Differences in Consumers' Attitudes toward Eco-Fashion Products:
Comparisons between South Korea and China

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Introduction: The increasing popularity of fast fashion has been influenced to several environmental problems. Due to the various environmental impacts of present clothing consumption, many fashion industries have become concerned about "sustainability" in their supply chain when they produce the clothes (Niinimaki, 2010). This newest trend brings great pressure to the fashion firms to turn to an "eco" viewpoint and start to promote "eco-fashion products" (Jain and Kaur, 2004). However, the research approaches to eco-fashion products are mostly confined to Western context due to its earlier interest toward the environment (BBC News, 2009). Lack of understanding in consumers' attitudes toward eco-fashion products in the Asian market has been caused by Asian consumers' incomplete level of knowledge about eco-fashion. At this stage, comparing the differences in consumers' attitudes toward the eco-fashion products in both South Korea and China would be valuable (China Costume Service, 2012).

This study aims to identify the differences in consumers' attitudes about eco-fashion products between South Korea and China. By focusing on the consumers' attitudes toward eco-fashion products, consumers' attitudes about the environmental issues and their fashion involvements are exploited in an individual attitude level. Three research objectives are developed: (1) to find out what factors can affect the consumers' attitudes; (2) to identify which country has higher consumer attitudes toward eco-fashion products; and (3) to examine what is the most significant factor to influence consumers' attitudes towards eco-fashion products.

Eco-fashion: The term eco-fashion refers to fashion products that are made of organic textiles, sustainable materials such as hemp, and non-textiles. Moreover, all recycled materials containing vintage textile and other materials that can be reused, but are not necessarily made from organic fiber, are also included (Mintel, 2009).

Consumers' attitudes toward eco-fashion: Allport (1935) defined attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, which exerts a directing influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related".

Hypotheses are developed based on the previously theoretical and empirical literature. This study identified two factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward eco-fashion products. According to the two main factors, the following hypotheses were proposed. H1. Both Chinese

and Korean who have higher attitudes toward environmental issues will positively affect the attitudes toward eco-fashion products. H2. Koreans will have higher attitudes toward eco-fashion products than Chinese. H3. Chinese who have higher attitudes toward fashion involvement will positively affect the attitudes toward eco-fashion products. H4. Koreans who have higher fashion involvement will negatively affect the attitudes toward eco-fashion products.

Methodology: Online respondents (n=228) were obtained from both China (n=128) and Korea (n=100). Respondents were primarily females (Korean: n=60, 68%; Chinese: n=79, 71%). Also, more than half of Korean respondents (54%) are 26 to 39 years old, are students (n = 73, 81%). Most of the Chinese respondents (n=67, 60%) are 19 to 25 years old, and are students (n=45, 41%) as well.

Results: For Koreans, a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation demonstrated of "the attitude toward environmental issues" (Eigenvalues=2.369, single factor), "fashion involvement" (Eigenvalues=4.912, single factor) and "attitude toward eco-fashion products" (Eigenvalues=1.882, single factor). For Chinese, the same procedure was done such as a previous order (Eigenvalues=3.010, single factor), (Eigenvalues=6.151, single factor), (Eigenvalues=2.641, single factor). In addition, regression analysis was used to check how the two independent variables (variable A: attitude toward environmental issues and variable B: fashion involvement) affect C: attitude toward eco-fashion products. For the Korean survey result, A does positively impact C, but very little (B=.160, $\beta$=.158), while variable B does negatively impact variable C. On the other hand, the Chinese survey result indicates that A does positively impact C (B=.631, $\beta$=.644), and also B positively impacts C (B=.407, $\beta$=.414).

Discussion and Conclusion: Chinese who are more involved in fashion have higher positive attitudes towards eco-fashion products. They tend to less distinguishable when they purchase a fashion item. However, Koreans who are more involved in fashion have less positive attitudes towards eco-fashion products. This suggests that Korean companies have to carefully understand the style and features of eco-fashion when they launch an eco-fashion brand. Still, Chinese have less environmental protection attitudes compared to Koreans. This result further demonstrates the significant role of Chinese education to increase the level of attitudes in terms of general environmental protection.

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