

Reimagining Menswear Through the Exploration of Historical Cambodian Clothing and Cross-Cultural Dress

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research develops personal connections between craft and cultural identity. Aspects of non-gendered historical Cambodian clothing from the early 18th and 19th centuries and formal qualities from womenswear in this research are investigated to contribute to the evolving dialogue of menswear. A melting pot of influences from French colonisation, neighbouring South Eastern countries, and a Belgian painting provided the cultural reference points for developing a contemporary menswear collection. The idea of cross-cultural dress is used to position traditional eastern costumes within a contemporary fashion context. This research develops and extends on a shift towards progressive menswear, questioning how clothing could be more fluid for men who have appreciations for ‘ambiguous’ qualities in womenswear. Elements from womenswear and menswear are used interchangeably to explore formal qualities such as structure, silhouettes, details, functionality and construction techniques. Exploring these elements is realised through collaging historical images and full-scale mock-ups into cultural-dress, which led to a new design approach that I embraced in this research.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Imuy Teav

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INTRODUCTION

Since growing up in Cambodia, I have appreciated Western fashion more than Cambodian clothing. I have always perceived Cambodian clothing to be more costume-like and used only for special occasions, whereas Western clothing is more fashionable and functional for everyday wear. This thinking led to overlooking the importance of my own culture. In Cambodia, we celebrate many cultures and traditions from Khmer New Year (Cambodian New Year), Chinese New Year to Christmas. Most of these occasions would require us to dress up in clothing that reflects the traditions of each culture. Despite moving to New Zealand at twenty-one years old, I had never worn traditional Cambodian clothing until my wedding day in 2019. I did not realise how heavily influenced I was by western fashion and how disconnected I was from my Cambodian heritage.

Having been surrounded by Cambodian clothing every day, I looked to research other types of historical clothing that were less familiar to me during my undergraduate studies. I was drawn to the structure and silhouettes of Victorian Era clothing. Victorian clothing has a recognisable rounded sleeve shape in their womenswear, delicate details such as gathers and pleats, and is worn in multiple layers. This clothing marked contrast from Cambodian clothing, which has a much softer structure that is styled with less layering and more subtle silhouettes. My interest in fashion lies at the intersection between womenswear and menswear. As an artisanal person, I have a deep appreciation for details and crafts in clothing. I am fascinated by the formal qualities of womenswear and its structural properties, silhouettes, and details and am equally drawn to the functionality and construction techniques from menswear. In previous work, my practice focused on reimagining menswear by exploring working-class clothing from the Victorian era. I experimented with corsetry from womenswear and fused it with male workwear. The work explored the boundaries of masculinity and focussed on progressive menswear. However, it lacked a personal connection to my culture. The question became how I could become more visible in my research.

This project developed a more profound connection between my craft and cultural identity. By designing and making a contemporary menswear collection, I reimagine ambiguous aspects of historical Cambodian clothing from the early 18th and 19th centuries and utilise formal qualities

from womenswear to contribute to the evolving direction of menswear. A historical Cambodian garment known as the sampot is used as a starting point in this research to explore its ambiguous qualities as a non-gendered garment. The term ambiguous is used fluidly to rethink the relationship between clothing and gender and became the foundation for my design approach for this collection. This research also investigates the implications of cross-cultural dressing that emerged during the French colonisation in Cambodia and how this menswear collection could be positioned within a contemporary fashion context.

Methods employed in this project include historical research into Cambodian clothing and its traditional pattern making techniques. Three dimensional (3D) experimentation of full-scale mock-ups was used to reimagine traditional clothing in today's context, alongside the collaging of historical images to visualise cross-cultural dress. At the same time, styling exercises were employed to build continuity between previous and new collections and test the garments' versatility. Exploring these methods led to new working methods that I embraced in my practice.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can a contemporary menswear collection reimagine 'ambiguous' aspects of historical Cambodian clothing and utilise formal qualities from womenswear to be part of a conversation that expands the boundaries of progressive menswear for a contemporary audience?

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

This research draws upon tacit knowledge and experiences to reposition historical Cambodian clothing into contemporary fashion. I examine aspects of my heritage and question how this cultural knowledge can transform my thinking and build connections to my practice. An evaluation of historical Cambodian clothing reveals the effects of French colonisation and cross-cultural dress on Cambodia's cultural identity.

EARLY CAMBODIAN CLOTHING

A critical text that opened my eyes to traditional Cambodian clothing was 'Seams of Change'.¹ It was fascinating how traditional Cambodian clothing that I grew up with was alien to me as a designer. The discovery of this book offered knowledge of the key garments of Cambodian culture, the contexts in which the clothing was worn, the cross-cultural influences that resulted from French colonisation, and traditional Cambodian pattern-making techniques that helped shape my designs and design approach. This book allowed me to be transported back in time and be more culturally connected with my making.

I traced the developments of pre-colonised Cambodia in the 1800's to understand the features of Cambodian clothing and how the garments were constructed and worn. Cambodia's most common non-gendered clothing was the sampot, an uncut rectangular cloth draped around the body and worn by men and women.² The nation's cultural identity was a melting pot of influences from neighbouring countries from South East Asia, such as Vietnam, Thailand, and China. The ambiguity of the non-gendered sampot became the foundation for designing throughout this collection.

IMPACTS OF FRENCH COLONISATION ON CAMBODIAN CLOTHING

The French colonised Cambodia between 1860 and 1954. The occupation coincided with territorial conflicts with Thailand and Vietnam, which led to Cambodia seeking protection from the French.³ Although French colonisation had some negative impacts on Cambodia, it is essential to acknowledge that the occupation of Cambodia by neighbouring countries was an imminent threat if the French did not step in.⁴

¹ Narin Chea, Sopheary Chea, Sonine Kem and Chanmara Preap, *Seams of Change: Clothing and The Care of The Self in Late 19th and 20th Century Cambodia* (Cambodia: Reyum Publishing, 2003).

² The fabrics for sampot were made from silk and cotton, like most of the other garments worn in Cambodia at the time. These fabrics were indicators of social class. For example, silk fabric was worn by the upper class and cotton for the lower and middle classes.

³ David Chandler, "Cambodia: A Historical Overview," Asia Society, 2021, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/education/cambodia-historical-overview>

⁴ Chandler, "Cambodia."

As the French navy and the army gained greater colonial control over the country, their suits became a uniform that reaffirmed colonial power.⁵ After reading ‘Restyling Colonial Cambodia (1860–1954): French Dressing, Indigenous Custom and National Costume’ by Penny Edwards, an American scholar in indigenous research, I discovered how significant the French suit (also known as the ‘kut shirt’) was to influencing Cambodian culture. The kut shirt was also worn as navy and military uniforms across Europe and featured many colours, including black, grey, blue, white, and khaki. The white coloured kut shirt was particularly favoured to highlight the form of the garment and was an assertion of power and hierarchies within the military ranks.⁶ This military look was perceived to represent the idea of a “man of action”.⁷ The symbolic meaning of wearing a suit blurred social hierarchies of class, which Gillies Lipovetsky, a French philosopher, describes as an “instrument of democratization”.⁸ The shirt itself had a boxy shaped shoulder line with a button-down constructed in heavy fabrics and subtle contours.⁹

In the early 20th century, Cambodian kings and government officials began adopting French clothing, including suits and trousers. Khmer ministers followed this dress code but paired the kut shirt with sampot jong kben (Fig 1). In the present day, the kut shirt is no longer worn as a uniform but is limited to special occasions and ceremonies (Fig 2).¹⁰ In this research, the kut shirt was integrated with other garments to decolonise its colonial power and reposition Cambodian clothing into contemporary menswear.



Figure 1: *Cambodian and French Officials around an Ox Cart, 1900*, photograph, National Archives of Cambodia, Cambodia.



Figure 2. Chan Mara Preap, *A Group of Officials Wearing Kut shirts and Sampot Tied in Kben Style on the Occasion of Royal Ploughing Ceremony, 2003*, photograph, Cambodia.

⁵ Penny Edwards, “Restyling Colonial Cambodia (1860–1954): French Dressing, Indigenous Custom and National Costume,” *Fashion Theory* 5, no.4 (2001): 392, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270401778998909>.

⁶ Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (England: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005), accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www-bloomsburyfashioncentral-com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/products/berg-fashion-library/book/uniforms-exposed-from-conformity-to-transgression/from-military-uniforms-to-codified-civility>.

⁷ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994), 168–167.

⁸ Gillies Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 59.

⁹ Chea et al., *Seams of Change*, 58–59.

¹⁰ Chea et al., 58–59.

CROSS-CULTURAL DRESS

French clothing in Cambodia resulted in a shift towards the cross-cultural dress. Edwards identified that men were encouraged to adopt trousers over the sampot. The national Khmer media purported that trousers offered greater mobility and affordability and were more culturally and socially developed.¹¹ The cross-cultural dress was also most apparent for the upper classes. For example, during the period of French colonisation, The King of Cambodia, Norodom I the Monarchist, is seen wearing both cultures' clothes interchangeably, ranging from traditional Cambodian (Fig 3), half Cambodian and half French (Fig 4), to full French (Fig 5). The images of the Cambodian King are powerful because they demonstrate the visible impact of colonisation on traditional Cambodian dress for the ruling class. These images could be interpreted as the loss of culture or a progression towards a civilised nation. I speculate that this cross-cultural dress was a strategy to build cultural unity between the French and Cambodian people.



Figure 3. The Phnom Penh Post, *King Norodom wears the lost crown*, 1866. Photographer: John Thomson, Cambodia, 8th April 2021,

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/arts-culture/trailing-kings-forgotten-crown-jewels>.



Figure 4. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, *Arrivee a Marseille de S.M. Sisowath, Roi du Cambodge*, 1906, photograph, New York, 8th April 2021,

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b7868fe1-bb11-7a25-e040-e00a1806666b>.



Figure 5. Wellcome Collection, *Norodom, The King of Cambodia*, 1866. Photographer: John Thomson, London, UK, 8th April 2021,

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/rtd328k3>

Cross-cultural dress, however, was met with some resistance by lower-class Cambodians. They deemed cross-cultural dress to represent the collapse of their culture and indigenous identity.¹² This comment by Edwards made me question the effects of colonisation and how it impacted Cambodia's cultural identity. This colonisation affected how I valued western clothing over Cambodian traditions growing up. Over the past 100 years, there have been several attempts to revive, protect, and increase the awareness of Cambodian traditions through arts

¹¹ Edwards, "Restyling Colonial Cambodia (1860–1954)," 404.

¹² *Ibid.*, 395.

and craft schools.¹³ Reflecting on this text helped me realise my responsibility when bringing Cambodian heritage forward. Reviving these traditions will help create visibility for Cambodian clothing in contemporary fashion and raise questions about how Cambodian identity could be re-empowered.

Traditional Cambodian clothing continues to be worn in the provinces. The clothing is less common in urban centres but is visible during ceremonial and religious occasions, such as weddings or when visiting a pagoda to pray. During these formal occasions, wearing traditional clothing is a ritual that has been passed down from one generation to another. As a modern take on traditional clothing, there are many shades and tones of colour available today that are influenced and adapted from the traditional Cambodian system of colours (Fig 6). The Cambodian system of colours has seven colours for each day of the week and originated from the early Hindu religion, which aligned colours with aspects of spirituality, superstition, and planetary signs.¹⁴ Some Cambodians followed colours of the day for their outfits, particularly on formal occasions, because they believe it brings happiness and good fortune.¹⁵



Figure 6. Saree Duong, *The colors of the day: Sampot Pamuong*, 1968, photograph, Cambodia.

¹³ G.C.H ter Horst, “Weaving into Cambodia: Trade and Identity Politics in the (Post)-Colonial Cambodia Silk Weaving Industry” (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2008), 12.

¹⁴ These colours included “Sunday (sun), red; Monday (moon), gold; Tuesday (Mercury), purple; Wednesday (Rahu, ascending node or Dragon’s head, and Ketu, descending node or Dragon’s tail), a bronze color; Thursday (Jupiter), green; Friday (Venus), light blue; and Saturday (Saturn), dark maroon.” Gillian Green, “Countries of Southeast Asia: Cambodia,” in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, ed. Dhamija Jasleen (England: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2010), 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7. Imuy Teav and her husband (Bobby Hung) wearing traditional Cambodian clothing on their wedding day, 2019, photograph: G-rise Media, Cambodia.

In Figure 7, my husband and I wear a blue sampot paired with a gold kut shirt and ao den (beaded shirt) on our wedding day. The colour gold is symbolic of fortune ,while blue represents unity. Although I have seen elders in my family wear this clothing growing up, it was the first time I had ever worn any traditional Cambodian clothing. Wearing these clothes felt foreign to me, which became a turning point to connect with my culture.

POSITIONING MY PRACTICE WITHIN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

In this research, historical insights about Cambodia provided a cultural lens to support my practice. In this section, I explore the relationship between costume and fashion and position my work within the current direction of menswear. I aim to share my cultural heritage with a contemporary audience to establish greater visibility for traditional Cambodian clothing in a globalised transnational fashion system and develop my cultural knowledge. To do this, I combine aspects of Cambodian clothing with western tailoring. Alongside the cultural contexts of this research, I analyse how contemporary menswear designers such as JW Anderson challenge the definitions of menswear and rethink the boundaries of what men could wear.

DIVISIONS BETWEEN COSTUME AND FASHION

In my journey of researching traditional Cambodian clothing, I discovered the views of cultural anthropologist Simona Segre Reinach. Before reading ‘Ethnicity’, I had not considered the historical tension and hierarchies between costumes and fashion. I drew little distinction between costumes and fashion other than the contexts in which they are worn. I was intrigued by Reinach, who claims that colonial expansion in the 19th century was a catalyst that affirmed Eurocentric superiority over other cultures.¹⁶ Western clothing was distinguished as fashion and perceived as more significant than non-western clothing, regarded as costumes.¹⁷ The idea of hierarchy positioned fashion as offering newness through trends, while other cultures' clothing maintained their traditions.¹⁸ This perspective enabled me to question the implications of positioning costumes within fashion and whether creating a cross-cultural collection could help to break down these boundaries and hierarchies.

In contrast, a Professor of Art History, Victoria L. Rovine, in her paper ‘Colonialism’s Clothing: Africa, France, and the Deployment of Fashion’, suggests that contemporary fashion has become increasingly transnational, and it has become common for cultures to be influenced by each other. A key idea that she proposes is that clothing is a vehicle for negotiating similarities and differences between cultures and understanding fashion’s developments, intersections, and conflicts.¹⁹ Reading this text made me realise the power of cross-cultural fashion in connecting cultures and a contemporary audience together. Cambodian people can wear clothing in this collection to celebrate their cultural identity and create opportunities for non-Cambodian people to learn and appreciate cultures beyond their own. Rovine’s idea transformed my thinking to focus less on the boundaries separating cultures and more on the commonalities that bind us together.

Ziggy Chen, a contemporary Shanghainese designer, is an example of a practitioner who demonstrates the possibilities of the cross-cultural dress. I align my practice with Chen because he creates clothing that reflects a duality between historical Shanghainese textiles and European tailoring to represent traces of time. Chen’s

¹⁶ Simona Segre Reinach, “Ethnicity,” in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Modern Age*, ed. Alexandra Palmer (England: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ Sheila Cliffe, *The Social Life of Kimono* (England, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 5-7.

¹⁹ Victoria L Rovine, “Colonialism’s Clothing: Africa, France, and the Deployment of Fashion,” *Design Issues* 25: no. 3 (2009): 44, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://direct.mit.edu/desi/article/25/3/44-61/68961>.

objective is to share his culture by recreating ancient Chinese fabrics and collaging old paintings of Shanghainese people into prints.²⁰ He likes to work with natural fibres such as cotton, linen, and ramie. His collections mixed his Chinese heritage with the 1970s and 1980s British popular culture that shaped his teenage years with European tailoring and silhouettes (Fig 8).²¹ This integration shows the evolving culture in Shanghai and is a source of inspiration for me to explore the evolution of Cambodian culture. I am interested in how he positions his cultural identity into the collections while bridging ideas from different periods in history.

An interview in 2020 with Ziggy Chen describes Chen’s work as contributing to the global interconnectedness of fashion in “mediated social interaction and exchange systems.”²² Living in an interconnected, globalised world means that knowledge and experiences can be shared and exchanged, which helped to bridge ideas from multiple cultural references into my practice and explore how these relationships can be integrated to form new meanings. As a person who has felt culturally displaced from Cambodian culture growing up, I recalled seeing traditional Cambodian clothing on elders from my family but not understanding the context behind them. In this research, I have gained significant knowledge about traditional garments and how they were worn, the system of colours and their relationship to religion, and pattern cutting techniques unique to Cambodia. Sharing this knowledge aims to build research on Cambodian culture, promote cross-cultural exchange in the fashion industry, and challenge the perception that Cambodian clothing can only exist in the context of a costume.²³



Figure 8. Ziggy Chen, *Collagemory*, 2021, Collage, Ziggy Chen, Shanghai, 18th April 2021, <https://ziggychen.com/pages/collagemory-s-s-2021>.

²⁰ Dark House Limited, “Ziggy Chen,” ink, 2021, accessed June 3, 2021, <https://www.ink-clothing.com/en/Man/brands/62/Ziggy-Chen/AUTUMN-WINTER-2021/id=737>.

²¹ Lane Crawford, “Created in China: Ziggy Chen,” Lane Crawford, 2020, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.lanecrawford.com/discover/created-in-china-ziggy-chen-52700005-20150513/shop/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Britannica, “History of Belgium,” Britannica, 2021, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belgium/History>.

When looking for reference images to influence my designs, the research started with Cambodian clothing, French clothing, and historical images of western clothing. I was drawn to a Belgian painting by Léon Frédéric, titled ‘The Ages of Workers’, created between 1895-1897 (Fig 9). Like Cambodia, France also occupied Belgium between 1794-1814 during the French Revolutionary Wars.²⁴ This painting was created not long after the war, and it appeared to capture the hardship of the Belgian people as they were still recovering from the war with the French. In this painting, what resonated with me was also the fluidity of clothing that both males and females wore. Womenswear’s formal qualities, such as delicate gathering and lightweight fabrics, created fluid silhouettes across the painting. These qualities also appeared in men’s clothing within the painting. This interchangeability of the clothing is comparable to Cambodian garments, where the concept of gender between male and female was blurred. Clothing from the painting was also carefully selected to align with the Cambodian system of colours with a contemporary take on the shades and tones. For example, the primary colours of purple in the Cambodian system of colours became a soft tone of lavender from the painting, and bronze became dirty brown (Fig 10).



Figure 9. Léon Frédéric, *The Ages of Workers*, 1895-1897, painting, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, 10th May 2021, https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/the-ages-of-the-worker-2066.html?tx_commentaire_pi%5BpidLi%5D=509&tx_commentaire_pi%5Bfrom%5D=841&cHash=a3b576df46

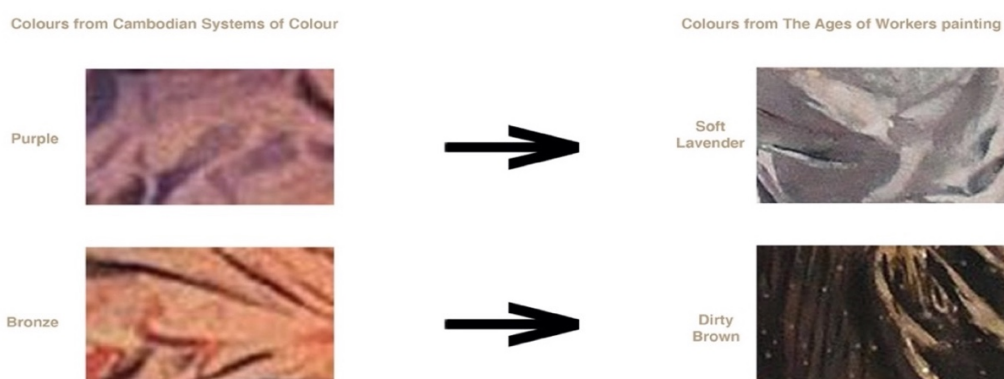


Figure 10: Imuy Teav, *Comparisons of colour choices between Cambodian system of colours and The Ages of Workers*, 2021, diagram, Auckland.

²⁴ Britannica, “History of Belgium.”

REPOSITIONING MENSWEAR

From a design point of view, I have a strong interest in the current direction of menswear. A helpful text informing this research was Parker Bennett, an American writer who discusses the relationship between gender, clothing, and the wearer. He raises a significant point about how clothing allows wearers to perform gender and question whether they are restricted or empowered by what they wear.²⁵ This idea made me curious about how the wearers of my clothes would feel, wearing my garments. I speculate that the wearers of my clothes would be progressive men who appreciate formal qualities in womenswear and are open to embracing a softer image of a man that may usually be hidden or suppressed. Bennett also highlights how the evolution of menswear has broadened and become increasingly progressive since the early 21st century. It has become common for menswear designers to challenge the relationship between gender and clothing while pushing menswear into alternative directions.

JW Anderson, a contemporary British menswear designer, is another key practitioner inspiring my collection. His collections provoke controversy and appear to revolve around gender, but that is not his motivation. When I started designing clothes, Anderson quickly became my muse. His progressive design philosophy enabled me to create beyond the associations of gender, which allowed for endless possibilities in contemporary menswear. For Anderson, designing menswear is not limited to the distinctions of a man or a woman. Instead, it involves testing the boundaries of menswear by exploring new silhouettes and lines to find new proportions. Anderson intends to push menswear forward beyond the essential everyday wardrobe for men because he believes that womenswear has already been greatly challenged. Some recognisable formal qualities from womenswear are visible in Anderson's Fall 2020 menswear collection (Fig 11). These qualities include the use of ruffles on a sleeveless fitted top and an oversized golden chained belt to accentuate the waist of his model, who wore a long flowy oversized coat. His use of uncommon details for menswear has inspired my designs, but in a more subtle way, such as soft gathers and round-shaped sleeves. The representation of models was also carefully selected for whom he imagines his wearers to be from lean builds, soft facial features, to long curly hairstyles, which makes it difficult to differentiate their gender. Anderson's choice of models has helped me consider the relationship between the models I want to use and how they align with my collection.

²⁵ Parker Bennett, "Menswear in the Millennium: Bending the Gender Binary," in *Fashion, Agency, and Empowerment: Performing Agency, Following Script*, ed. Annette Bennett and Katalin Medvedev (England, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), 64–77.

A famous British pop singer, Harry Styles, shares a similar progressive view on dress as Anderson. Styles believes that society should remove the barriers that limit our understandings about what clothing is associated with so that we can be free to express what we want to wear creatively.²⁶ Both Anderson and Style’s perspectives made me realise that there are still many societal barriers to overcome in creating a new norm for pushing menswear forward.



Figure 11. JW Anderson, *JW Anderson Fall 2020 Menswear*, 2020, looks 10 and 2. Photographer: Alessandro Lucioni, Paris, 20th April 2021,

<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2020-menswear/j-w-anderson/slideshow/collection#10>

<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2020-menswear/j-w-anderson/slideshow/collection#2>

²⁶ Hamish Bowles, “Playtime With Harry Styles,” *Vogue*, November 13, 2020, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.vogue.com/article/harry-styles-cover-december-2020>.

METHODOLOGIES

This research project aims to connect my practice with my Cambodian culture. An Autoethnographic methodology allows me to examine cultural contexts significant to me, while a Practice-Based Research methodology guides and directs my iterative and reflective design processes, enabling me to explore new methods for practice to create a body of garments informed by my cultural heritage.²⁷

Autoethnography was used to draw on my lived experiences as a Cambodian, raise questions about my cultural heritage, and understand my design identity.²⁸ According to autoethnographic researchers Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, Autoethnography can display "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural."²⁹ This methodology enabled me to share my connections with my heritage and its role in shaping my practice, alongside influences from a fashion context. Exploring my upbringing made me realise how little I knew about my culture, which motivated me to dig deeper to learn about historical Cambodian clothing.

Practice-Based Research (PBR) is the second chosen methodological framework for embracing the roles of designer, practitioner, and researcher.³⁰ For Cazeux, PBR is a methodology that integrates research with creative practice.³¹ Integrating design, making, and research into my practice allowed me to make discoveries that could lead to unexpected innovations and outcomes. Reflecting on the making supported the progression of each design process. These reflections helped connect the dots between my contextual research and practice, which allowed me to explore different directions and outcomes during the experimentations.³²

²⁷ Clive Cazeaux, "Inherently Interdisciplinary," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 7, no. 2 (2008): 12, accessed June 17, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/1378908/Inherently_interdisciplinary_four_perspectives_on_practice_based_research.

²⁸ Mariza G. Méndez, "Autoethnography as a Research Method," 280.

²⁹ Ellis and Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," 739.

³⁰ Vaughan, "Designer/ Practitioner/ Researcher," *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal* 15, no. 2 (2014):16, accessed June 5, 2021, <http://revistas.udistrital.edu.co/ojs/index.php/calj/article/view/5134>.

³¹ Cazeaux, "Inherently Interdisciplinary," 12.

³² Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (London: Routledge, 2017).

METHODS

Using tacit knowledge about my heritage as a starting point, I recognised that more research was needed to understand Cambodian culture and clothing. The knowledge I gained from this research prompted a reflection on my design process from previous collections and challenged me to experiment with new methods. A continuous cycle of developments builds connections between the research and visual outcomes throughout the design process. For example, my design typically involved conceptualising an idea into a sketch and then calico for full-scale mock-ups. This collection, however, required me to embrace a new method by replicating historical Cambodian clothing, interpreting historical photographs and patterns of Cambodian clothing like the sampot to recreate them and gain a deeper understanding of the garment's form and functionality. The adaption of the garments would not have been possible without replicating them first.

Another method I utilised to develop the project was collage, specifically 2D digital collage using historical material. This material was drawn from historical Cambodian clothing, French clothing, and clothing from the Belgian painting to establish relationships between costume and fashion to reimagine and experiment with the cross-cultural dress. These collages created initial silhouettes and forms, then realised through full-scale mock-ups in calico fabrics. Some collages were turned into digital prints to produce bespoke fabrics to give a contemporary contrast to the historical references. These prints recalled the Cambodian system of colours with the shades and tones influenced by the Belgian painting. Other methods such as coffee dyeing were also used to tone down the bold primary colours of Cambodian clothing to provoke a sense of nostalgia.

ANALYSIS OF PRACTICE

“We all have taken elements from our past, in order to reconstruct our future.”³³

Historical research of traditional Cambodian clothing worn during the French colonisation, traditional Cambodian pattern cutting techniques and system of wearing colour and the study of the soft genderless forms worn by workers in Léon Frédéric, *The Ages of Workers* painting, coalesce to inform design approaches and aesthetics held within this body of work. Investigating Cambodian clothing helped shape my practice as a designer and share my cultural history with a contemporary audience. The integration of visual cues and methods of working from historical clothing has resulted in an alternative visual language of cross-cultural dress for men. Traditional Cambodian pattern cutting and making techniques are copied and physically experienced to gain tacit knowledge of the garments' origins, use and feel when worn. Clothing is unpacked to understand the garments' original pattern-making techniques through 3D reproduction. While styling exercises assist in integrating structured garments from previous collections into the new body of work. At the same time, the integration of previous works provides ongoing development of design identity and builds continuity between collections. These newly incorporated processes that I have discovered in this research have enabled alternative approaches and practices to clothing design, which created a body of work that speaks to my cultural identity.

³³ Marlo Saalmink, “A Conversation with Ziggy Chen,” SOME/THINGS Magazine, June 3, 2017, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.someslashthings.com/online-magazine/2017/5/26/a-conversation-with-ziggy-chen>.

REPRODUCTION AND ADAPTION OF HISTORICAL CLOTHING

Since becoming a fashion designer, I have followed a linear design process (Fig 12). These processes include contextualising design concepts through historical research, visualising designs through sketching, experimenting with 3D prototypes (toiles) for fits, silhouettes, and proportions analysis, choosing appropriate fabrications for designs and seasons, finally making final garments in the chosen fabrications.

The discovery of Seams of Change led to the emergence of a less linear design process, influenced by traditional Cambodian pattern making and construction techniques (Fig 13). The new design process involved incorporating photo collaging and styling exercises between 3D prototypes to test, analyse, and reflect on the making. This process allowed me to visualise cross-cultural dress digitally while creating continuity between old and new collections.

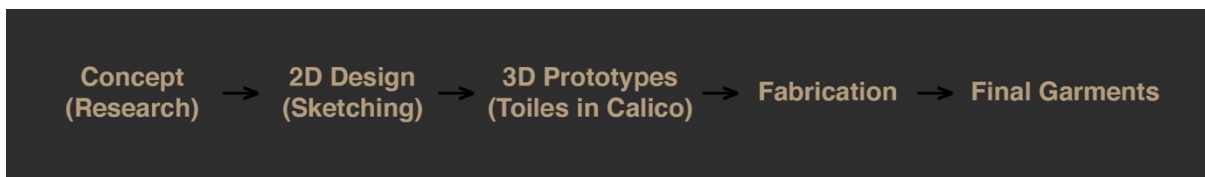


Figure 12: Imuy Teav, *Diagram of the linear design process*, 2021, diagram, Auckland.

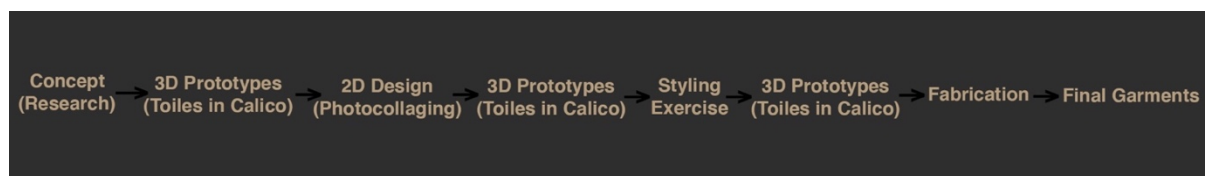


Figure 13: Imuy Teav, *Diagram of the new design process*, 2021, diagram, Auckland.

In experimenting with the functionality of traditional Cambodian garments, research started with a historical inquiry into the sampot. This traditional garment could be worn as Jong Kben (pants) or Juppe (skirt). Analysing the original Cambodian garments and their construction techniques was necessary before adapting them into a contemporary menswear fashion practice. Seams of change show traditional Cambodian pattern cutting techniques that use rectangle or triangle-shaped pattern pieces to utilise most of the fabric available. This approach allows a reduced waste pattern cutting technique to evolve when transferred into a contemporary context supporting a more sustainable practice (Fig 14).

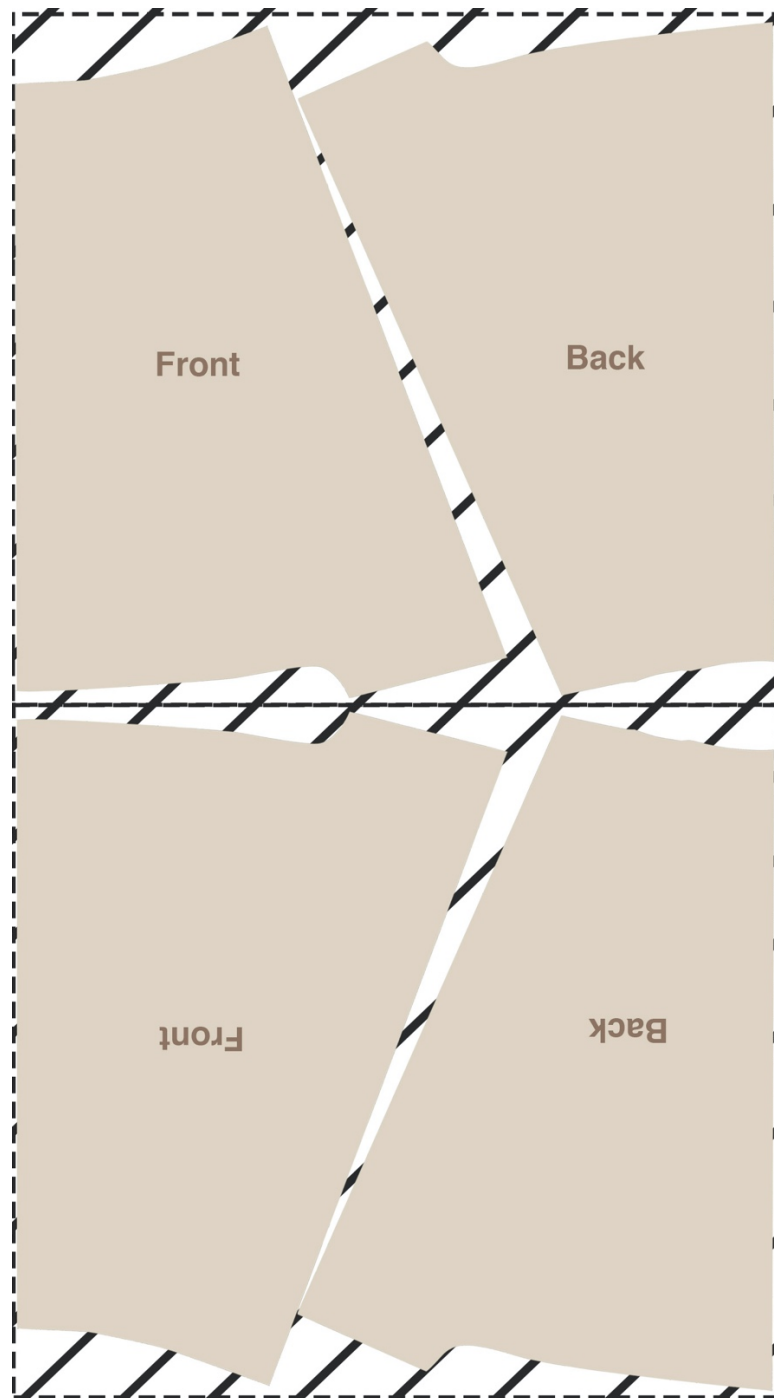


Figure 14: Imuy Teav, *Diagram of sampot pattern adapted from traditional Cambodian pattern cutting technique*, 2021, diagram, Auckland.

To begin with, a sampot draping exploration on the mannequin took place to understand the relationship between the garment and the body. This way of constructing uses traditional men's tailoring techniques, darts, and side seams, whereas the traditional way of wearing the sampot requires neither. The traditional wearing of a sampot jong kben involves a process of tying, rolling, and tucking at the waist (Fig 15). This way of wearing is not functional in today's context because wearers need to undergo a lengthy process each time they wear it. An initial solution to the lengthy process of putting on this traditional garment is using gathers with drawstrings to secure the pants at the waist (Fig 16). Gathers were also used to explore the various pants sizes while maintaining volume and space between the legs to ensure fluid movement and memory of the shape that sampot traditionally had. However, the gathers were also problematic because they had to be adjusted whenever the pants became undone. This impracticality was one of the reasons why I turned away from wearing a traditional garment in the first place. Front zip and a button at the waistband for closures was incorporated to improve its functionality (Fig 17).



Figure 15. Imuy Teav, *The traditional way of wearing Sampot Jong Kben*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



Figure 16. Imuy Teav, *Adaptation of sampot jong kben using gathers to hold up the pants*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



Figure 17. Imuy Teav, *Sampot closure*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.

This series of experimentations brought back memories of seeing my family in traditional Cambodian garments when we went to formal occasions like a pagoda and weddings. I remember the feeling of being an outsider because they would wear traditional clothing, and I would only wear western clothing like a collared shirt and pants. The integration of western tailoring details with traditional Cambodian clothing has helped create a sense of belonging and blend into the collective identity of my culture.

Further experimentations in the design process also involved exploring the texture of the sampot jong kben. The upper class often wore the hand-pleated sampot and re-pleated after each wash because natural materials like silk and cotton could not permanently hold the pleated forms. In this collection, hand pleating tests were conducted using cotton calico to understand how the texture responded to the body. However, it would not have been viable to re-pleat after each wash within a contemporary fashion context. Textured linen became a substitute for traditional pleating to help reimagine more subtle textures of the traditional pleated sampot (Fig 18).

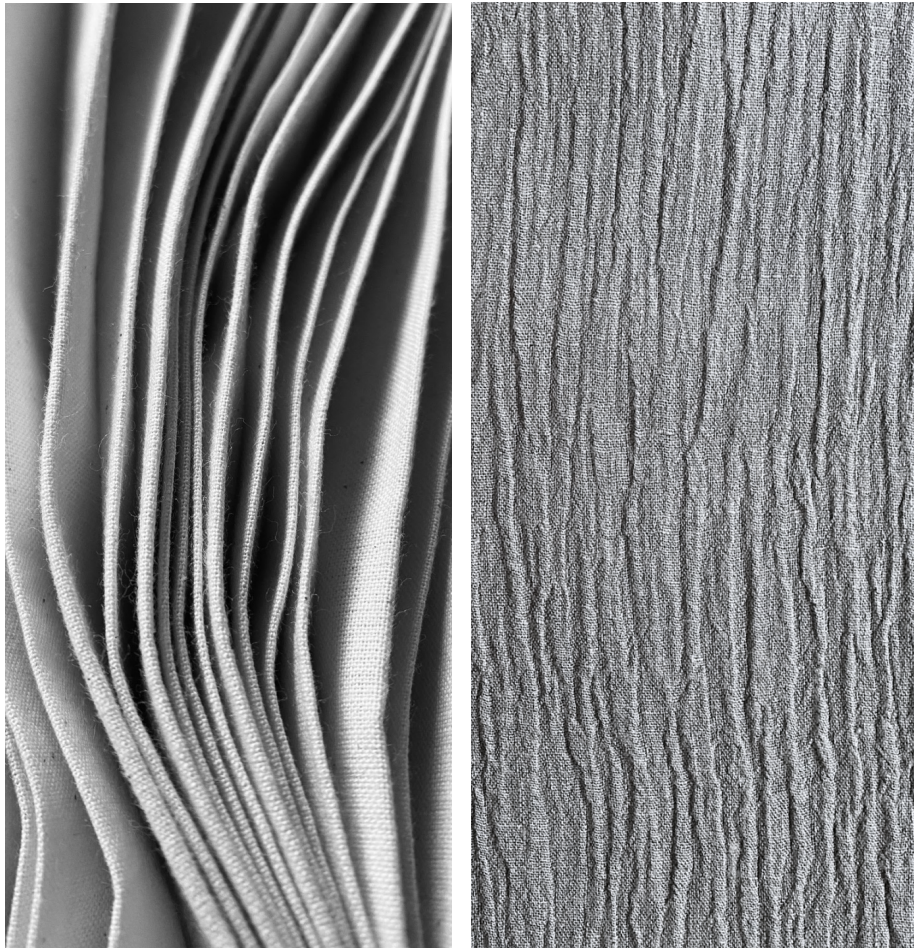


Figure 18. Imuy Teav, *Comparisons between hand-pleating texture on calico (left) vs crinkled linen texture (right)*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



Figure 19. Imuy Teav, *Hand-pleated sampot jong kben when laid flat*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.

The next series of experimentations followed a folding technique of the five seam Chinese pants from *Seams of Change* (Fig 20). The five seam Chinese pants were selected as a significant piece worn during the late 19th century and still worn in pagodas in the present.³⁴ The pants' patterns were cut out of paper to explore the various angles and proportions between the legs. This exploration allowed the adapted version to be worn practically within a contemporary context, providing enough room for stride and at the same time reducing fabric bulk at the crotch seams (Fig 21).

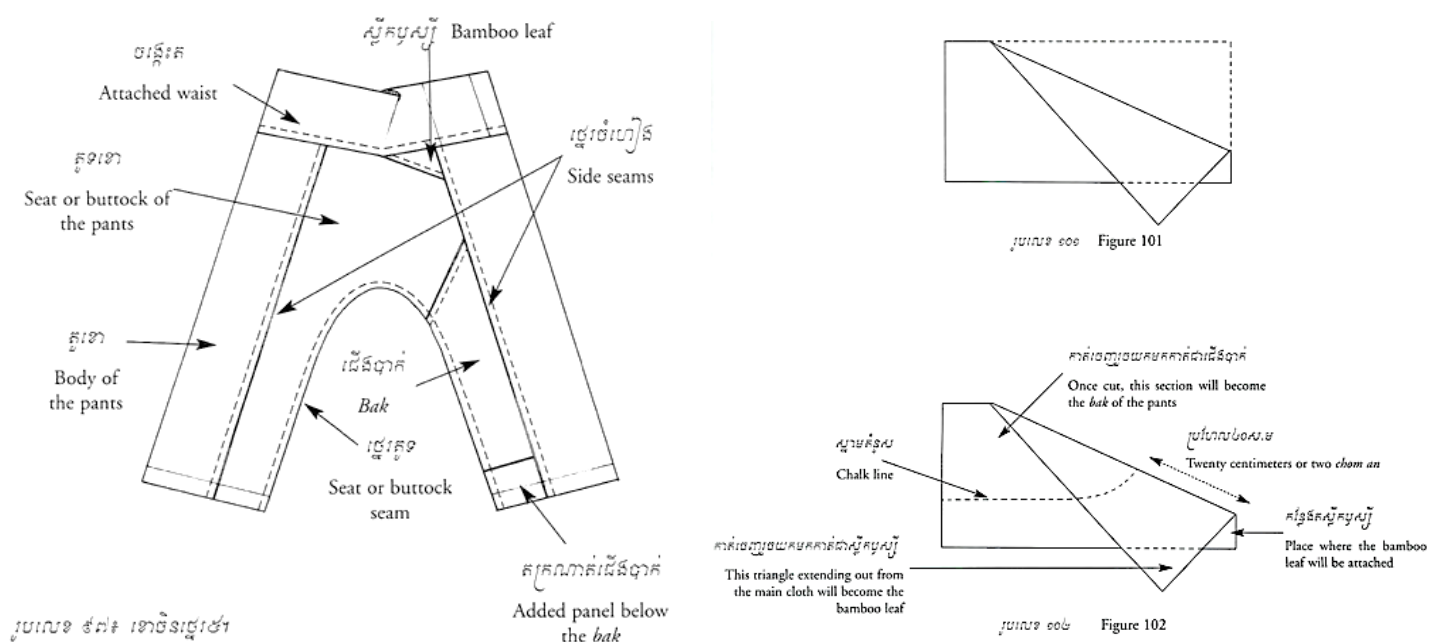


Figure 20. Reyum, *Five Seam Chinese Pants Patterns*, 2003, illustration, Cambodia.

³⁴ The five seam Chinese pants were originally adopted by Cambodian people who conducted business deals with the Chinese along the rivers in the 20th century. Chea et al., *Seams of Change*, 75.

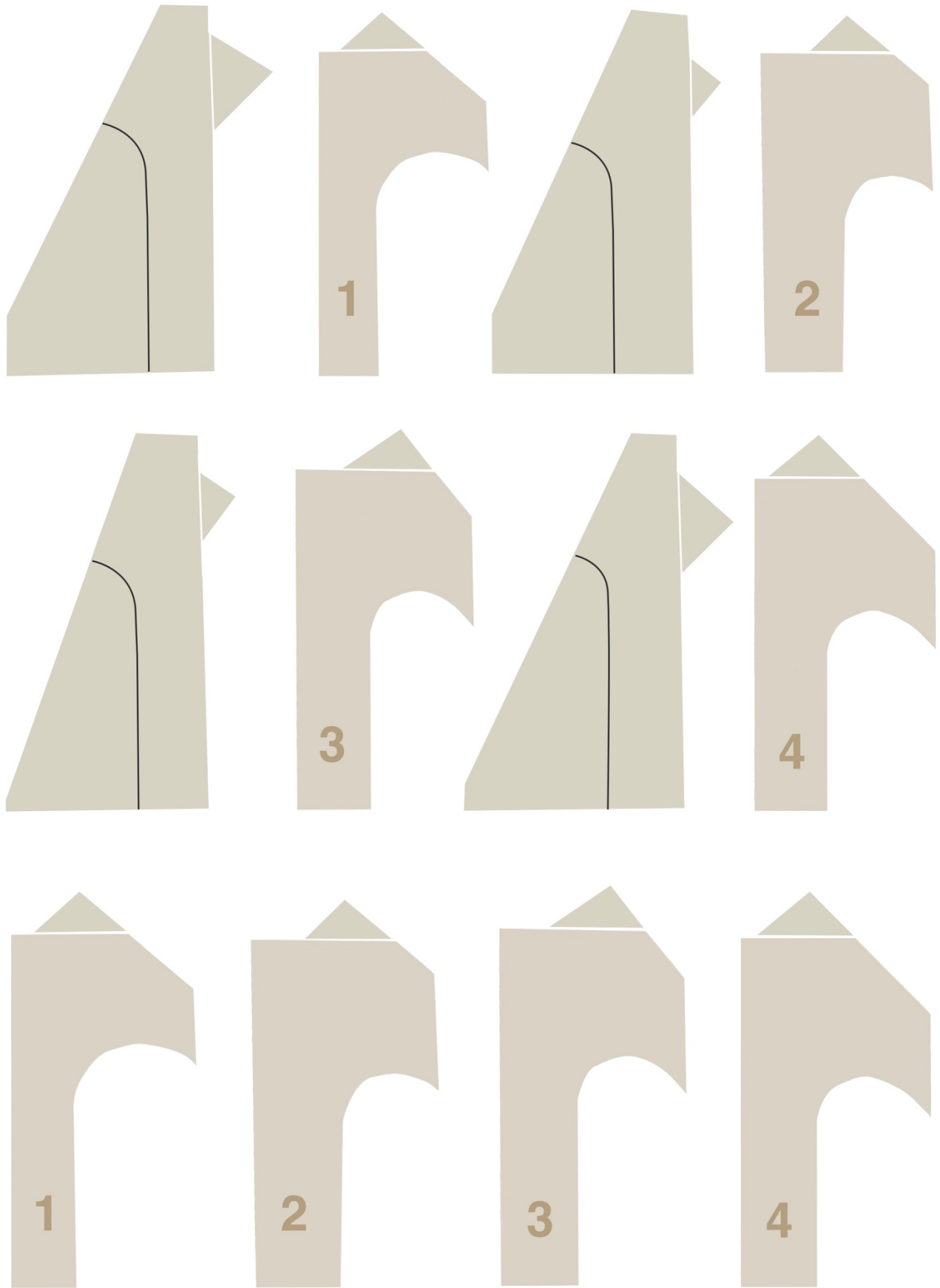


Figure 21. Imuy Teav, *Five seam Chinese pants pattern experimentations on leg angles*, 2021, diagram, Auckland.

After establishing an angle that allowed maximum movement and minimised fabric excess, full-scale versions in calico were used for fittings (Fig 22). Additional western tailoring details like waistband, pockets and zip were also introduced as a way of contemporising the garment while preserving its original silhouette and merging east and west design and making techniques (Fig 23).



Figure 22. Imuy Teav, *Experimentations of the five seam Chinese pants using the traditional folding technique*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



Figure 23. Imuy Teav, *Close-up details of a zip used to contemporise and improve the functionality of the five seam Chinese pants*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.

Learning about the construction methods of the five seam Chinese pants triggered my fascination with traditional Cambodian clothing. Every cut-out piece of the fabric had an intention to be reconfigured so that it was not going to waste. This series of experimentations allowed me to slow down and reflect on my process to be more mindful of my practice especially designing in a world where new garments are constantly produced. A minimal waste pattern-making technique was developed from these experiments, allowing for a more sustainable practice. Design development has evolved from linear to a much more responsive process that allows for the pattern and experiments to inform the outcome of the garment. This approach to fashion design sits in contrast to my previous approaches, where I would design a garment in 2D from historical research and simply make it.

The one-piece cutting technique used to construct a male Chinese shirt allows for further adapting traditional Cambodian clothing into a contemporary menswear context.³⁵ The male Chinese shirt pattern pieces include the main body, extended sleeves, a front placket, and pockets (Fig 24). In developing the one-piece shirt, I eliminated all the Chinese shirt's construction steps except for the main body piece and extended the shoulder seams to become sleeves (Fig 25). While this technique offers a sense of simplicity, the challenge of using a one-piece pattern piece is that the garment needs to work within the limitations of the fabric's width. For example, the narrower the width of the fabric, the shorter the sleeves will be. The neckline was cut out and gathered with a drawstring to replace darts and seams to achieve the shaping (Fig 26).

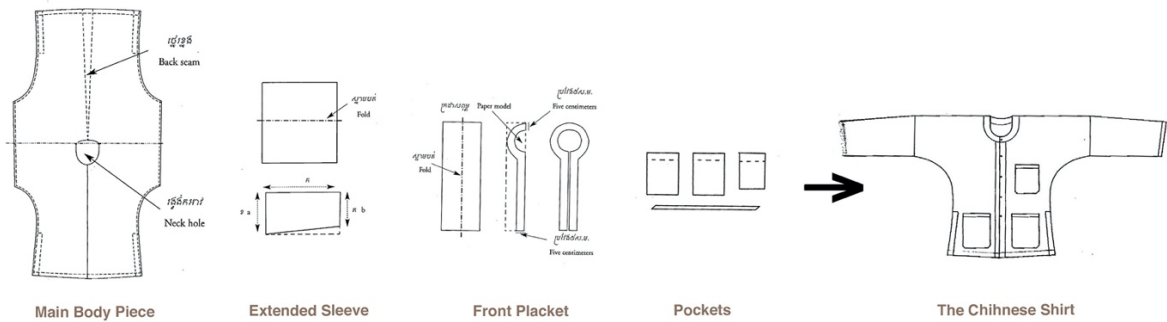


Figure 24. Reyum, *The male Chinese shirt pattern pieces and garment*, 2003, illustration, Cambodia.

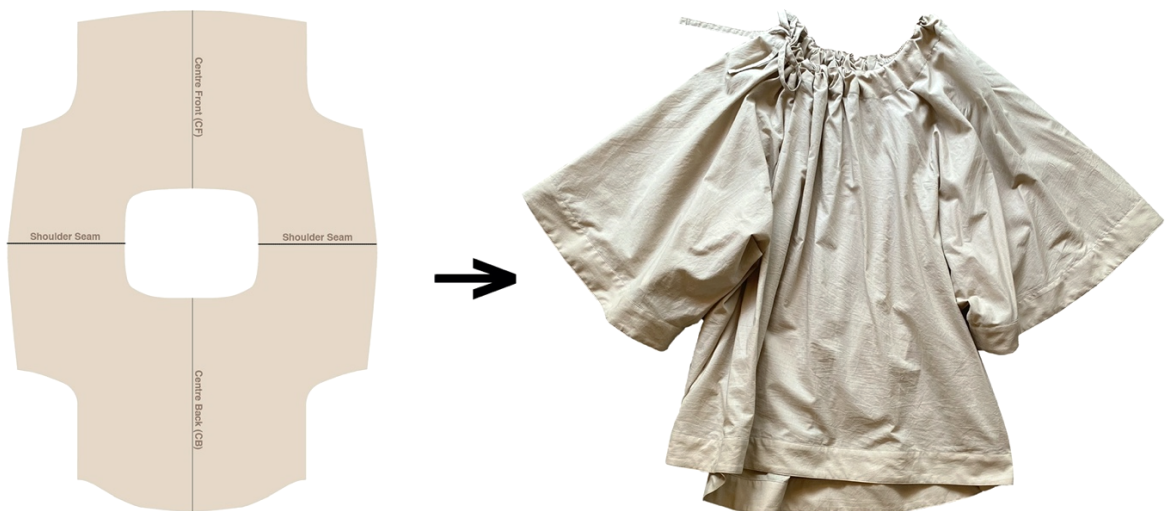


Figure 25. Imuy Teav, *One-piece shirt pattern*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland.

Figure 26. Imuy Teav, *One-piece shirt*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.

From making copies of original garments, I gained insights into traditional Cambodian techniques and how the garments were worn, which allowed me to adapt and integrate them into French clothing and clothing from the Belgian painting to explore the cross-cultural dress.

³⁵ Like the five seams Chinese pants, the Chinese shirt was also introduced when the Chinese came over to Cambodia for business during the 19th Century. Chea et al., 46.

PHOTO-COLLAGING OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND PRINTS

The research was further developed following the reproduction and adaption process by photo collaging and illustrating a Belgian historical painting from the 19th century. Photo-collaging was used to visualise cross-cultural dress (Fig 27). Instead of sketching from reference images, the challenge was to find alternative ways of visualisation by digitally manipulating images from the past and reimagining them in a contemporary context. Like J. W. Anderson, this collection was designed without the limitations of gender. Through illustration developments using images of historical clothing from *The Ages of Workers* painting, the kut shirt, the Chinese shirt, 3D made prototypes of the sampot, and the five seam Chinese pants, the collection explored new silhouettes, scale, proportions, different colour combinations and garment pairings to create alternative shades of menswear (Fig 28).



Figure 27. Imuy Teav, *Photo collage of illustration developments*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland.

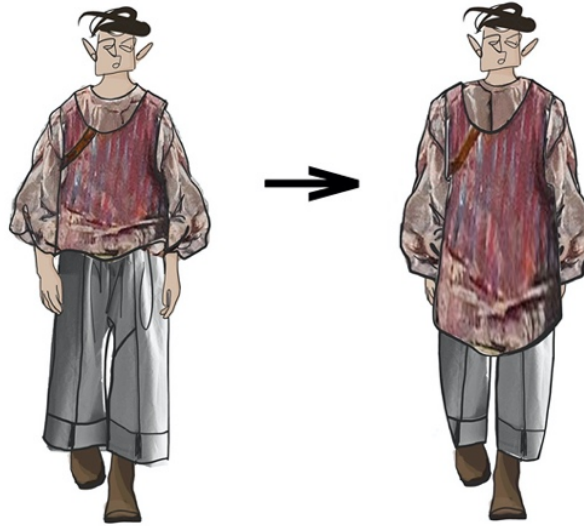


Figure 28. Imuy Teav, *Photo collage exploring the length of the vest (proportion) and the shoulder line (silhouette) of the top*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland.

Ziggy Chen’s design process of mixing clothing from the east and west informed newly developed approaches to clothing design that informed a process of cross-cultural dressing an approach for creating different pairings of cross-cultural dress (Fig 29). The integration of traditional Cambodian clothing (East) and clothes worn in *The Ages of Workers* painting (west) within these experiments are intended to generate cultural and personal meaning within a growing globalised transnational fashion system. By positioning Cambodian traditions through western fashion, this collection opens a dialogue that rethinks the cultural divisions of the past and bridges a sense of newness while holding cultural meanings.



Figure 29. Imuy Teav, *Photo collage of cross-cultural dress*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland.

Experimenting with colour and texture allows for dimensions against the flat colours. This experimentation is achieved by digitally photo collaging historical images onto natural fabrications of cotton percale and cotton twill that are Prepared For Print (PFP). These fabrics have been pretreated with chemicals to remove any residue like oil and wax to allow even penetration of pigments from inks onto the fabrics. Photo collaging of historical images were digitally printed to integrate a modern element into Cambodian clothing (Fig 30). These prints combined multiple colours from the photo collaged experiments to build and make the collection more cohesive. Each print was manipulated through Photoshop by layering, distorting forms, changing the transparency of images, and applying blending modes to achieve abstract effects. The abstraction brings attention to the overall texture and colours rather than being distracted by the figurative subject matter. These abstracted images also conceptually signify the fading of tradition that has now been made visible.

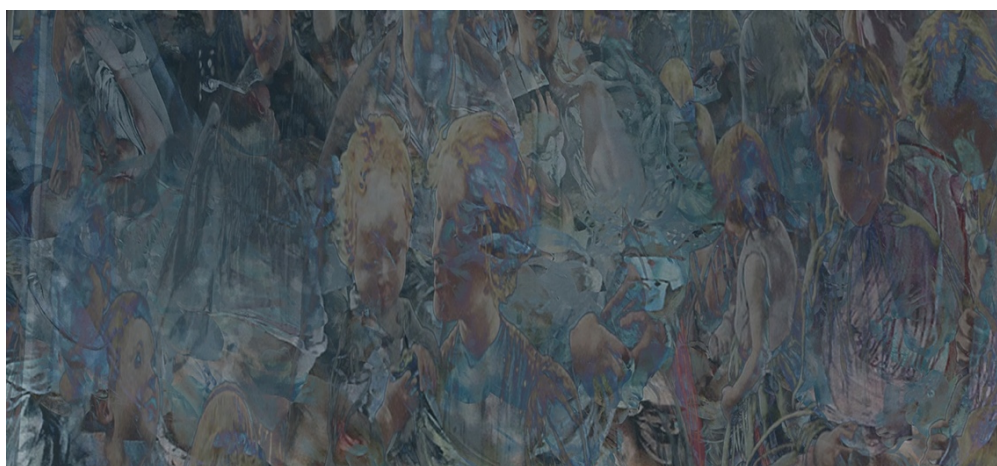


Figure 30. Imuy Teav, *Photo collage of digital prints*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland.

STYLING EXERCISES

After reviewing the illustration developments, styling exercises contributed to building continuity between previous collections and the current research and further developed my design identity. Styling exercises involved pairing previous design with the new developed garments to draw a connection between the two. It is essential to test the compatibility of the soft forms of the newly developed work with the previous Victorian era inspired collection that holds form and structure. For example, more recognisable pieces from the previous collections, like structured boned pieces (Fig 31), were integrated with softer structures from the new designs.



Figure 31. Imuy Teav, Boned pieces from Imuy's previous collections, 2018-2019. Photographers: Thian Fieulaine and Johnlevy Rocreo.

These styling exercises provided a way of questioning the versatility of these designs when paired with different garments and how they could exist in men's wardrobes. Although this is a menswear collection, sometimes ambiguous aesthetics of the newly developed garments are realised through styling male and female models to see how similar garments could be dressed on both sexes (Fig 32). By incorporating previous work, I reflected on how these garments could continue contributing to the conversation of progressive menswear.



Figure 32. Imuy Teav, *Styling exercises combining old and new pieces*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



FABRICATION

Traces of time are captured through the process of reinterpreting the traditional Cambodian system of colours through the lens of both *The Ages of Workers* painting and how this might be placed within a contemporary menswear clothing collection. This concept of time is realised through textures, fabric dyeing and digital printing. How a fabric behaves, drapes, feels, and looks were significant considerations in selecting appropriate fabrics for each garment. Varying weights of linen and cotton were manipulated to mimic unrefined textures as though the fabric had been brought forward from the French colonial period. The characteristics of lightweight fabrics are excellent for gathering details and volume, while heavier fabrics were used to sustain the structure of the garments. The contrasting weights in fabrics created a visual tension between softness and rigidity. A series of fabric swatches were used to analyse the cohesion of colour and texture within the collection (Fig 33).

The colour palette of this collection was influenced by the Cambodian system of colours and the soft tones from the Belgian painting. Exploring these influences has shaped how I use colours and challenged me to be more experimental with them. In comparison, the colour palette in my previous collections was relatively limited and monochromatic because of the inspiration taken from Victorian mid-century menswear (Fig 34 & 35).



Figure 34. Imuy Teav, *Undergraduate collection, Gentle Man*, 2018. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 35. Imuy Teav, *Post-graduate collection, In-between*, 2019. Photographer: Johnlevy Rocio.

Garments from the painting containing Cambodian systems of colour were extracted as an initial colour palette, including red, gold, purple, bronze, green, light blue, dark maroon. These colours were then further interpreted, developed using coffee dye, and digitally manipulated into prints to get to the final colour palette. Coffee dye during the experimentation process aimed to age the fabrics' newness and tone down the primary colours from the Cambodian system of colours. The coffee dyeing process involved soaking fabrics into hot coffee water to absorb pigments better (Fig 36). This effect was intended to evoke a sense of the past and a feeling of nostalgia (Fig 37).



Figure 36. Imuy Teav, *Coffee dyeing process*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.



Figure 37. Imuy Teav, *Comparisons of pre-dyed fabric (left) and post-dyed fabric (right)*, 2021, photograph, Auckland.

FINAL IMAGES



Figure 38. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look One-Norodom I blazer styled with crinkled Sampot*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 39. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look One close-ups*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Ficulaine.



Figure 40. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look Two*- denim boned vest worn over one-piece shirt styled with Chinese pants, 2021.
Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 41. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound) collection, Look Two close-ups*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 42. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look Three*- digital printed vest worn over boned Kut jacket styled with *Sampot Juppe 2.0*, 2021.

Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 43. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound) collection, Look Three close-ups*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 44. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look Four*-panelled vest worn over seamed sleeve one-piece dress, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 45. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look Four close-ups*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 46. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, Look Five- maroon boned vest worn over Leon shirt styled with digital printed Chinese pants, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.



Figure 47. Imuy Teav, *Un(bound)* collection, *Look Five close-ups*, 2021. Photographer: Thian Fieulaine.

CONCLUSION

Exploring traditional Cambodian clothing led to discoveries about my cultural identity and enabled me to engage with new practice methods. The ambiguity of Cambodian clothing and cross-cultural dress provided insights that influenced the designs in this collection, which aims to contribute to the discussion of fluidity in contemporary menswear.

The lack of personal connection in previous collections made it challenging to immerse myself in the concepts of my designs. This research centred around building deeper connections to my culture through my practice. Investigating traditional Cambodian clothing raised questions about the possibilities of positioning traditional eastern clothing in a western fashion context and explore how the meanings of traditional clothing can be challenged and reimaged through contemporary menswear. The blurring of eastern and western clothing was realised through the concept of cross-cultural dress, which enabled new visual meanings to emerge. The melting pot of influences for this collection informed by Ziggy Chen's design philosophy provided ways of breaking cultural barriers and bridging hierarchies. A limitation of this research was the lack of academic resources about traditional Cambodian clothing. Events such as the Khmer Rouge led to the disappearance of cultural knowledge. However, the discovery of the book *Seams of Change* provided the foundations of traditional pattern making techniques and exposure to pivotal Cambodian garments.

Over the past twenty years, contemporary menswear has become increasingly progressive as fashion designers continue to expand the boundaries of what menswear could be. Designers like JW Anderson transformed my perspective in designing menswear. By eliminating the concept of gender, I was able to design based on the formal qualities of clothing that genuinely interest me from womenswear and menswear, such as functionality, structural properties, silhouettes, and details. Adopting alternative processes, methods, and techniques allowed me to disrupt the linear design processes that I had used previously. Working three-dimensionally in the first stage of the design process allowed me to embrace the unknown and feel comfortable with the unfamiliar. Styling exercises were also critical in the reflective process for editing and creating continuity between previous collections and this one.

The outcome of this research established two realisations. I reflected on the responsibility and power of carrying my traditions forward after critically analysing the cultural contexts of clothing from Cambodia. Integrating my heritage into what I make can be a means of cultural preservation and knowledge building for other Cambodian people who may also feel displaced from their culture. From a social perspective, evaluating the literature on menswear and its relationships with gender are also worth rethinking. Stereotypes, perceptions, and ideologies can all be challenged through fashion. Menswear is used as a catalyst to trigger dialogue and conversation in how we understand clothing as a continually negotiated space that is fluid. An observation of current developments that I have noticed is the openness towards ambiguity in menswear, which has become the new norm in how men dress. Moving forward, I intend to continue experimenting with the new design processes that I discovered during this research and continue to deepen my knowledge about my culture.

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