

## **Consuming “Cowboy” in Korean Material Culture: Impact of "American Style" from the 1950s to the 1980s**

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### **Abstract**

This symposium contemplates on the influence of “Cowboy Culture” in genres of popular music, fashion, and film. Blue jeans and American style popular music emerged in the expansion of American popular culture by means of cold war cultural hegemony and underground economy of consumer products—both officially and unofficially. Introduction of “American cowboy culture” in post-WWII Asia could come with Hollywood movies, tourist attractions, and children’s toys. For example, many Japanese tourists used to go to Hawaii to participate in cowboy-themed entertainment in the 1980s while children developed desire for “Woody” (Sheriff Woody Pride) in Toy Story (1995).

In East Asia, high-end fashion is obviously influenced by French fashion. However, the US became the center of the fashion industry after WWII. Just like post-war contemporary art, US-sponsored fashion and cosmetics brands grew their popularity and market share in cold-war cultural hegemony. Using visual culture and consumer behavior in film and media, this paper posits that young people in South Korea had an ambivalent attitude toward “American Style” fashion.

I argue that the impact of US cultural hegemony in post-war South Korea left a deep impact on street fashion including cowboy styles. Haute Couture fashion was driven by well-known designers in France or Italy. However, street fashion in South Korea was disseminated via Hollywood film, lifestyle magazines, and other US-produced consumer goods distributed by illicit channels like an Army PX stores in South Korea. The Eighth United States Army was stationed in South Korea since 1950. The United States Forces Korea was additionally established in 1957. The paper is composed of the following sections.

1950s: Beauty Pageants, Fashion Shows, and Popular Journalism  
1960s: Miniskirts, Hollywood Films, and Global Cosmetic Brands  
1970s: Rise of Unisex and Blue Jeans  
1980s: Ready-to-Wear Brands

## Biography



Kyunghee Pyun is professor of art history at the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York. Professor Pyun's scholarship focuses on the history of collecting, reception of Asian art, intersectionality of art and technology, and industrial history in modern Asia. Her research interest ranges from diaspora of Asian artists and Asian American visual culture to image-text relationship in illustrated books of medieval and early modern Europe, cross-cultural exchange of luxury objects, and business history of art and design practitioners. In regard to Korean studies, her scholarship is well summarized in *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art: Fluidity and Fragmentation* (Routledge, 2022) and *Dress History of Korea: Critical Perspectives of Primary Sources* (Bloomsbury, 2023). For dress history, Professor Pyun wrote *Fashion, Identity, Power in Modern Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), which discussed modernized dress in the early 20th-century. This book was translated into a Korean language version and published by a renowned academic publisher called Sapyoung Academy in 2024. She has a three-volume series on dress history. The first was *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern Asia* (2018); the second was the *Dress History of Korea: Critical Perspectives of Primary Sources* (2024); and the third is *School Uniforms in East Asia: Fashioning Statehood and Self* (coming out soon; 2026).