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Yoo Jin Kwon
Korea National Open University, kwonyoojin@knou.ac.kr

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Transformation of Hanbok Baji, Pants in Traditional Korean Dress

Yoo Jin Kwon, Korea National Open University, Republic of Korea

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This design work is to explore and re-interpret baji of hanbok, pants of Korean traditional dress. The design work consists of a yellow asymmetrical top and a pink jumpsuit of which the original form comes from baji.

Baji is a generic term for baggy pants that are part of Korean traditional dress. A pair of baji in man’s attire remains as outer garments, while Korean women had worn baji as undergarments for centuries. The pattern and the construction of baji are distinctive: Pant legs consist of six pieces of fabric and a wide waist band is made with four pieces. When the ten pieces of pattern are laid down and cut, little fabric is wasted. The unique pattern work and construction was highly efficient when fabric was produced with a narrow loom. When it is put on the body, baji creates a generous volume, particularly having a lot of room under the crotch. It serves the traditional lifestyle of sitting on the floor very well. Baji is tied on the waist and at the hem. All excessive fabric on the waist is grabbed and folded to the right. Then, the folded fabric is sent to the left, making a large diagonal pleat. A fabric belt wraps around the waist. Pant legs moderately taper and are tied with a band called dae-nim, which allows blousing for movement.

There are no side seams, center front seam, and center back seam in baji. A rectangular piece is folded half in vertical direction and the folded sides are located on the side. Two oblique pieces are located between the rectangular pieces as if they are leaning against each other forming an inverted V-shape. A large oblique piece covers part of the right leg and around the crotch and a small oblique piece covers part of the left leg.

Interestingly baji carries non-Euclidean geometrical characteristics of hyper-space (Lee & Kim, 2010). The shapes of the two oblique pieces are obtained from Möbius band. When you make a Möbius band by attaching a twisted end to end of the long side and cutting the band diagonally, you will obtain the shapes of the two oblique pieces. The process of connecting lining and shell of pants resembles Klein bottle, which is an example of a non-orientable surface. When connecting the two layers, a lining piece is laid over a shell and the pant hem is sewn to that of the shell. Then, one puts a hand through the unsewn waistline of the shell. One pulls the lining pants through the tunnel that the shell makes until the lining piece is completely aligned with the shell. Lee and Kim (2010) discusses that this unique sense of space reflects deconstruction of symmetry and boundaries in the body and the surrounding space.

The current design work transformed baji, capitalizing on its characteristics including extremely low crotch lines, ample but accidental pleats, and cutting with nearly zero-waste.
Lee Young Hee, a Korean designer known as “the clothes of wind,” transformed hanbok skirt into evening dress (Lee, n.d.), baji was transformed into a sleeveless jumpsuit in the present work. Drafting the pattern and draping was experimental. The flat pattern of baji was elongated to the extent the narrow width of Myoungjoo allows. Myoungjoo is 15 inch wide silk fabric used in traditional Korean dress. The waistline of baji was raised up to the level above bust line. Then diagonal pleats are made and tacked to fit the body well. Seams connecting a rectangular piece and an oblique piece is hidden behind pleats and the right bottom picture below shows a glimpse of the seam connecting the two oblique pieces. A narrow string is tied in the waist. Portraying the indeterminate space of baji, the overall shape of the jumpsuit is asymmetrical and the waist band wraps passes through the inside and the outside of the jumpsuit. The left side is naturally draped and hung down.

A shoulder strap is applied to the right side. The strap is made with dongjeong. Dongjeong is originally a white band collar. Attaching dongjeong is the last finish of making a jacket in Korean dress. For the current design work, three pieces of silk dongjeong was hand-painted in gradation of hot pink to create a visually interesting decoration. The decorative pink object was attached to the strap to add an impression of Möbius band.

The yellow top underneath was transformed from joki-heori, which means vest-waistband in Korean. Joki-heori looks like an upper part of vest attached to the waistband of hanbok skirt. Joki-heori is the trace of cultural acculturation. When the Western culture came in with foreign Christian missionaries in the late nineteen century, the upper part of skirt was changed to joki-heori embracing the influence of the Western clothing pattern. Joki-heori has replaced the older form of the waistband because it became more comfortable and easy to wear hanbok. Hanbok skirt with joki-heori has become common nowadays.

The originality of the design lies in the new and blurry aesthetic effect. The overall aesthetic of the work is neither Korean nor Western, reflecting the current interpretation of Korean dress. While it is as voluminous as traditional hanbok, a question might be raised if it is traditional Korean because of the exposure of shoulder and arm. One contribution would be that the experiment with patternmaking of baji presents a new way of patternmaking jumpsuit.

