

# **A Comparative Study on Formative Characters of Korean and Japanese Traditional Costumes**

**- Focusing on the late Joseon period of Korea and the Edo period of Japan -**

**Seon-Eun Choi\* · Song-Ok Ryu\*\***

Concurrent Professor, Dept. of Fashion Design, Paichai University\*

Professor, Dept. of Fashion Design, Sungkyunkwan University\*\*

## **I. Introduction**

Starting from China, Northeast Asian culture was introduced to Japan via Korean peninsular. However, traditional Korean and Japanese clothing have shown native identities of their own and similarities since Korea did not deliver the practice of traditional Chinese clothing to Japan completely and Japan did not follow what it was handed over as it was.

In this context, the goal of this thesis lies in studying design such as forms, colors, patterns, and details of traditional clothing in the late Joseon Dynasty(1661-1895) and Edo period(1600-1868) and making comparisons of formative similarities and differences.

The objectives of the study includes the upper garments called "Jeogori," blouse-like with long sleeves, lower garments such as skirts and pants, and long coat called "Po," all of which were worn by commoners daily in the late Joseon period ; and traditional Japanese dress such as "Kosode" and "Furisode", the prototype of Kimono, "haroihakama", and "kamisimo", a sleeveless garments worn over the Kimono.

Analytical materials were historical records about dress in the late Joseon and Edo period, and as well as traditional clothing identified by actual materials for study such as wall paintings, genre paintings, and fashion relic of the past.

## **II. The Background for the Formation of Styles in Traditional Korean and Japanese Dresses**

Korea and Japan have generally kept a social standing system divided into two, ruling or ruled classes, since they formed an ancient nation. The ruling classes, in this context, wore court dresses focused on the decoration and show-off of a dress while

commoners in ordinary dresses focused on functions. With the two nations' social system changing rapidly from the late Joseon and Edo period, however, the system of dress also saw a huge change which brought the establishment of basic style of traditional dresses in more practical and reasonable fashion, and presented the shape of traditional dresses of both nation that are put on even today.

This study defined the late Joseon of Korea and Edo period of Japan as the period when the basis for traditional dresses has been made. It concentrated on the dresses in the late Joseon and Edo period because the late Joseon, the Renaissance of Joseon Dynasty, is the period with the dress culture that shows the national characteristics having developed in a versatile way to form dresses that fully meet all styles of traditional dresses<sup>1)</sup> and provided the basic form of traditional Hanbok in the modern society<sup>2)</sup>.

Edo period of Japan is a meaningful period in the history of Japanese dresses<sup>3)</sup> as it improved clothing in quality focusing on the development of the culture of merchants, and developed dresses at every age, generalizing the prototype of traditional Japanese dress today "Kosodo".

Historically, Korea and Japan have showed similarity in culture while influencing and being influenced by each other as neighbors. At the same time they reflect originality of each nation by improving all cultures to fit well with their own climates.

Considering the social and cultural aspects, the impact of major forces in each society at each age was found to be the most influential upon the birth of similarity and originality in dresses.

The social and cultural backgrounds in the formation of traditional dresses in the late Joseon and Edo period discovered factors that influenced each style of dresses and as a result of a comparative analysis, they have characteristics that are very similar. Commoners-oriented culture in the late Joseon period, for example, influenced the way of dress to be practical without formality and free from social rules. Such practical and simple looks were also observed in the Edo period whose fashion culture was commoner-oriented in which the social status of merchants climbed as they became economically stable. The ideology and tendency of commoners, the main group of society in the late Joseon and Edo period influenced the formation of traditional clothing at those times, which represents their own ways of dress in common.

Besides, considering the phenomenon in which men's topcoat (Po) in the late Joseon and Kosode kimono in Edo period developed based on society, dresses with functions rather than decoration were growing in common when commoners were the major force of society.

### III. A Comparative Study on Formative Characters of Korean and Japanese Traditional Costumes.

In order to compare the formative characteristics of traditional dresses in the late Joseon and Edo period, the study categorized the traditional dresses of both nations into forms, color, material and pattern and details. Followings are the result of comparative analysis on each character that traditional dresses of both nations has respectively.

#### 1. Form

In style, traditional dresses in the late Joseon are characterized by the division of the upper and the bottom. People basically wore in two pieces of Jeogori and bottom, putting on Po as a topcoat by courtesy. <Figure 1>

In Japan, there was Hobok (narrow sleeved Jeogori and slim trousers) as its original dress since ancient society<sup>4)</sup> and it has changed into one piece-style Kosode kimono, which became the complete form of traditional Japanese dresses since Edo period with the ancient society changing influenced by neighboring national cultures and powerful clan, commoners, and warriors becoming the major force of the society, and at the same time original study on dresses to easily put on and take off to adapt themselves to the maritime climate of the Japanese Islands<sup>5)</sup>.

Following is the comparative analysis on the characteristic of the form of traditional Korean and Japanese dresses focusing on the wearing and tailoring. With regard to designs, the practice of wearing traditional Korean clothing in the late Joseon is characterized by abundant shape, stretching which patronize long coat called Po over Jeogori, skirts, and pants. <Figure 2> In the composition of dress, the style has the characteristic almost the same regardless of social standings or gender, except the differences in details. With the tailoring being straight line in a plane, the wearing gives three-dimensional and linear beauty.<Figure 3>

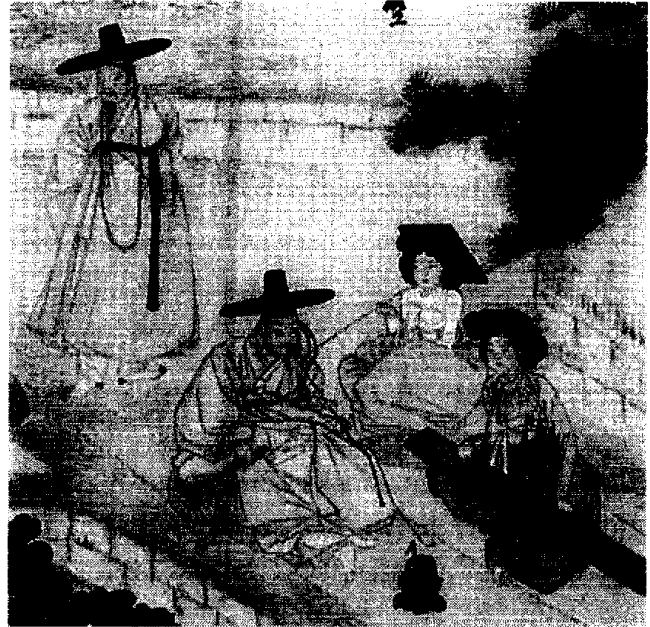
The fact that people, young and old, men and women all alike, wore Kosode in Edo period<sup>6)</sup> is one of similar characteristics that people in the late Joseon wore formally Po and Jeogori. Edo wears utilize the most the plane composition in a dress, dying or embroidering a pattern something like a wide picture, and put on many clothes in the same form in many layers.

The collar of inner wear appears on wearing the form of women's clothing in the late Joseon and Edo period through the visual insight on remains and genre pictures, the silhouette in outward shape of women's clothing in the late Joseon features tight Jeogori and abundantly curved skirt, which is thought to come from highlighting the hips and making the silhouette of skirt rich in appearance by putting on many layers of inner wear.<Figure 4>, <Figure 5>, <Figure 6> While working, women tied up

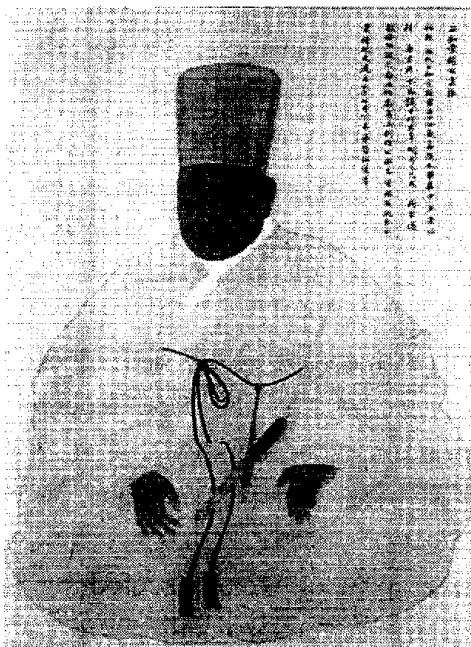
their outer skirt to expose inner trousers and the silhouette features the upper tight and the bottom abundant.<Figure 1>, <Figure 7>



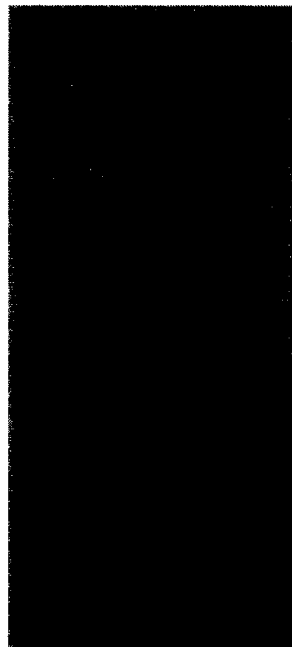
<Figure 1> Korean genre painting by Yoon-Bok Shin, 18th Century



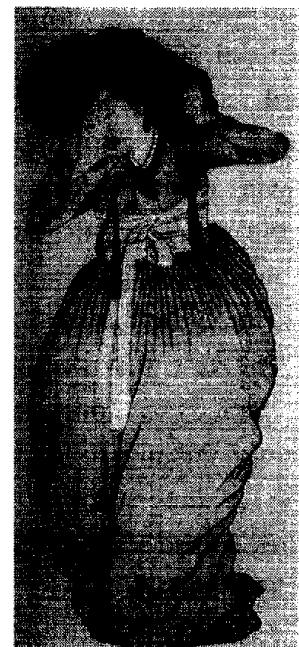
<Figure 2> Korean genre painting by Yoon-Bok Shin, 18th Century



<Figure 3> Korean portrait by Yeong-Seok Cho, 1732



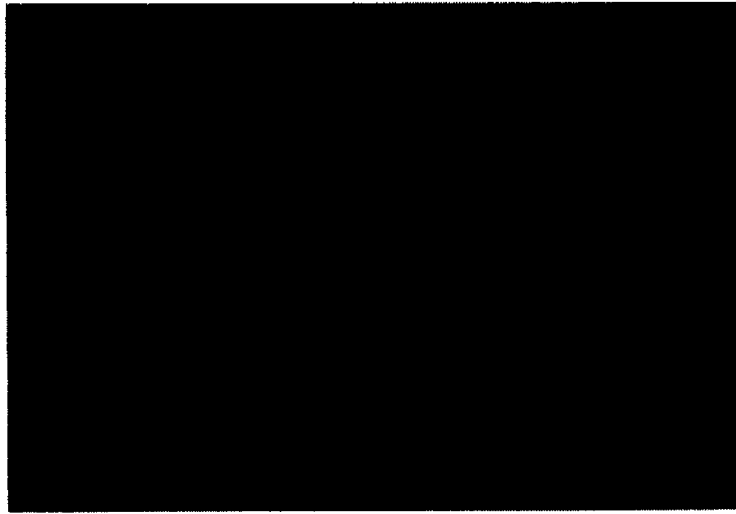
<Figure 4> Korean genre painting by Yoon-Bok Shin, 18th Century



<Figure 5> Korean genre painting by anonymous, 18th Century



<Figure 6> Korean genre painting by Yoon-Bok Shin, 18Century

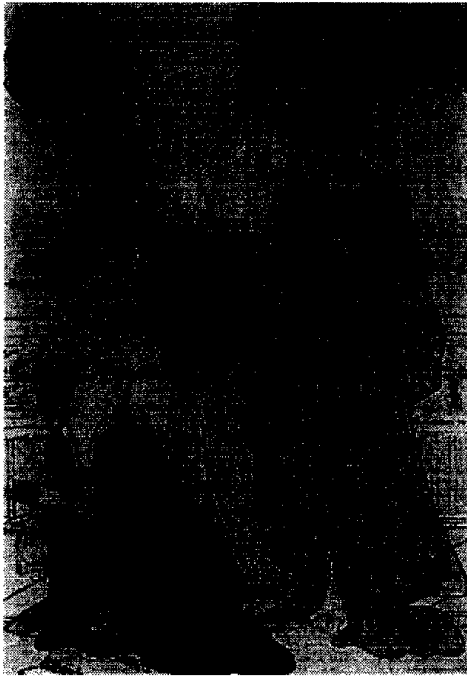


<Figure 7> Korean genre painting by Yoon-Bok Shin, 18Century

On the other hand, women's dresses in Edo period pursued the silhouette similar to mermaid and induced sensuality by straighten up the collar of Kosode or Furisode in many layers <Figure 8> enabling wearers to reveal sexual attraction while walking. <Figure 9>

Japanese flagship traditional dress "Kimono" originated from one piece Kosode is made up of T-shape vertical and horizontal seam, and straight line tailoring makes collar and sleeve, and skirt in straight.<Figure 10> When wearing, however, the finishing shows the silhouette of mermaid, and the margin of the width of the dress has some room, which gets smaller in the late Edo, allowed layered-look which enables dwarfness to be covered up with affluent form. <Figure 11>

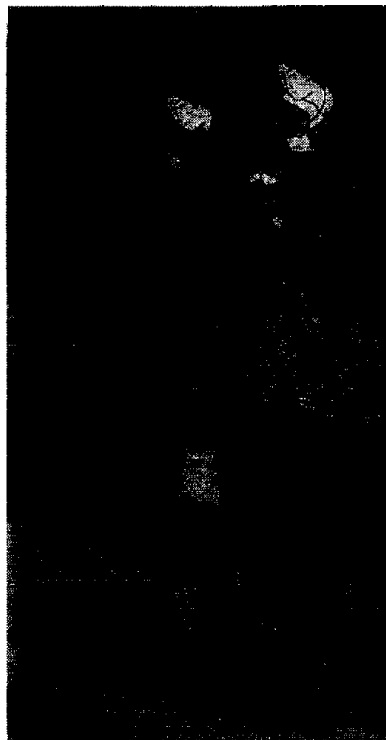
The formative characteristic in the contour of dresses in Edo is the accentuation of size in exaggeration. This is common particularly in the contour of men's dress; Kamisimo came from the military circles features exaggeration in shoulders, the width of inflated and excessively long trousers.<Figure 12>,<Figure 13> These exaggerations are notable in the width of sleeve, which is too long to disregard the function of "Furisode".<Figure 8>, <Figure 14>



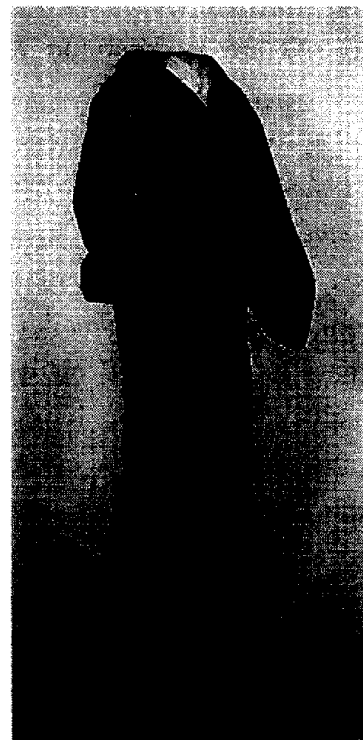
<Figure 8> Japanese woodblock print by Torii Kiyonaga, 18Century



<Figure 9> Japanese genre painting by Utagawa Toyoharu, 18Century, Tokyo National Museum



<Figure 10> Ukiyo-e by Utagawa Toyokuni, 1800



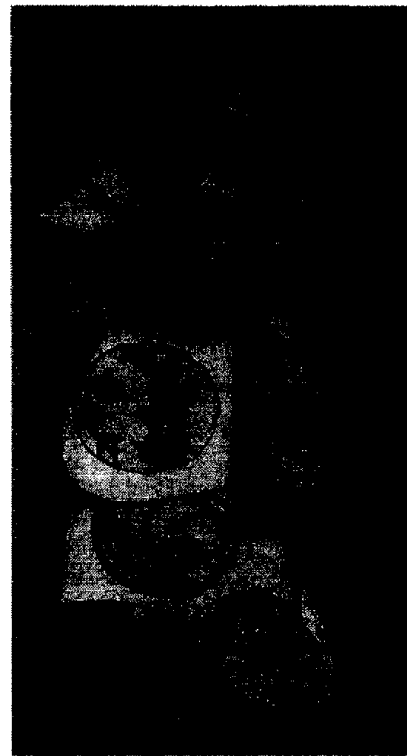
<Figure 11> Kosode, Edo period, Tokyo National Museum



<Figure 12> Japanese genre painting by anonymous, 18Century



<Figure 13> Kamisimo, Kyoto Customs Museum



<Figure 14> Japanese hanging scroll by Choyodo Anchi, 18Century

Ceremonial dress also highlights these tendency even described in largely pleated trousers of Haori-hahakama, an ordinary dress for merchants and commoners, which is seen in the context of the tradition of layered-look and an effort to cover up a dwarf body.

The analysis of formative characteristic of Jeogori in the late Joseon and Kosode in Edo in terms of tailoring found the following features. When designing a garment, Korea used both straight and oblique lines, but Japan used only straight lines. When sewing, traditional Korean dresses is made in straight line with collar and trimming being expressed as curves<sup>7)</sup>, while traditional Japanese dress is sewed with the straight cut and the final production is also straight.

## 2. Color

Colors of dress during the late Joseon and Edo period look similar. Typical color combinations of traditional Korean clothing are red, blue, black, white and yellow. Those of traditional Japanese clothing were also vivid colors such as red, yellow, blue, green, and white, and it was easy to apply new color. Such colors represent the philosophical speculation Yin/Yang(陰陽) and five elements theory(五行說) which

Korea, China and Japan have in common. The color described in the late Joseon highlights the use of blue and red because the color was developed on the basis of the theory of Yin-Yang and Wu-xing and thus light-colored dresses were common.<sup>8)</sup> On the other hand, the color of dresses in Edo was developed in the focus on blue and red, of which the blue was specialized for navy and deep blues, tending to use rather one tone of either gray or blue than various and splendid colors.

When it comes to the shade of colors, the comparative analysis of traditional Korean and Japanese dresses focused on remains showed Korean dress had higher chroma and brightness of yellow color than Japanese dress, which mostly used medium chroma and brightness such as unmixed solid color with grey tone.

In Joseon, colors with higher chroma were considered the color of higher rankings that commoners were banned from wearing anything red and yellow and thus colors with high brightness and clearness such as light pink and brick colors were favored of. This translates that Korea whose natural environment are made of stable fields and mountains and climate is temperate, tends to enjoy mild color and to prefer plain and simple colors based on the white. On the other hand, half toned or compound colors in the Japanese dress in Edo period is interpreted to have depended on the climate of Japan full of humid.

In terms of the harmony in colors, the dress in late Joseon employed different colors at each part, including the body, collar, breast-tie, and cuff, in order to avoid uniform simplicity and in pursuit of the harmony of colors, which have the effect of each part of the body being highlighted, along with the beauty of color arrangement, I think. In Edo period, the dress layered with the same form but different colors became a method for small Japanese to equip with exaggeration and dignity. By complementing the simple form of dress, they could enable a variety of expression by way of color arrangement and scheme.

### **3. Material & Pattern**

When it comes to fabrics, both Korean and Japanese clothing of the Joseon and Edo period were made of breathable fabrics such as cotton and linen, which comforted commoners. These advantages helped the dresses become part of peoples daily lives.

Patterns used in traditional dress in the late Joseon are largely classified into natural pattern based on animals and plants, letter pattern wishing for happiness, and geometric pattern; Remarkably, the feature of most patterns were motivated from realistic philosophy based on Confucian ideas in a wish for the happiness the life time, instead of coming from pure aesthetic motivation. Therefore meaningless geometric patterns have decreased naturally and the realistic materials in animal or plants patterns, such as dragon, Chinese phoenix, butterfly, bat, mandarin duck, tree



peony, and pomegranate were preferred; They focused on more realistic expression than aesthetic creativity, by choosing materials in life<sup>9)</sup>. In particular, the vogue of letters directly expressed wealth and prosperity<sup>10)</sup> is one aspect of characteristics of fabric patterns in the Joseon.

The financially stable life of citizens in Edo period heightened the interest in decoration and enabled dyeing and weaving techniques develop rapidly. At the same it allowed more various and delicate expressions by adding Uzen dyeing into the existing weaving, embroidery, dyeing with uncolored spots, and gold-plating techniques.<sup>11)</sup> Thus Kosode in that period was filled with a variety of small patterns and the unit of motif in repeat, and pictorial patterns.

The pattern of Kosode in Wahuku-kimono used in women's dress in Edo is mostly natural scenery and animals with various techniques such as dyeing, embroidery, and gold-plated decorations being expressed<sup>12)</sup>. It is also notable that Japan also favored flower and animal patterns wishing for happiness.

Generally speaking, Korea has a lot of color expression by decorative lines when it comes to the technique of expressing patterns, while Japan has many pattern expressions by fabric dyeing, including Karaori.

#### 4. Detail

In the aspect of details, most accessories with dresses in the late Joseon meant not only for simply decorating the body, but also decorating itself for the purpose of practical functions and incantation. For instant, a variety of hair accessories, incense case, and personal ornaments for ladies.

Japanese dress in Edo period, on the other hand, rarely used details for decking up, excluding hair accessories and folding fan for ceremonial and practical use<sup>13)</sup>, which is attributed to that the decorating pattern of Kosode and the Obi knot absorbed the decoration technique as a whole<sup>14)</sup>.

Specifically, people began wearing clothing with practical accessories in the Joseon and Edo period.

## IV. Conclusion

As a result, the study has found several characteristic differences and similarities in traditional clothing of the two countries.

To begin with, the traditional Korean and Japanese clothing in the late Joseon and Edo period have a similarity in terms of the formation of style as it reflected the society of those days well. Commoners-oriented culture in the late Joseon period, for

example, influenced the way of dress to be practical without formality and free from social rules. Such practical and simple looks were also observed in the Edo period whose fashion culture was commoner-oriented in which the social status of merchants climbed as they became economically stable.

In other words, the ideology and tendency of commoners, the main group of society in the late Joseon and Edo period influenced the formation of traditional clothing at those times, which represents their own ways of dress in common.

Against these backdrops, similarities and differences were observed in the style of tradition clothing of the late Joseon and Edo period.

With regard to designs, the practice of wearing traditional Korean clothing in the late Joseon is characterized by abundant shape, stretching which patronize long coat called Po over Jeogori, skirts, and pants. These are similar with the look of traditional clothing of the Edo period worn in layers. Besides, people of all ages of both periods wore the likes of Kosode in Japan; and Po and Jeogori in Korea.

Colors of dress during the late Joseon and Edo period look similar. Typical color combinations of traditional Korean clothing are red, blue, black, white and yellow. Those of traditional Japanese clothing were also vivid colors such as red, yellow, blue, green, and white, and it was easy to apply new color. Such colors represent the philosophical speculation Yin/Yang(陰陽) and five elements theory(五行說) which Korea, China and Japan have in common.

When it comes to fabrics, both Korean and Japanese clothing of the Joseon and Edo period were made of breathable fabrics such as cotton and linen, which comforted commoners. These advantages helped the dresses become part of peoples daily lives.

Major patterns of Kosode in the Edo period were characters, natural scenes, and animals, which are in common with those of Korean clothing in the Joseon period, whose favorites were flowering plants and animals. Specifically, people began wearing clothing with practical accessories in the Joseon and Edo period.

The study has also found differences between traditional Korean and Japanese clothing.

Typically, the design of traditional Korean clothing before the 1592 Japanese invasion of Korea were developed with a two-piece garment, while that of traditional Japanese dress in the Edo period developed into a straight-line-cut Kimono.

Womens wearing Korean dress of the late Joseon period is characterized by tight upper garment or jeogori and abundant skirt in a cocoon silhouette, while that of the Edo period is characterized by a mermaid silhouette, cutting pieces of fabric in straight lines. In other words, a traditional Korean womens dress underlined her curvaceous beauty while Japanese womens dress highlighted liner beauty.

When designing a garment, Korea used both straight and oblique lines, but Japan

used only straight lines. In coloring, the differences between the two lie in chroma or depth of color.

Traditional Korean clothing in the late Joseon period preferred pure colors with high brightness and moderate chroma, while traditional Japanese clothing in the Edo period had preferences for grayish colors with moderate brightness and low chroma.

Color combinations of traditional Korean dress in the late Joseon period are characterized by different colored tones on many sides of a garment, while those of traditional Japanese dress in the Edo period featured different colored sections in layers<sup>15)</sup>.

Shortly put, the formative characters of the two have much in common with design, composition, coloration, pattern, detailed decorations and accessories, but they have continued to develop their own styles by getting better at their craft and growing them into a traditional art form at climatic conditions.

Showing the true image of Korea, the study will present objective views of how traditional Korean culture differs from other Northeast Asian countries as it has found the formative characteristics of traditional Korean dress and identified its originality and real nature. At this time, when the world keeps an eye on the cultural exchanges between Korea and Japan, this thesis on similarities and differences between the two in terms of formative characteristics of traditional clothing will be helpful in understanding each other.

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