industries (Guo 2009).

The enterprising spirit evoked in *paodanbang* activities is considered to have contributed to Taiwan's economic miracle in the 1970s and 1980s (Hsu 2010). Moreover, such informal economy articulates a transnational imagination through aesthetic and cultural expressions. (Hsu 2010). In the 1990s, young shuttle traders combined leisure travel with commerce and created a unique Japanesque space in Taipei's Ximending area. Young people not only went to Ximending sell and buy faddish items not available through existing retail channels like department stores, but also to watch people, be seen, immerse in the atmosphere, and feel a sense of membership. (Lee 2009 143-145).

While Korean fashion retailers are part of Taiwan's *paodanbang* tradition, their emergence needs to be contextualized in the globalized economy. Their decision to bypass Wufenpu and source directly from Seoul reflects Taiwan's and

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<sup>5</sup> During my fieldwork, I became curious about the lack of Korean brands in Taiwanese department stores. According to the managers at Sui—a Korean brand co-invested by Korean fashion company Domeya and Taiwanese clothing firm, Guang-qi, it is because Taiwanese departments prefer international fashion brands. The majority firms in Dongdaemun have no brands (interview, 21 May, 2012).

Korea's differential positioning in globalization. Unlike in the 1960s, 1970s, or even the 1990s, the shuttle traders from Taiwan have been actively incorporated into South Korea's vision and practice of globalization. In the fashion sector, no place better represents such a globalized system than Dongdaemun. Named after the eastern gate of the old Seoul city during the Joseon Dynasty, "Dongdaemun Market" was once a food market organized by Korean merchants under Japanese colonization. Its main trade shifted to apparel, a commodity introduced through foreign aid following the Korean War, and eventually supplied 70% of the apparel businesses in Korea in the 1970s and 1980s (Cho 2011). The opening of Art Plaza in 1990 introduced modern shopping mall atmosphere and flexible trade culture catering to retailers. Its success spawned the construction of similar types of shopping malls, making the area an enormous commercial district and helping it gain leadership over the Nandaemun wholesale market (Cho 2011, 6).

Dongdaemun traded with overseas buyers from Taiwan in the 1980s, but the transaction was primarily established through the ethnic Korean-Chinese network. (The Korean-Chinese (*hanguo huachiao*) were ethnic-Chinese populations of the merchant class who migrated from northeast China to Korea during the Chinese civil war (1920-1950). Under circumstances such as foreigner's investment restriction in Korea, the outbreak of Korean War (1950-1953), and the outreach by Republic of China (Taiwan) under the cold-war framework, many Korean-Chinese migrated to Taiwan from the 1950s to the 1970s. Most Chinese-Korean settled in Zhong-shing Street in Yongho, setting up shops selling clothes, electric blankets, spices, and gingseng. (Jian 2004)) Zhong-xing Street in Yongho became known as "Korean Street" in the 1980s due to the bustling garment trade from Korea. Ms. Sun, a Korean-Chinese in her 50s who worked in Dongdaemun for a packaging and shipping company in 1980, recalled receiving orders, negotiating price, overseeing custom production and arranging shipping for clients from Zhong-xing Street (Interview 16 March 2012). Korean-Chinese still play the role of middle-person in Dongdaemun, providing all-in-one services of translating, ordering, shipping, etc. But a more formidable transformation took place in Dongdaemun following the 1997 financial crisis, making the market accessible to anyone, with or without ethnic ties, with or without trade interest.

First, in addition to the traditional market and the modernized wholesale market, a third trading area, a retail shopping district composed of many department-store types like Migliore, Doosan Tower, and Hello apM, was built and targeted at teenagers, families, and tourists. The small to medium-sized manufacturers in the market began to produce cheap clothes for export. To

some extent, the new marketing and export-directed strategy helped save Dongdaemun from depression at the wake of 1997 financial crisis.<sup>6</sup> Rebranded as an around-the-clock “fashion town,” Korea’s largest wholesale and retail shopping district has 37 shopping malls (each of the 9-10 floors are made up of about 80 sellers of clothing and shoes), 31, 864 specialty shops, and over 50,000 manufacturers (Cho 2011; Tourist map). On a tourist map “Dongdaemun Fashion Town Special Tourism Zone,” it introduces the area as a “mecca of the fashion industry on a global scale” and “an one-stop system from planning to production and sales.” With 20,000 small producing facilities in the vicinity, the geographical cluster-based network was quickly identified as a competitive principle behind the “myth of Dongdaemun.”

The clustering of retail, wholesale, manufacturing, shipping, fabrics, and garment accessories markets in Dongdaemun enabled a self-fulfilling supply chain system (Choo et al., 2009). It also provides economic scale and minimize transaction cost. Joining the throwaway market instead of the standard fashion cycle, the small companies in Dongdaemun deliver variety and fashionability quickly and inexpensively. Calling it *pronto mode* formula, UK-based researcher Nobukaza Azuma notes that such market mechanism, which treats fashion items “in the same manner as fresh produce in grocery retailing” attracted prestigious Japanese, French, and Italian apparel firms and brand operators (2002, 141). Throughout the 1990s, Japanese retailers of the Shibuya street fashion known as *kogal* actually capitalized on Dongdaemun’s *pronto moda* capability because they could meet the fluctuating demands of styles at an affordable price.

How do Taiwanese clothing retailers play into Dongdaemun’s integration into the regional and global economy? Are there relationships beyond supplying and sourcing? From August 2011 to June 2012, I conducted fieldwork in the Shida Night Market, where “Korean fashion” shops have mushroomed from 2008 to 2011. I participated-observed the more than 100 clothing shops in the area and talked to shop operators whose jobs involve regular buying in Seoul.<sup>7</sup> Given the booming business under “Korean fashion” and the growth of casual sellers spawned by tourism and educational exchange, I also initiated contact with

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<sup>6</sup> Or so that’s the big discourse, which is also not questioned in the well-made documentary by Taiwan’s Public Television Service. As Jieheerah Yun (2011, 75) points out, the 1997 financial crisis resulted in restructuring of financial institutions and *chaebol* companies, small shops and factories are unlikely to receive assistance. Many were closed despite the success of Migliore.

<sup>7</sup> My fieldwork covers the area bordered by Shida Road, Roosevelt Road, Taishun Street, and the southern border of National Taiwan Normal University. The specific 9 streets I observed were located on Longquan Street, Alley 38 of Taishun Street, Alley 40 of Taishun Street, Alley 49 of Shida Road., Alley 44 of Taishun Street, Alley 59 of Shida Road, Yunho Street, Alley 75 of Yunho Street, Alley 50 of Taishun Street, Alley 83 of Shida Road, and Pucheng Street. The number of shops shifted quickly from 2011 to 2012 due to resident protests.



individual sellers of different background and location (See index for a list of informant and their background).

While there were instances of Korean-Taiwan interaction at the product development level, such as “patterned in Taiwan, manufactured in Korea,” the majority buyers project a cut-and-dry relationship with Dongdaemun. Miere, a woman in her mid 20s who opened her first shop in Shida three years ago, said firmly, “Korea is just a sourcing stop, like the way China is a sourcing stop” (interview 22 May, 2012). Jessie, an experienced buyer and business owner who regularly takes entrepreneurs on group buying tours to Seoul and China, said her visits to Dongdaemun are always about the products, never the suppliers. “My head is always turning, checking out the styles” (interview, 27 March, 2012). According to her, repeat visits would be a result of product variety, not reputation of suppliers. A Shida business owner who buys large quantity from Dongdaemun also confirms the practical business culture:

“As long as you make large quantity orders, their attitude is different. The boss—usually the manager—will come out to talk. My experience in working with Korean suppliers has been good. They are highly cooperative. It’s the same everywhere. Large orders will facilitate communication and speed” (SIKI interview, 3 May 2012).

SIKI and his partner have contracted Dongdaemun suppliers to manufacture clothes, either using SIKI and partner’s product idea or the suppliers’ product idea exclusively sold at their stores in Shida. Each month, they put out 150 to 200 new styles, each ordered between 500 to 1000 pieces. SIKI is impressed with the safe, comfortable, and systematic shopping environment in Dongdaemun.

Buyers from Taiwan are an integral part of Dongdaemun system, which is accommodating to foreign buyers, evinced not just in the modern, intuitive shopping space, but also in the shipping and multi-lingual services offered. However, to most of my informants, language is much less of a concern than a distinctive business and aesthetic sense about product selection in an easily overwhelming marketplace. Poetica, the young owner of a Shida boutique specializing in one-piece dresses, told me it took her four trips in six months to finally figure out the kind of clothes she would carry at her store. She describes Dongdaemun in terms of the department stores in Taipei’s east shopping district, Dongqu—except at a much bigger scale. Pressed to spend NT \$200,000 on her first buying trip, she navigated the connecting stalls like a “snake” so she would not miss any product (*saohuo*). “It’s easy to lose oneself in the foreign market. Winter in Korea is super cold and it’s natural to bring back thick knitwear. But they won’t sell in Taiwan because it’s just not that cold here. And that is all

money we are talking about” (interview 20 January, 2012).

Having a distinctive sense of style is probably the most important asset for small shop retailers. After all, the reputation of small shuttle traders rests on their unique eye for sourcing from abroad. Yet one of the biggest problems facing small merchants selling “Korean fashion” in Taiwan is the high rate of identical products. Under cost-saving consideration, some buyers would shorten the length of their trip from an average of three to four nights to an one-night stopover. The late night, long-hour operation<sup>8</sup> of the wholesale market makes it possible for overseas buyers to maximize their traveling time, but it also creates stressful and hectic work condition. Yet, the labor of transnational buying is frequently erased under a discourse connecting traveling and shopping with leisure.

During my interview with a young female shop owner in Banciao, three bureaucrats from the New Taipei City government entered the shop to check the manufacturing location of the clothes. After hearing that the owner goes to Korea once a month, one officer remarked, “Wow, what a sweet job!” Although the officer was just making conversation for more questioning, this view was commonly held by people upon hearing the profession of “carrying goods from abroad.” Transnational buying is misunderstood for leisure shopping. The construction of Dongdaemun as a special tourist zone/fashion town contributes to this view, attracting even casual visitors with no intent to be in the retail clothing business.<sup>9</sup> Shop owner Miere once took a curious friend on a buying trip and became extremely frustrated due to such misrecognition.

I told her let’s not do this again. I said ‘I am working, and you are playing. It’s totally different. I was telling the shop to get me 2-2-2,<sup>10</sup> and you were still like “should we take this one?” I used to leave one day to go to Idae and Hongkik at a more leisurely pace. On that day I really needed to remind myself to slow down. But it’s hard to relax because at the back of my mind there’s always: Gotta source tonight, gotta source tonight, gotta source tonight” (interview, 22 May 2012).

The distinction between shopping and “liver-busting”<sup>11</sup> buying has been reported in the Taiwanese media. Accounts of physical laboring such as how

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<sup>8</sup> Most wholesale shopping centers open from 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. until 6 a.m. Yet some malls that open during the day time also open until early morning, such as Maxtyle (10:00am-5:00am); or Area 6 (9:00p.m. to 5:00 p.m.) The OT (0:00 a.m. to 3:00p.m.)

<sup>9</sup> One of my informants tried to buy from the wholesale market while doing a summer exchange program in Korea.

<sup>10</sup> Meaning ordering two of each style or color.

<sup>11</sup> This was a phrase posted by a buyer who checked in “At Taoyuan International Airport” on Facebook.

young female buyers struggle to schlep heavy bags of clothes across the malls or subway make interesting storytelling on talk shows.<sup>12</sup> Following Taiwanese merchants on an all-night buying trip, Taiwan's Public Television Service has produced an informative documentary about Dongdaemun's racing culture, which affects the work schedule and lifestyle of transnational buyers in every way (2010). During my fieldwork, my contact with the shop owners fell in various hectic time pockets organized around "going abroad." Miao talked to me just hours after getting off the plane; Ping talked to me in her store basement while unpacking and pricing the sweaters from her previous trip to Korea. One time, busily reviewing buying plans for her upcoming trip, Miere simply had no time to talk to me. State of tiredness was common.

The more experienced buyers are able to mobilize their resources to set their work conditions. Sululu, a 32-year-old shop owner who has been doing transnational buying in Asia since she was 20, said:

I like my job. People in the same business always ask me how much longer I intend to do this because they are all tired out by the inverse schedule. I get a sense of achievement from my job. I can adapt to the hardship, which comes with every trade. I got married and had a kid after getting into this business. Because my partner accepted me, I was able to choose having a family, even a child (interview, 18 January 2012).

In some way, Sululu's self-presentation is not so different from the other "war stories" in the competitive trade. The matter is, transnational buying involves physical, mental, and aesthetic work. It requires complex coordination and interaction with other divisions of labor in the fashion business. Jessie, the semi-public expert figure in shuttle trading to Korea and China who has continuously disseminated knowledge of the business through teaching, media interviews, blogging, and tour groups, puts "work" in a more ordinary way. One "minor" account she mentioned in passing which struck me as telling about the condition of work was that her husband traveled with her to Dongdaemun during her pregnancy.

Rather than treating "laboring" as good "war stories" under capitalistic logic of competition, I want to position the transnational buying activities of Taiwanese clothing retailers in the complex labor forms in transnationalized fashion industries. Specifically, a transnational labor view is urgently needed as Dongdaemun became redrafted into Seoul's design discourse and policy. Since 2010, Seoul metropolitan government has been promoting design-related businesses through the construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park

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<sup>12</sup> Paodanbang experts are popular guests on finance or business related talk shows.

(DDPP). A public park and massive (16 acres) structure that adds amenities to the existing fashion industries, the star-architect designed DDPP promised to be not just the new landmark for Dongdaemun, but also for Seoul. To get its residents to accept the necessary inconvenience brought upon by such an urban re-landscaping plan, Seoul city put forth a “feeling based” campaign emphasizing the global status benefit of transitioning from a “hard city” to a “soft city” (Yun 2011). Yet there is much hidden cost in addition to the highly visible demolition of the historic Seoul Sports Stadium (built in 1926). Jieheerah Yun’s dissertation provides many key counter-narratives to the city’s design branding and co-optation of Dongdaemun’s infinite growth myth. Of relevance to the current paper are displaced vendors, oversupplied lots in the shopping malls, and the unjust treatment of migrant laborers, who make up an important garment production force in Korea (Yun 2011, 89; interview with Key Hyoun Park, secretary-general of Chun Tae-II Foundation 26 April, 2012). These instances illuminate on a variety of labor forms positioned unequally in Korea’s fashion industries.

How does Dongdaemun’s discursive shift to a design capital affect the “laboring” of fashion buyers from Taiwan? First, the deepening stratification between material and immaterial work favors export promotion. At the policy and academic level, fashion is increasingly evaluated according to the Korean government’s interest to support design related industry, rather than labor intensive manufacturing (Cho 2004). Yet “the work of fashion production—including design work and manufacture—continues to be labour-intensive, low-paid and often relatively insecure” (Reimer 2009, 65). The discrepancy can be observed in Dongdaemun, where government support goes to agencies like Dongdaemun Market Information Center (managed by Korea Fashion Association). The Center offers a design library, organizes fashion shows and confab meetings between new designer meetings and overseas buyers (interview with manager Teak Kim 27 April, 2012). But the fast output of versatile new styles often did not grow out of design hubs. It is more likely from the individual suppliers, who develop their specialization by being in the proximity of the fast changing market.<sup>13</sup> When the discourse on the fashion industry shifts

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<sup>13</sup> At the wholesale market in Dongdaemun, I met several sellers who design and plan new styles on a weekly basis. At a pants shop in Nuzzon, one of the big wholesale shopping mall, a middle-age woman said she puts out two new styles weekly. Before opening her own business, she was trained in making pockets for slacks. Another couple who have been in the business for 10 years said they customize their designs for China clients. Some received design training at vocational schools but ideas for new designs come from close interaction with buyers (interview, 27 April 2012). Though Dongdaemun is branded as fashion town and articulated with the popular Korean Wave, it is not a career destination for university graduates from design departments

to immaterial aspect such as feelings, design and creativity, the work of buying—an ambiguous territory that falls somewhere between manufacture and consumption—can be easily overlooked.

Second, factor in the geographical dimension and we find a variety of new labor forms emerging due to the growing demand of “floating” and “mobile workers.” In Korea, migrants from Russia, Nepal and Bangladesh already formed an important workforce for garment manufacture with irreplaceable skill.<sup>14</sup> Korean fashion firms also have entered foreign markets through exporting finished goods, licensing, OEM producing in Korea, to joint venture and OEM producing overseas (Cho and Lee 2006). At Dongdaemun Sewing Association in Chang-sin Dong, I met two men who have returned after some frustrating years of doing business in China.<sup>15</sup> De-nationalization of the apparel industries seems to have created further division of labor, as the unique characteristic of Dongdaemun is the subcontractor’s capability to make garments from start to finish and yet it is a knowledge that cannot be easily passed on due to the compressed and expanding scale of the industry (interview with Na Pyong De 27 April, 2012). Garment factories in the Kaesong Industrial Park located in North Korea add complexity to the trans-nationalized framework of labor classification.<sup>16</sup>

At the policy and discursive level, the Korean apparel industry is shifting to nonmanufacturing or value-added activities like branding, design, product development and retailing (H-Brookshire and Lee 2010). Dongdaemun Market Information Center, for instance, is trying to draw in more foreign buyers by setting up fashion shows and the chance to meet up-and-coming designers. However, the process yields a demand for mobile workers. And the experience of the transnational subjects—be it a migrant worker for a garment factory in Dongdaemun, an owner of a small firm doing OEM production in China, or an apparel buyer from Taiwan—are hardly the same. As Doreen Massey points out, speedups, accelerated turnover time, and increased mobility do not affect all person and groups equally (1993).

So, does “Korean fashion” exist? How is “Korean fashion” possible when it

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(conversation with Ho Jung Choo, SNU professor in the Department of Clothing & Textiles, 26 April 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Pamphlet of scholarship for migrant workers from Supporter’s Association for Deported Migrant Workers were distributed at the Chun Tae-II Foundation in Dongademun.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of frustration included difficulty in transferring company ownership and in worker management.

<sup>16</sup> Clothes manufactured in Kaesong Industrial Park can only be sold to South Korea. According one garment manufacturer there, this special economic zone will not only help alleviate their global workers deployment, but will also maintain the positive image of “Made in Korea” compared with other imported goods from China (Chiu 2008, 11).

is already transnationalized and translocalized from inside to outside? Based on my fieldwork, the following discussion will tease out how “Korean fashion” is embedded and deployed in the local apparel market, trans-localized industry, retail activities, and fashion sense in Taiwan.

### Meanings of “Korean Fashion” in Taiwan

When I told people in Taiwan that I was researching on the rise of “Korean fashion,” the conventional wisdom often pointed me to the value-adding effect of Korean Wave. At a shop in Shida, the young sales women skillfully and enthusiastically demonstrated how to wear hair accessories like Korean stars in TV dramas. Several retail buyers readily acknowledge their taking advantage of the Korean Wave. The majority, however, are not Korean Wave fans and have no time for star-chasing or fan activities. Hence, I approached them not with a straight shooter like, “why do you sell Korean clothes?” but questions concerning their trade, such as “how did you get into the clothing business” and “how did the shop start?” I tried to locate their resources and responsibilities for starting up and maintaining their businesses. For the most part, I was looking for signs that would illuminate the ways Korean style has been constructed at the intersection of market, space, and culture.<sup>17</sup> In Taiwan, Korean fashion can carry the following three connotations: (1) a homogenized taste for the mass public, (2) a practical solution for the individualist shop maker, and (3) a sourcing stopover in the transnationalized fashion industries.

### Korean fashion as Homogenized Taste

To explain how Korean fashion works as a homogenized clothing style for women in Taiwan, it’s useful to look at the stories of the newest “Korean fashion” store owners in Shida. Miao, the youngest informant in my study, opened a little boutique with her family’s help right after graduating from university. Her shop sign is juxtaposed to the words, “Korean Brand.” In the teal-green shop where a wooden rocking horse sits, she is often seen earnestly introducing accessories, blouses, bags she personally selected from Korea. A couple of streets down, Tutu was busily setting up her shop and interviewing a sales applicant. She had been a sales manager for a clothing store in the area named after Ehwa Women’s University in Seoul (Lihua). When I first met her, she was a salesperson at another new Korean fashion shop in Shida. Two week later,

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<sup>17</sup> During my shop visits, I took notes on the shop name, product types, product styles, pricing, interior decoration, customers, service, sales pitch, presentation of the salespeople, etc. To allow natural conversation to emerge and time to observe, I often tried on clothes and solicited style tips.

she opened her shop around the corner, selling “authentic Korean” (*zhenghan*) blouses, blazers, and dresses she brought back from Korea.

Miao and Tutu both opened their shops in once quiet residential alleys that had only become “invaded” by new clothing shops a year ago. Competition was fierce and most new shops make some kind of symbolic affiliation with Korea, such as announcing “Just Arrived from Korea” on chalkboard signs. When asked about the characteristics of Korean fashion, shop owners or salespeople often mention superior slim-fitting silhouettes and quality fabrics, but many acknowledge that they are a matter of sales pitch rather exclusive quality of clothes made in Korea. Adding to the liberal definition of “Korean fashion” are multiple routes of supply and unclear labeling.<sup>18</sup> When a store advertises Korean goods (*hanhuo*), it could mean a number of things, like made-in-Korea apparel imported by the shop owner, made-in-Korea apparel imported by Wufenpu merchants, OEM production in China by Korean company (*hanzu*), and knock-offs of Korean apparel made in China (*hanban*). It is well known that many shops carry a mixture of these possible products to take advantage of the symbolic value of Korean goods.<sup>19</sup> Under this circumstance, Korean fashion is driven into a game of speculation by price competition and branding—that is, promotion by small business services rather than by corporations.

The result became a homogenized and mainstreaming understanding of Korean fashion, seen in the high rate of identical outfits. Many informants mention the difficulty of selling something edgy and non-mainstream<sup>20</sup> to their Taiwanese customers, who are mainly budget-conscious students and office workers. EJ, a shop owner in the more upscale and trendy Dongqu, is a veteran clothes seller who has different resources and insights from most buyers I met.<sup>21</sup> Married to a Korean and living half of the time in Seoul, her passion is “all things related to Korea and making money” (interview, 12 January, 2012). Based on her experience, Taiwanese consumers easily fell prey to the power of branding. She used to pay fashionista bloggers to write advertorials for apparel and bags. At a

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<sup>18</sup> Although garment importers are required to identify the originating country, material, and care instruction under the commodity labeling law drafted by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, a good amount of them have no clear labels.

<sup>19</sup> SIKI’s store is one of the few shops that makes distinctions between the different kinds of Korean fashion by way of production. The price range can be big.

<sup>20</sup> These are often clothes that didn’t sell well, such as a shirt attached to a long chiffon skirt with a high cut in the front, revealing shorts inside, or an all-gold tight blouse (Miao interview, 30 October, 2011; Miere, interview 22 May, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> She has an apartment in Seoul, which makes it easy for her to access the market compared to buyers from Taiwan. When I followed her to Dongdaemun, her husband dropped us off and picked us up afterward. Sitting in the traffic jam in Dongdaemun at midnight and commenting on buyers from Taiwan and China, EJ remarked that “we will do the shopping in a graceful style.”

meet-the-blogger event, she was surprised by the high number of readers dressed identically as the blogger. “I am not a fashionable person. But I know how you can sell something even if it’s ugly as hell.” She cites a Korean shopping website (CKK) as an example of successful manipulation and talked about how she took advantage of the branding effect:

I got into buying from Dongdaemun’s wholesale market because of CKK. I knew apparels sold on CKK are from Dongdaemun, not from their own production. For two months, I went there [Dongdaemun] every other day and browsed nonstop. I discovered clothes sold on CKK were really from there. I followed the pictures and tracked down the shop labels. I sold “CKK” clothes online at a lower price and told people that I sourced from the same place. I made a lot of money. But people also complained why there wasn’t a CKK logo. I was asked whether it’s a knockoff. The thing is, if they have been branded really well, they’d think it’s fake. Taiwanese people really buy into the myth of logo. (interview, 12 January 2012).

If the value of *paodanbang* comes partly from its introduction of rare-to-find commodities from abroad, one of the unspoken mishaps in shuttle trade is necessarily importing commodities already available, even abundant, in the local market. Although it is not a phenomenon exclusive to Shida, the sudden increase of new clothing shops there made visible the paradox of sourcing transnationally but offering few diverse goods. As a result Shida became a cheap retail zone, “another Wufenpu” (Huang 2012, 28). What is Korean about Korean fashion became purely price based. The characteristic of Korean fashion, as many sellers instinctively acknowledge, is “whatever sells the best.” This new market reality impinges on another group of shop owners in Shida, who are critical of Korean fashion but use it as a practical means to support real dreams.

#### Korean Fashion as a Means for Individualist Shop

Before Shida became “another Wufenpu,” it was known as a low-key area with small shops. The anonymity of “small shops” is significant. The enterprising mode in the small shops often takes the creative, cultural, and community desires into consideration. Many sold clothes also sourced from overseas markets such as Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Bangkok, but they did not sell clothes based on the promotional value of the manufacturing country. “Play” was a key word I often heard when being in their shops. For example, Poetica, a self-described “fashion player,” enjoys meeting customers who “get” her products and know immediately how to “play” with it. Madam Chen likes to



comment in detail on the ways Japanese and European designers “play” with fabrics, cutting, and pattern. Once at Jewel’s shop, as soon as I mentioned that I was looking for blazers, her face lit up and she said: “let’s play this leisurely.” They set up their businesses in Shida before the area became trendy in a mainstream way. Facing the influx of Korean fashion, they invented ways to embed Korean fashion in their unique shop style. I will devote the following to discussion to one shop’s story.

From 2003 to roughly 2009, Ping and Ring’s shop was the only bright spot in the dark alley leading from my previous apartment to the night market. Once in a while, a poster showing large suitcases would appear on their closed door, indicating they are on a buying trip to Japan. They sold mainly women’s clothes and zakka items sourced from Osaka and Tokyo’s wholesale markets. However, the shop is more than a clothing store embracing simple, vintage, girl-like Japanese fashion, its interior setup, atmosphere and items/merchandise on display reflect an interest in independent, DIY fashion and art. Besides a painting of Yoshitomo Nara’s rebellious girl, the work of local young illustrators and designers and the DIY flyers reflecting the owners’ family network and community connection often decorate the walls.

Classmates in elementary school, Ping and Ring started the business around 2000. A school counselor by day, Ping rented a stall in Shida Night Market selling hand-made skirts made by her. Shida was dark and so uncommercialized at the time that finding a space to rent went through personal networks rather than the real estate agents. Once the business picked up, the landlord took back the stall. In 2002, Ping and Ring set up a shop a few blocks down in a quiet residential alley. They started to source from Japan to fill the increased business demand. Few years later, rising yen and rising Korean fashion started to close in on her business. According to Ping:

We resisted sourcing from Korea for a long time. Why did we resist? Our friends who went said there is good stuff there. We thought we would check it out whether or not we want to carry it. I was surprised the clothes there are not as ugly as I thought. Well, I don’t like the kinds around here. I found the market caters to all sorts of needs, such as our preference for simple, good quality, Japanese-style clothing, not the loud Korean-style fashion (interview 18 January, 2012).

Although Ping and Ring were able to find Korean goods from Dongdaemun that fit the theme of their shop, the market environment in Shida was changing rapidly. Gone was the leisurely feeling at her store. On Friday nights I often couldn’t get into her shop, which has become crowded with young girls (and

boyfriends) drawn to the area's new fashion shops. On weekday afternoons, when their shop returned to its leisurely pace and community atmosphere,<sup>22</sup> Ping told me she was unhappy about the crowd. "We know how to make money. But the two of us wanted more than making money." It was a profitable time. They were urged to franchise and retire (become the boss). Ping was against the idea. The shop was a solution to financial needs at first. In the process of running their business, they became inspired by similar shops in Japan that combined work and dreams. She said:

It's tiring to tend the shop, but not tending the shop makes me feel I am out of touch. If I don't tend the shop I won't know how to select clothes because I have no interaction with the customers. In the long run this shop will lose its sense of place. Tending the shop keeps me real (interview, 18 January, 2012)

Shop operators like Ping and Ring typically use Korean fashion items to complement their shop's individual character. However, Korean fashion in Taiwan is more than commodities; as indicated throughout this paper, it brought changes to the marketplace, customer makeup, and cultural struggles. Facing new competition and customers whose tastes are too syrupy and sensual for them, Ping and Ring have flexed their creativity and enterprising flexibility by opening various experimental "small shops" in the neighborhood as well as other locations. This includes a café, a shop mainly showcasing hand-made clothes by her family and local designers, and a clothing store offering various DIY/art classes taught by return customers. For them, the rise of Korean fashion as goods and business prompted them to reflect on and confirm their business and cultural vision. Korea is hardly the only fashion sourcing location. Poetica, who sells one-piece dresses in her DIY pink boutique in Shida, is looking for the right moment to go to China. "I have to admit I am a little tired of going to Korea. But I am afraid to go to China. So I want to go with a tour group" (interview, 20 January 2012). However, the scale of China's garment industries and market is still discouraging her from taking action. What sort of Taiwanese merchants have the resources to deploy Korea fashion's Chinese connection?

### **Korean Fashion's Chinese Connection**

**One of the ways Korean apparels are made in the context of transnationalized fashion production, as mentioned earlier, is through OEM**

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<sup>22</sup> One of the important characteristic of Ping and Ring's shop is the caring interaction between them and the customers. Return customers often help out at the store, stocking and bringing Ping and Ring meals and snacks.

production outside of Korea. Yet, there is still another means of producing “Korean fashion” which further decenters the Korean brand. Known to Korean fashion companies as a practice of making various knock-off versions based on Korean design, this method creates a tri-local, trans-local connection between Taipei, Seoul, and Humen—a garment wholesale town near Dongguan. It is well known that Wufenpu wholesalers would buy samples in Dongdaemun and take them to factories in Humen on the same journey for ordering cheaper knock-offs (Hu 2008). In my research, those informants with the Chinese connection tend to be large-quantity dealers with significantly more experience in different sectors of the fashion industries besides retailing. As a result, they are interested in the competitive possibility from manufacture’s end.

Jessie, the retailer, business career instructor, and tour guide for buyers, has a rich career profile in the fashion industries. Her mother was a shuttle trader-turned apparel wholesaler. Jessie grew up watching her mother bring home giant suitcases of clothes, medicine, walkman and what not from Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. Though she did not want to follow her mother’s footsteps, she set up her own business selling accessories in several markets in her hometown, Kaohsiung. In her mid 20s, she opened an apparel company that provided retail, wholesaling, and make-to-order production. Many of her clients were the Wufenpu wholesalers. The pattern designs came from either her company or the clients.

One of the qualifications Jessie advertised on her blog as well as on the career training courses was her factory-running experience in Humen, China.<sup>23</sup> After building her connection with the Taiwanese business (*taishang*) circle through years of wholesale buying, she took over a garment factory of about 40 workers and took orders from Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the US. Although she closed the factory after just a year,<sup>24</sup> the experience shaped her niche and pitch. On her blog, she offers practical consideration about doing business in China and responds to questions from just about everyone. She actively dispels Korean fashion fetish and challenges Taiwanese people’s bias about China. She writes:

Korean goods are still made in China. Those who shuttle trade from Japan also get made-in-China goods. China has the largest labor market in the world and will continue to be for at least 10 more years. In fact, Koreans also open factories in China. In our subcontractor factory, there are also pattern design orders from Korean companies (Jessie 2006).

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<sup>23</sup> She teaches business career startup courses offered by the National Youth Commission.

<sup>24</sup> She said “managing workers in China is different from Taiwan, not to mention I was female, in my 20s. No one listened to me” (interview 27 March, 2012).

For Jessie, China is the “real source” of all fashion because just about every brand depends on its production capacities. SIKI, a big retailer who runs two Shida shops with his wife, has also tapped into China’s manufacture power to help him establish a brand. “We go straight to the factory. We don’t go to China for ready-to-sell clothes. That’s the Wufenpu mode. We make orders with our own designs and the fabrics we found” (interview, 3 May 2012). SIKI makes it clear that he is interested in product development (*kaifa*), not designing clothes. He said:

We are not designers. We do it in a simple way, usually with certain elements that catch our fancy. We mix and match. Take this t-shirt for example, we like it and would like to add a pocket. So we use lace, net, matched color, or contrast color. We would also buy some brand products, like an expensive skirt that cost 4000-5000 NT. Then we go to Korea or China looking for materials, [order it to be made], and price it differently. A brand is just a logo.

The thing is they really used that particular material” (interview, 3 May 2012). In his office in the store’s basement which also doubles as a storage room, SIKI showed me fabric samples from Korea and China, which seems to be his passion and a more critical advantage than factory connection. To save trouble, he only contracts out to factories run by Taiwanese businessmen (*taishang*). The real competition in the fashion business, according to SIKI, rests in the material and manufacturing upgrade, which also becomes a matter of national policy on economic and technology development.

The merchants who regard South Korea as a stopover in the transnationalized fashion industries are highly aware of the state of decline in Taiwan’s garment industries. They maintain a flexible and ambivalent engagement with Korea in order to locate a new competitive advantage in Taiwan. Emphasizing quick style turnover almost every week, SIKI’s business is practicing its own version of “fast fashion” through interactions with Dongdaemun and Humen. The manufacture capacity under post-socialist, capitalistic China has allowed product distinction as well as cultural distinction (Chang 2004; Hu 2009). As for Jessie, she considered herself a reluctant Korea fashion buyer and tour organizer. When I asked her whether all the influx of Korean goods in Taiwan has enriched the garment industries and fashion sensibility, she shook her head and said:

I think it’s all bad influence, and I am part of the problem. I take people to do wholesale buying in China and in Korea. They import the stuff and make money off Taiwanese people. Then with that money they go on more

buying trips abroad. Taiwanese money is going out constantly. A better alternative may be us bringing something out to sell—probably more likely in China, but not in Korea” (interview, 27 March 2012).

Jessie’s suggestion expresses a desire for more equal trading. It will not be easy in the competitive business world. But as “Korean fashion” becomes more and more elusive and market more saturated in Taiwan, the issue of how fashion is materially, economically, and culturally integrated with people’s lives will become increasingly important.

### Out of Culture, Out of Fashion

Throughout this paper, I have shown the various ways “Korean fashion” has been embedded in the young, urban market in Taiwan and mediated by the transnational and translocal business activities of Taiwanese retail buyers and shop owners. Fast, faddish, and affordable, Korean fashion has lured in young consumers and entrepreneurs in Taiwan. However, the concurrent manufacturing and retail conditions in the region did more to encourage the emergence of Korean fashion. As this paper has illustrated, the “Korean identity” of Korean fashion rests on flexible connection with transnational capitalists of multiple origins (Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, or Korean-Chinese), manufacturers located in China, and shuttle traders zooming through inter-cities like Dongdaemun, Taipei, Dongguan, Osaka, and Bangkok. The brand making of Korean fashion is very much an inter-Asian affair, emptied of intrinsic Korean materiality, and instead, became intricately woven into inter-local connectivities. Cultural and economic shifts at any given locality could affect the value of Korean fashion. In this conclusion, I wish to re-consider the expediency of Korean fashion in Taiwan amidst Shida Night Market’s controversial rezoning process.

Since late September 2011, some local residents protesting against the environmental degradation caused by the expanding night market have successfully gotten the Taipei City government to limit the growth of Shida Night Market. Although many businesses have tried to make amends by regulating their hours, noise levels, and cooking smoke output, more than 90 businesses were still driven away from the area as of late June 2012. Most, even with legitimate business licenses, cannot easily resolve the violation of a city ordinance that forbids operating business in alleys of six meter-wide or less. This could result in an accruing daily fine of NT 60,000 dollar. Rumors and reports of Night Market shutdown drove away potential business owners and customers. During the latter part of my fieldwork, police officers and government officials

made frequent stops at shops in Shida, checking business licenses and notifying many shop owners to remove any extended display on the exterior of their shop. Some of my informants had to put a halt on their buying trips because of business slowdown. By the end of my fieldwork, more than half of my informants in Shida have relocated or closed their stores.

The controversy has been framed largely as a conflict between the residents' fight for existing quality of life and business' role in urban regeneration. As in all urban spatial struggles, the interest alignment in the community is complex. The real estate developers have aggressively persuaded many ground-floor landlords to turn their properties into profitable and heavily partitioned spaces for lease. Yet upper-level residents and landlords have shouldered more of the environmental and safety costs. As an adjudicator, the Taipei City government double played several sides by initially supporting the promotion of Shida Night Market as a new tourist area, and then using its legal enforcement power to selectively shut down small businesses following the organized protests from residents. The public discussions were invariably tilted toward the resident group, officials, and cultural elites (Lin 2012). Caught between residents and landlords, small businesses tenants simply pleaded for economic survival. This discursive imbalance bears consequences on the public understanding of the issues, as the spatial struggle in Shida is also a symbolic struggle. And cheap clothes are no match for the contending cultural powers in Shida, which included the

For one thing, clothing shops are generally newer tenants than restaurants. They might feel inconvenienced by the rezoning process, but the sentiment of disenfranchisement ran deeper among the long-term restaurant operators—among whom one operator even burned his shirt during one protest. Korean fashion might not be regarded as creative or in good taste, but they are not held responsible for immediate environmental degradation. The mushrooming clothing shops, however, are pitted against Shida's historical-humanist reputation as the “lower culture” upon the disdainful reaction that the area is turning into Taipei's biggest garment wholesale market, Wufenpu. While plenty of people have defended the history and cultural legacy of the night market in Taiwan, almost no one has spoken on behalf of the clothing retailers in public. The clothing trade seemed more itinerant and less committed to the local cultural economy in Shida. After all, Korean fashion is sold in any online or offline markets in Taiwan. Korean fashion or not, clothes in this context score little cultural credit.

It is not that there is no “culture” in garment trade or that clothing

businesses have weaker ties with a local community or a geographical place. My paper has described how shop keepers were driven to creative entrepreneurial resolutions out of economic exigency from the neighborhood and global scale. Landlords and real estate developers often raise rent out of the belief that it is the “location,” rather than the dynamic social and cultural relationships that created appealing neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the clothes retailers straddle transnational and translocal cultural economies out of a sourcing need that reflects the globalization of garment production and exchange in the specific decline of Taiwan’s garment industries. The clothing shopkeepers may not be vocal players during Shida’s rezoning controversy, but they helped shape the cultural landscape of Shida and attracted new residents, visitors, and tenants to the area’s vibrant culture. As with urban locales with mixed business and (sub)cultural interests like New Kujijiang, Hongdae, and Dongdaemun, the meanings of Shida is being re-written, re-negotiated, struggled by players of unequal symbolic power. The rezoning controversy has only begun to bring out the diverse and conflicting stories and feelings of people whose lives have been impacted by the cultural and economic activities at trans-local scales.

In the end, what does Korean fashion have to do with it? Rather than ending on a note about Taiwan’s national discontent against Korea’s economic and cultural rise—an emotional commentary that often leads to further competitive ideology, I want to reiterate that the creation of Korean fashion is a transnational and translocal process from the specific locale of Taiwan. In the absence of a manufacturing base and design investment, clothing trade needs to be acknowledged as a part of the transnational cultural traffic and that the Taiwanese clothing retailers/buyers’ regular trips to Seoul has spawned a range of entrepreneurial and creative activities in Taiwan. This process allowed multi-referential reflection on the relationship between Taiwan and Korea, on global and regional fashion sense, and dissemination of garment industries in East Asia. Finally, if clothes gain no currency in Taiwan’s local cultural politics, perhaps it is time to dialogue seriously about the kinds of clothes that ended up hanging on our bodies and closets. No, it’s not skin deep at all.

# 國科會補助計畫衍生研發成果推廣資料表

日期:2012/11/01

國科會補助計畫	計畫名稱: 透過韓國感知亞洲: 流行服飾與音樂創作中女孩主體的跨在地生產
	計畫主持人: 蔡如音
	計畫編號: 100-2410-H-003-070- 學門領域: 文化研究
無研發成果推廣資料	



100 年度專題研究計畫研究成果彙整表

計畫主持人：蔡如音		計畫編號：100-2410-H-003-070-					
計畫名稱：透過韓國感知亞洲：流行服飾與音樂創作中女孩主體的跨在地生產							
成果項目		量化			單位	備註（質化說明：如數個計畫共同成果、成果列為該期刊之封面故事...等）	
		實際已達成數（被接受或已發表）	預期總達成數（含實際已達成數）	本計畫實際貢獻百分比			
國內	論文著作	期刊論文	0	0	100%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	100%		
		研討會論文	0	0	100%		
		專書	0	0	100%		
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	100%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	100%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	100%	件	
		權利金	0	0	100%	千元	
	參與計畫人力（本國籍）	碩士生	0	0	100%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	100%		
博士後研究員		0	0	100%			
專任助理		0	0	100%			
國外	論文著作	期刊論文	0	0	100%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	100%		
		研討會論文	1	1	100%		
		專書	0	0	100%		章/本
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	100%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	100%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	100%	件	
		權利金	0	0	100%	千元	
	參與計畫人力（外國籍）	碩士生	0	0	100%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	100%		
博士後研究員		0	0	100%			
專任助理		0	0	100%			

<p>其他成果 (無法以量化表達之成果如辦理學術活動、獲得獎項、重要國際合作、研究成果國際影響力及其他協助產業技術發展之具體效益事項等，請以文字敘述填列。)</p>	<p>無</p>
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	成果項目	量化	名稱或內容性質簡述
科 教 處 計 畫 加 填 項 目	測驗工具(含質性與量性)	0	
	課程/模組	0	
	電腦及網路系統或工具	0	
	教材	0	
	舉辦之活動/競賽	0	
	研討會/工作坊	0	
	電子報、網站	0	
	計畫成果推廣之參與(閱聽)人數	0	

# 國科會補助專題研究計畫成果報告自評表

請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況、研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）、是否適合在學術期刊發表或申請專利、主要發現或其他有關價值等，作一綜合評估。

1. 請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況作一綜合評估

達成目標

未達成目標（請說明，以 100 字為限）

實驗失敗

因故實驗中斷

其他原因

說明：

2. 研究成果在學術期刊發表或申請專利等情形：

論文： 已發表  未發表之文稿  撰寫中  無

專利： 已獲得  申請中  無

技轉： 已技轉  洽談中  無

其他：（以 100 字為限）

3. 請依學術成就、技術創新、社會影響等方面，評估研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）（以 500 字為限）

首先，本研究依據最初評審的建議，將流行音樂的探討擱置，專心研究台韓間流行服飾的交易與文化。在為期一年的研究當中，研究者透過跨國田野調查，了解頻繁前往韓國批貨的台灣女性服飾業者，在此勞動過程中的經驗與知識。由於研究當中多數研究對象為師大夜市的年輕服飾業者，研究過程中見證、納入在地空間爭議與衣著的在地與跨國文化政治。本研究的初衷在於探討台灣與韓國社會文化間的實際當代互動，研究結果除了包括成衣交易當中女性創業、勞動的厚描，還適時的在師大商圈快速變遷的當下記錄的重要的服飾文化意義。雖然整體來說並不屬於文化政策的範疇，但是研究結果應可提供在地文化政治與政策更多的思考。