

## Fashion evolution in the view of political economics

“ Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another.”

- Georg Simmel (1957)

Fashion as the biggest part of our appearance is undeniably the crucial part of our daily life. Clothing fashion is in one of the basic needs. With all the norms and social standards, we can't just go around naked (also that would even be illegal in some countries). Therefore, fashion plays its part as a way to express yourself, to belong with your social role in order for them to be accepted or recognised by society. It's the other form of communication, the colour, the pattern and the silhouette reflect your attitude and lifestyle. Fashion continues to evolve along with the economic and political movement. Rising with the urbanization and following the cultural hegemony and development paradigms, fashion evolution is the pursuit of social existence of mankind.

Back to ten thousand years ago, the agricultural revolution was formed inducing the settlement of people. Together with the agricultural surplus, the city began to develop forming into the kingdom and later, the empire. Urbanisation shifts the natural order into imagined order where social division and class division was formed. Fashion is the representation of class and also one of the aspects that reinforce the development of the city. Fine silhouette requires specialty and would be considered as the part of urban production. The transportation for exchange then formed to allow transaction between urban production and agricultural surplus.

Fashion progress and diversification correlate with the flourishing of economy and arts. With the existence of societal hierarchy, fashion acts as the reflection of the affluent. There is the legislation of clothing separated by social class and status. Ruling class wore the silhouette in a different style, for instance the wrapping method of toga of ancient Rome expressing the status of the wearer, different fabric choices separating the normal fabrics like cotton with the luxurious imported fabrics such as silk ,the advancement in sewing methods such as embroidery and the valuable mineral as a gold in ancient Egypt. The conception of affluence especially emperor Augustus of roman empire's affection of Chinese silk brought about an international trade between East and West known as The Silk Road to trade resources followed by culture, knowledge and religion which leads to the development of civilization.

Fashion can also be the statement since the difference in colour and style of the knight's armour in the age of feudalism and the red and blue illustrated Russia and the United State. It helps with the symbolization and the perception of the eyes accounting for the dualism of fashion. This incident precipitated the unification and alienation of mankind. In recent days, fashion is the way to express yourself, your identity and even your political view point. Many political parties use colour to identify themselves such as red for Republican and blue for Democrats in the United State which also refers to the left-wing (red) and right-wing

(blue) politics. They later represent those colours through their fashion using appearance in the public and the media to signal their message to the society.

Institutions and political systems have substantial impact on fashion. Royal institutions contribute great influence on fashion trends constructing the social norm as in the case of the queen of France, Marie Antoinette with her extravagance style is recognized as an important fashion icon up until today. Royal events like royal weddings are conspicuous in the eyes of the public and then become the trend setter of the fashion industry. Fashion also signifies social freedom, political freedom and economic freedom. There's a big difference between the fashion between PyongYang and New York, the capital city of Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United State. A Juche state with low in every aspect of freedoms, Pyongyang fashion is in unity with the style that is decades backward. Supreme leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong-un expresses himself through conventional fashion nostalgically resembling his grandfather generalissimo Kim Il Sung's style since the 1950s to convey people's trust and respect along with showing his leadership. New York, on the other hand, has a diversity of fashion as a result of high freedoms to express themselves and individuality. New York has a variation of culture with many sub cultures which you can roughly identify with their fashion and style. Exposure to the foreign culture can also be seen in a fashion. Thai modern style of fashion, with high degree of cultural exposure, is diversified with foreign culture influences such as Western style and Korean style.

Capitalism intensifies the impact of fashion on the economy, society and the environment with 'fast fashion'. Fast fashion originated in the United Kingdom in the early 2000s aiming to increase the supply and lower the price of clothing. Unlike many other goods that price increase overtime such as housing, health care and education, fast fashion continually decreases their price to gain market competitiveness by squeezing the production cost. Fast fashion makes clothing more affordable and accessible to people even in the less developed area. It changed the consumer behaviour over the world using price mechanisms to incentivize people to buy more and more. In order to maximize firm's private benefit, marketing strategies frequently embolden the pursuit of new clothes using the fashion trend, season as Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer to launch the new collection. With a common expression, 'this is so last season' encouraging consumers to follow and consume the new fashion line. According to Elizabeth L. Cline, 'It changes the rules of what we're supposed to wear constantly, and we seem to have lost our sense of self'. Fast fashion together with consumerism creates vaguely negative externalities to the society and environment which induce inefficiency that leads to market failure.

In order to keep the price low, firms need to minimize their production cost by moving their production plant to third world countries where there is cheap labour with loose labour union and welfare policies such as social insurance and maternity leave. Fashion is one of the most labour abundant industry as a result it contribute great impact to the society especially in the third world countries such as Bangladesh, the second largest garment supplier of the world market, where over 3.5 million people is garment worker which is more than 2% of the total population contributing to 12% of GDP and 80% of export GDP as in 2013. Risky working conditions induce low well-being of workers. In 2013, Rana plaza, one of the biggest garment factories in Bangladesh collapsed due to a poor working environment

resulting in 1,134 deaths and more than 2,500 injured. The request for higher welfare has been performed but swiftly been declined. Fast fashion firms exploited their garment workers, alienate their human dignity and in some case even modern slavery forcing child labour to be garment worker.

Looking more into the supply chain of fast fashion production, there is a great impact on the environment. Starting from the material, the most population textiles such as cotton and polyester cause pollution. 94% of all cotton cultivation is GMOs cotton that is chemical addiction and requires pesticide and fertiliser in order to maintain the satisfying amount of productivity. The excessive use of chemical substances affect farmer's health and contaminate the water causing water pollution. Polyester is also disputable as microplastic fibre during the production is harmful to the marine environment. Fashion production process consumes a large amount of water and takes up 20% of all industrial water usage, one pair of blue Jeans make up for 1,500 Litre of water. Since most fast fashion items are not made to last with the 3 years average life time, it creates waste together with the non-biodegradable component such as polyester causing a severe problem of waste accumulation taking up 5.9 % of the waste in the landfill. The garment production with the use of chemical substances such as bleach and dye causes even more health impact to the garment workers and emiss the greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere.

Those are the externalities that garment workers and the third world country have to bear in order to keep the price of fast fashion low. External costs should be inspected and controlled under the public policy since the free market cannot capture those costs. Tax should be applied for the water contamination and garment workers should have gained higher welfare such as a safer working environment, health insurance and childcare by forming a labour union.

With the shift in development paradigm, the new political economy of development in the 21st century that will fulfill sustainable development has changed the customer viewpoint of the fast fashion to be more aware and responsible for the externalities cost. Sustainable fashion movement was formed with firstly to be seen as a high price with a high-end image that can be only affordable by the rich people buy the growth of technology has changed the market. E-commerce provided cheap advertisement costs for the local retailer making it easier to access and big data help with the match between firm and consumer. Online shopping is booming, affecting mass production. Localizing the product is one way to help reduce carbon footprint from transportation and ensure the distribution of income to the smaller firms. Collective voice is formed to ban fast fashion products deviating the marketing strategies to convey the sustainability of the products or even green washing the products using the keywords such as organic, vegan and green. Many fast fashion brand green washed themself by creating a new sustainable looking product line or promoting their environment care campaign such as recycling and upcycling which actually took up only a small proportion of their cloth and the rest still go to the landfill.

Covid- 19 pandemic has also increased the concern of people in the environment. People care more about sustainable development since it affects the uncertainty in life but economic recession may also contribute other outcomes to the demand of sustainable products since it has a higher price and cannot compete with the price mechanism of the

mass production. However, the underutilisation of clothing should be considered. Consumption of fashion should be more responsive to the society and environment. Instead of buying many cheap fast fashions, customers should shift into the more expensive but higher quality and responsibility to the environment pieces. With the upcoming trend as the future of fashion is made to order, waste accumulation from the textile industry would decline if consumer's choice is shifting.

Government needs to be held responsible for the organization that takes the impact of the fashion industry to the economic, society and the environment into account in order to keep this one of the biggest industries in the world under inspection, to question their performance and how it is contributed. Otherwise, those organisations need to live under the donation which is fluctuating and not really sustainable. The organisations such as fashion revolution and fair-trade organizations should have gained more support from the central government.

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