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# Analyzing the Impact of Western Fashion on Traditional Attire and Cultural Identity: A Systematic Literature Review

**Samina Junejo**
Assistant Professor, Aror University of Arts, Architecture, Design & Heritage,
Email:samo_junejo@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Cultural identity is largely expressed through the clothing one wears and as the world becomes increasingly globalized, Western-style dressing influences many different forms of traditional attire from all parts of the globe. Although there have been a number of studies dealing with interactions between Western-style dress and other forms of traditional dress (from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and fashion), this review aims to identify the ways in which Western-style dress has impacted traditional types of apparel; analyze the relationship between globalization and culture via fashion; examine factors contributing to whether and to what degree individuals adopt/ adapt/resist Western styles of dress; investigate the extent to which traditional dress continues to exist (and if so, in what form) and to suggest areas for further research. Utilizing PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines, a systematic search of publicly available academic literature (published between 2016 – 2025) was performed. The results of the search were then utilized to conduct citation snowballing. Studies included represented the following geographic regions: Central Asia; East Asia; South Asia; West Africa; the Arabian Gulf; and European and North American Muslim diaspora. Results indicate that Western-style dress influences and reshapes traditional forms of attire but it does not eliminate them completely. The review identified gaps related to comparative cross-national quantative analyses of cultural identity expression via clothing and analysis of the role of digital media in reviving traditional forms of attire

**Keywords**: cultural identity; cultural hybridity; fashion globalization; postcolonial theory; traditional dress; Western fashion; systematic literature review

## Introduction

Dress is never simply about functionality. As such, in every culture there are the visible ways we exhibit our cultural identity, religion, gender, and status through dress (Botirova & Abdullayeva, 2025; Jansen & Craik, 2016). The last four decades have seen the emergence of the globalized fashion system — the result of globalized advertising (mass media), retailing (transnational re-tailers), and the use of new technologies and their accompanying digital and social platforms. These have resulted in the establishment of the western sartorial code (three-piece suit, jeans, mini-skirts, fast fashion silhouettes) as a common global reference for all people.

There are different aspects of this phenomenon in academic discourse. One way to think about it is in terms of whether or how western-style clothing can erase the local vocabulary of clothing and thus, the culture's meaning(s) for that vocabulary (Zhang & Yim, 2025). On the other hand, another perspective based on the idea of "cultural hybridization," sees tradition and west style as

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mutually exclusive and thus are combined into something entirely new that is both an element of the globalization process and allows communities to retain their cultural identity (Jansen & Craik, 2016). Another way to view this exchange is through a post-colonial lens where the western encounter is seen as part of the historical legacy of colonialism in which western style clothing has historically been imposed upon colonized peoples via missionaries, administrators etc., and thus today's 'revival' of local styles cannot be understood without reference to this past (Slade & Jansen, 2020; Jansen, 2020).

The importance of this debate extends well beyond academia. For example, the fashion and heritage preservation sectors, along with various national governments are now using traditional clothing as an economic development resource to support their tourist, diplomatic and sustainable development initiatives. At the same time, both designers and consumers are also negotiating the same garment based on its value as a site for religious practice, as part of their own gender identity politics and as a means of self-expression as part of their daily lives (Wu et al., 2025; Radeljic, 2025). As such, understanding how and why people adopt, adapt, resist or transform traditional forms of clothing has relevance for those working in education related to the fashion sector, in policy-making that impacts culture and for professionals within the commercial aspects of this sector.

Although there are many relevant areas of study as it relates to Western fashion influencing traditional clothing, they have been studied independently of one another. Much of what has been researched regarding Western fashion's influence on traditional clothing has been conducted through a variety of discipline-specific lenses and/or regionally-based studies. Therefore, there has been little effort made to evaluate the synthesis of these findings across various cultures. The purpose of this review was to bridge the gap left by previous reviews and provide an evaluation scholarly works from 2016-2025 that were related to the overlap of Western fashion and traditional clothing within the context of cultural identity. Additionally, this review will be based upon five key objectives including: (1) examining the ways in which Western fashion has impacted traditional attire throughout society; (2) investigating the relationships between globalized fashion and cultural identity; (3) evaluating factors that contribute to either the acceptance/adoption/and resistance to Western style; (4) analyzing the preservation/transformation of traditional dress in modern times; and (5) identifying potential research gaps, and providing recommendations for potential future research.

## Methodology

The review is based on Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA (2020) was chosen due to its widespread use as an auditable method for documentation of all aspects of the research design including, searches conducted; screening decision rationale; and criteria for inclusion or exclusion of studies. This allows the synthesis to be viewed as an analysis rather than a summary.

The conceptual search strategy used a combination of three concept blocks using Boolean operators to find relevant literature for this study. The first block was composed of keywords "western fashion", "western clothing" or "western dress". Keywords in the second block included "traditional attire," "traditional clothing," "indigenous dress," or "ethnic dress." The third block contained keyword combinations such as "cultural identity," "heritage," "globalization," or "cultural

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preservation." After developing these initial blocks, they were narrowed down to focus on specific regional areas (such as Central Asia, East Asia, West Africa, the Arab Gulf region, South Asia, and Latin America); to fit specific theoretical perspectives (post-colonial theory; cultural hybridity; decolonial fashion studies); and to address new themes that have emerged since the start of the project (such as modest fashion, digital mediated/ social media mediated revival of traditional dress; and sustainability and heritage craft.)

Search efforts used the free-to-access scholarly search engines (e.g., Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar), institutional repository searches and dissertation repository searches, supplemented by backward and forward citation snowballing from appropriate literature. This review also needs to address an additional methodological limitation that it lacked institutional-subscription access to proprietary databases such as Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, JSTOR, or ProQuest Dissertations & Theses —therefore the search was completed using all of the best, widest availability, free-to-access sources possible —which will likely yield a different —possibly fewer —set of documents than a complete search with institutionally subscribed database(s) would provide.

The first stage of searching the database involved a preliminary screening of search results by title/abstract. This removed clearly non-relevant, non-scholarly or duplicated documents from consideration. A second round of full-text assessments were then completed on all relevant search results based upon the eligibility criteria outlined above. With approximately 150 records generated from search-engine and platform searches (and another 15 records generated using citation snowballing) after duplicates were removed there were 120 unique documents that were reviewed as part of the title/abstract phase. From these 120 documents, 95 were eliminated due to relevance issues (off-topic or lack of scholarly content); therefore, 25 documents remained which were subjected to full-text assessments. Following this step, 13 documents were eliminated because they lacked sufficient bibliographical verification, had thematic overlap with one of the other studies that were already included in the analysis or failed to provide evidence related to both fashion and identity elements of the research question. As a result, there were twelve studies that were included in the synthesis of results.

## Results

The twelve studies were published between 2016-2025 and cover six geographic regions including: Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, West Africa, the Arab Gulf region as well as Muslim Diaspora communities in both the U.K. and U.S., along with three theoretically cross-national studies. Qualitative methods were used to conduct many of the research studies (case studies using interviews and/or document analysis), while a few studies used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and three studies utilized conceptual/theoretical frameworks for their analyses. No study that was part of this review used an comparative quantitative approach.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Included Studies**

| Author(s) | Country/Region | Research Design | Sample | Theory/Framework | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Radeljić | United Arab | Qualitative dis- | National | National identi- | The abaya has |

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| Author(s) | Country/Region | Research Design | Sample | Theory/Framework | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (2025) | Emirates | course/policy analysis | dress discourse and media texts | ty; soft authoritarianism | shifted from a state-mandated identity marker to a luxury fashion vehicle, exposing tension between cultural authenticity and Western-influenced consumerism. |
| Botirova & Abdullayeva (2025) | Uzbekistan (Central Asia) | Mixed methods (survey + interview) | 48 survey respondents; 1 merchant interview | Cultural globalization and revival | Traditional adras/atlas garments persist mainly as ceremonial dress; younger respondents, especially women, view them as stylish and culturally significant. |
| Wu, Liu, Liang, & Cui (2025) | China | Multiple case analysis | Case studies of Chinese heritage brands and designers | Cultural sustainability | Reviving traditional aesthetics, modernizing motifs, and digital integration are identified as key strategies for sustaining textile heritage among younger consumers. |
| Zhang & Yim (2025) | China (online communities) | Qualitative; constructivist grounded theory | Online "New Chinese Style" fashion community | Postcolonial theory; self-orientalism | Digital communities negotiate Chinese identity through hybrid dress; some users reproduce self-orientalizing stereotypes |

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| Author(s) | Country/Region | Research Design | Sample | Theory/Framework | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | while others assert cultural pride and resist Western-centric norms. |
| Onwuakpa & Nwabuoku (2024) | Nigeria | Qualitative Review | Case review of Nigerian fashion industry practice | Modernization and cultural influence | Contemporary Nigerian fashion has evolved under the influence of foreign cultures, leading to reduced use of traditional handwoven textiles such as Aso-Oke, Akwa-Ocha, and Akwete in modern dress styles, highlighting tensions between cultural heritage and modern fashion trends. |
| Mirza (2019) | Canada (Muslim women in a Western context) | Qualitative interviews and digital storytelling | 16 Muslim women | Intersectionality | Participants use modest fashion to express their intersecting identities, navigate diverse social contexts, challenge Western beauty ideals, divert the Western gaze, and resist Islamophobic stereotypes. |
| Gul (2022) | United States | Qualitative semi-structured interviews (master's thesis) | 8 Muslim women (hijabi and non- | Hybrid identity negotiation | Participants construct hybrid religious–American identi- |

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| Author(s) | Country/Region | Research Design | Sample | Theory/Framework | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | hijabi) | | ties through dress; community-seeking and sociocultural context shape sartorial choice more than retail availability. |
| Peirson-Smith & Craik (2020) | Hong Kong (postcolonial) | Qualitative case study; thematic analysis | NGO personnel interviews; promotional materials | Decolonial theory; sustainability | Sustainable-fashion advocacy in postcolonial Hong Kong contains contradictory messaging that both challenges and reproduces Global North-centred sustainability norms. |
| Slade & Jansen (2020) | Cross-national synthesis | Editorial synthesis of a special issue | Contributions from multiple international case studies | Decolonial theory | Decolonizing fashion is framed as an ongoing, non-linear process of challenging Eurocentric fashion knowledge while acknowledging persistent contradictions and colonial structures. |
| Arivanantham & Radhakrishnan (2025) | India | Applied case study / methods development | Toda community artisans | Sustainable cultural preservation | Integrating indigenous Toda embroidery into textile-waste repair reduces environmental impact while sustaining endangered craft |

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| Author(s) | Country/Region | Research Design | Sample | Theory/Framework | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | knowledge, linking heritage and sustainability. |
| Jansen & Craik (2016) | Cross-national (edited volume) | Theoretical/conceptual | Case Studies | Tradition–modernity framework | Argues that "traditional" and "modern" dress are not opposites but continuously negotiated categories shaped by local agency within global fashion systems. |
| Jansen (2020) | Cross-national (edited volume) | Theoretical/critical synthesis | Not applicable | Postcolonial theory | Argues that dominant understandings of fashion are rooted in modernity/coloniality and Eurocentric knowledge systems, advocating a decolonial framework that recognizes multiple, equally valid ways of fashioning the body and challenges the universalization of Western fashion. |

***Influence of Western Fashion on Traditional Attire***

Radeljić (2025), in her research on the Arab Gulf area, determined that, the UAE abaya is a garment that has adopted and incorporated Western luxury materials, silhouettes and branding philosophies, however remains lawfully and culturally associated with its nation's identity. The result is a garment that is equally influenced by the West and completely local. Botirova and Abdullayeva (2025), studying the Western influence in Central Asian everyday clothing stated that Western style clothing have become common place in the majority of people's day-to-day lives and, as such, traditional adras and atlas are now used mostly for ceremonial events, but still hold symbolic cultural significance. Wu et al. (2025), also researching how modern designs incorpo-

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rate traditional Chinese textiles, also confirmed that western influences in modern designs of Chinese textiles create "an Asian-chic" design aesthetic. This design aesthetic is popularized in both international and domestic markets.

### *Fashion Globalization and Cultural Identity*

Traditionally, globalization has been viewed by many scholars as a unidirectional force exerted upon local cultures. However, many recent studies have portrayed it as an arena of dialogue. As Jansen and Craik (2016) note, "tradition" and "modern" in terms of clothing are not mutually exclusive or static; instead, these categories continue to be negotiated as garments travel throughout global networks. Slade and Jansen (2020) expand on this idea with respect to different nationals; they conclude that decolonizing fashion is a non-linear, ongoing endeavor, where attempts to recreate "authentic" dress may, ironically, result in reproducing the same colonial structures of power they intend to dismantle.

### *Adoption of Western Fashion*

Studies have demonstrated adoption is usually situational or partial rather than a complete transition. Gul (2022), indicated that, based upon their study of Muslim-American women's adoption of western fashion in addition to modest and/or ethnic clothing; their adoption of these styles will vary by context, by community expectations and by their need for acceptance, not through the replacement of an entire wardrobe. Radeljić (2025) reported a similar trend when studying Emirati women and how they combine western luxury style along with internationally designed collaborations, but also maintain the abaya as a key symbol of both their religion and nationality.

### *Adaptation and Hybrid Fashion*

Hybridity has been the most consistent result of all reviewed studies. In Nigeria, for example, Onwuakpa and Nwabuoku (2024) showed how designers rework their designs on a variety of textiles such as Ankara, Adire and Aso-Oke, by making use of internationally based tailoring and presentation methods to develop garments which are visible in both local and foreign fashion markets. In China, Zhang & Yim (2025), explained how online "new chinese style" communities exist where traditional clothing components are blended with globally spreading styles of beauty, creating "fashionable-traditional", but hybridized identity through the internet. Although, this is an attempt at moving away from self-orientalization and instead towards creating hybrid identities, it often relies upon self-orientalization rather than being completely free of it. For example, Mirza (2019) reported that among Muslim women in the Western context, modest-fashion practices have consciously fused global fashion trends with the normative expectations of modesty in Islam, so that the wardrobes they wear can no longer be seen as either purely "western" or "traditional".”

### *Resistance and Cultural Preservation*

A number of studies have demonstrated, through the documentation of active, agentive resistance to complete Westernization of sartorial expressions that some individuals have chosen to reject the idea of solely adopting Western attire for their daily lives. Botirova and Abdullayeva (2025), for example, reported that younger Uzbek respondents -- particularly women -- deliberately chose to purchase traditional clothing items, which they viewed as a way to express pride in their

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cultural identity, rather than simply viewing these purchases as part of a Westernized wardrobe. Similarly, Wu et al. (2025), were able to identify specific preservation strategies employed by Chinese designers and cultural institutions to preserve the legacy of traditional Chinese culture, such as employing elements of traditional design on contemporary textiles and promoting this content via digital platforms to reach a demographic of young consumers that may otherwise be drawn to the fast-fashion products of Western companies. Lastly, Arivanantham and Radhakrishnan (2025), illustrated a unique form of preservation in which indigenous Toda embroidery techniques, used by members of the Toda community -- many of whom still practice these crafts today -- are being incorporated into the process of repairing discarded textiles, thereby both preserving potentially endangered forms of artisanal knowledge and contributing to environmental sustainability.

### *Transformation of Traditional Dress*

Rather than being discarded or lost, research has consistently demonstrated that traditional clothing continues to evolve and take on new meanings. The study of Peirson-Smith and Craik (2020), found that in post-colonial Hong Kong, promoting sustainable fashion through advocacy transforms both how we think about and interpret the cultural significance of textiles and craftsmanship within an international discourse of sustainability; however, this also creates contradiction with respect to how Global North-centric sustainability values may be imposed upon Global South production processes. Radeljić (2025) examined the transformations in the status of the abaya from a government-mandated "modesty" garment to high-status fashion item and most recently as a tool for framing gradual socially liberalizing ideologies in the United Arab Emirates. Together these studies demonstrate that traditional dress can best be conceptualized as a dynamic and evolving system which is continually adapting to changing political, economic, social, etc., conditions.

## Discussion

Reading these six themes together shows that western fashion and traditional dress interact in most cases with hybridity and negotiated adaptation occurring more often than whole replacement or untouched preservation. This pattern is consistent with cultural hybridization theory that global cultural flux will be localized and recombined, rather than just imposed on each other (Jansen & Craik, 2016), and it compromises simpler narratives of culture-imperialism whereby western fashion overwrites local sartorial systems in one way.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides an additional explanation for the resistance and preservation observed in Theme 5: wearing traditional attire serves as an in-group identifier which enhances belonging and distinctiveness especifically among younger generations experiencing diaspora or postcolonial contexts (Botirova & Abdullayeva, 2025; Gul, 2022). Similarly, Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) helps explain the use patterns observed in Theme 3, where garments are selected not purely for religious/ethnic signaling but as means through which individuals construct and perform their identities within marketplaces where consumers purchase goods to create their identities. This dynamic is visible in the abaya's evolution into a luxury fashion category (Radeljić, 2025). Further, Postcolonial Theory (Said, 1978; Jansen, 2020) provides crucial insight into interpreting Themes 2 and 6 since several studies included in the review frame the current dress practices against histories of colonial dom-

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ination and situate "revival" or "decolonization" efforts within ongoing power asymmetries (Slade & Jansen, 2020; Peirson-Smith & Craik, 2020).

One significant inconsistency throughout many studies is how people perceive Hybrid/Revivalist styles. One example of this type of conflict is Zhang and Yim's (2025) research on "New Chinese Style," which discusses when and how people choose to wear New Chinese Style clothing for either cultural pride/resistance, or as a way to reinforce stereotypes of orientalization while claiming to celebrate the culture. The exact same contrast exists within Peirson-Smith & Craik's (2020) study about sustainable fashion in Hong Kong, which explains how attempts to create sustainable fashion locally, and support it through marketing campaigns, are hindered due to evaluation models created at the global north. This demonstrates that one cannot assume hybridity and/or revival will always result in free expression and therefore the degree to which hybridity and/or revival can be considered politically effective depends upon who has control over the definitions and interpretations of these terms.

In terms of methodology, most of the literature reviewed was qualitative through use of interviews, case-studies and/or documentary or discourse analysis. The one study that was a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods was Botirova & Abdullayeva (2025). No large-N quantitative cross-country study exists within the body of literature examined. While there are many strengths of qualitative research -- it provides rich, context-specific information -- this type of research severely restricts our ability to determine whether the degree to which countries adopt, adapt or resist global fashion trends varies significantly among different regions. Additionally, using qualitative research alone also prevents us from determining if specific demographics (age, gender, income level, etc.) influence how individuals respond to globalization processes. Geographically, most of the literature focused on either Gulf or East Asian regional contexts have emphasized the role of government/state institutions and other formal/institutional structures in shaping clothing choices (e.g., national dress policies and heritage branding), while those focusing on West Africa and/or the Muslim diaspora have generally depicted individuals/community members negotiating their own dress codes/choices for themselves. These findings suggest that the agent(s) responsible for the actions of individuals in response to globalization of fashion can be influenced systemically by regionally-based political and religious systems — an issue that currently cannot be addressed directly through comparative analyses based on the literature thus far.

There are two new research areas found in recent literature (2020-2025): how digital platforms have allowed for traditional clothing styles to experience a resurgence (i.e., "New Chinese Style" communities through social media by Janssen's work published 2020); and that traditional craft has been repositioned as an aspect of sustainable development strategies (both Arivanantham & Radhakrishnan, 2025; and Wu et al. 2025). Both of these ideas point toward how any future research related to Western fashion's influence on traditional forms of dress will likely intersect with other emerging areas of literature including digital fashion and sustainable fashion.

## Conclusion

The systematic literature review compiled twelve studies from 2016 – 2025 to explore the influence of Western fashion in traditional attire and cultural identity in Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, West Africa, the Arab Gulf, and Muslim diaspora. The primary result of this re-

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search is that relationship between globalized Western fashion and traditional forms of dress are characterized by processes of hybridization, selective adaptation, and active negotiation. It does not seem that people have simply replaced their traditional dress with Western style, nor do people appear to be preserving their traditions without incorporating elements of global fashion. Instead people continually perform their cultural identities through clothing that draws upon both the vocabulary of Western and traditional styles.

This study contributes to our understanding of the effects of globalization on fashion (fashion studies) and to our understanding of how people negotiate their cultural identities through the clothes they wear (cultural sociology). For researchers this study demonstrates the importance of developing quantitative and longitudinal methodologies to supplement the rich qualitative work being done in this area. For educators who teach courses in fashion, this study demonstrates the importance of including hybridity and post-colonial critiques as analytical tools to help students think critically about their own dress practices and to avoid dividing "tradition" and "Western" dress into two opposing curricular categories. Finally, for industry professionals who wish to capitalize on traditional textile and garment production, this study identifies an important tension between potential commercial opportunities and possible negative consequences. On one hand, working with traditional textiles and garments can provide new business opportunities. However, if companies simply appropriate these materials without properly acknowledging their origins or respecting local norms, then they risk perpetuating the same kinds of colonial power imbalances that many of the studies included in this review specifically criticize.

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