

New Vintage – New History? The *Sukajan* (Souvenir Jacket) and Its Fashionable

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Abstract

This article traces the *sukajan's* journey from military souvenir to fashion statement. Originally embroidered by the Japanese for American soldiers in Occupied Japan the *sukajan*, or souvenir jacket, went on to commemorate further tours of duty including the Vietnam War. In the second half of the 20th century, it was worn as an act of defiance by members of subcultures both in- and outside of Japan, developing connotations of rebellion. Its visibility in media culture further popularised this garment. The *sukajan's* historic associations with military conflict and subculture style, as well as identification with Japanese craftsmanship, made it ideally suited for new vintage production, a growing trend in the fashion industry. The design, branding and marketing of new vintage *sukajan* drew on these associations to add gravitas to this mass-manufactured garment. Despite its ubiquity it has received little critical investigation. This article brings the history of this neglected garment to light and also contributes to debates around the commodification of youth subculture style and 'military chic'. Through an examination of the materiality of the *sukajan* as it moves between cultures, through time and across space it further demonstrates how such a study can disrupt the Eurocentrism that continues to plague Fashion Studies and can contribute to an enriched discussion of imitation, transformation and identity in moving between the global and local. Finally, this article asks what are the implications of co-opting a garment originating in the brutal militaristic struggles between nations and cultures, sanitising this history and selling it as fashion?

Key words:

sukajan, souvenir jacket, tour jacket, new vintage, authenticity, military chic, street wear

Introduction

This article discusses how the *sukajan*, a souvenir jacket originally embroidered by the Japanese for US servicemen in Occupied Japan (1945-52) to commemorate their tours of duty, came to be fashionably consumed given its identification with Japanese craftsmanship, “military chic” and streetwear as communicated through new vintage. I use “new vintage” to refer to contemporary fashion production and consumption that purposely draws upon and communicates its link to past fashion as an authentication strategy. For consumers aiming to distinguish themselves sartorially in the mid to late 2010s, the *sukajan*, an embroidered jacket characterised by its distinctive bright, contrasting colours and lustrous material, reputedly had it all: ‘the contrast of ornate embroidery on a sporty silhouette’ and ‘statement making colours and unique detailing’ (Eggersten 2018). In the spring of 2018, five souvenir jackets produced by the Japanese brand Tailor Toyo were retailed by the luxury British department store Harvey Nichols (figure 1). Four of them bear faithful tribute to those embroidered for US servicemen in Occupied Japan, while the fifth more closely resembles those embroidered in Vietnam for soldiers upon completion of their tours of duty during the Vietnam War (1955-73). The website asserts that, ‘Tailor Toyo’s souvenir jackets aren’t just ultra-cool, they’re also steeped in cultural heritage’ (Harvey Nichols 2018c), ‘an enduring icon of Japanese heritage’ (Harvey Nichols 2018b). It further locates the jacket historically as ‘cool cousin to the trusty bomber . . . [which] takes off-duty dressing to new destinations’ and emphasizes the high degree of personalisation that these jackets afforded their owners historically (Harvey Nichols 2018a). This example highlights the ways in which the *sukajan*’s exotic origins, military associations and bold features characteristic of street style promised consumers unique, expressive garments strengthened through brand narratives emphasizing heritage. Tailor Toyo, of TOYO Enterprises, was preceded by Kosho

& Co. (Koshoshokai), the main producer of souvenir jackets to forces stationed in post-war Japan, and has been producing jackets that are formally and stylistically faithful to their historical predecessors ever since. Not only does Harvey Nichols draw on this connection, but it also calls upon the global recognition of excellence that “Made in Japan” connotes.

Although a garment originally worn off duty or purchased as a souvenir for others, the *sukajan*'s association with the military is significant. A long history of cross fertilization exists between military dress and fashion as evidenced, for example, by the World War One trench coat becoming a fashion mainstay or camouflage becoming ubiquitous in fashion and product design (Craik 2005; Foulkes 2007; Newark 2007). Jennifer Craik attributes the allure of uniforms to their ability to send out mixed messages, noting the ‘constant play between the intended symbolism of uniforms (sameness, unity, regulation, hierarchy, status and roles) and the informal codes of wearing and denoting uniforms (subversion, individual interpretation and difference)’ (2005: 7). She identifies that they are also associated with highly memorable experiences, ‘full of images of humiliation, pride, embarrassment, ritual, fitting in, shame, rebellion, transgression and punishment’ (Craik 2005: 1). At the same time, when these cultural memories are accessed through fashion design, they are often cleansed of unpleasant associations. ‘Military chic’ is a style that draws on military garments and their sex appeal without embracing their violent associations (Achter 2019: 272).

The ‘ultra-cool’ *sukajan* is also allied to street style in the Harvey Nichol’s product description. Streetwear has often incorporated military clothing or details due its ‘aggressive and utilitarian’ nature (Newark 2007: 170), communicating an oppositional and anti-fashion stance. The adoption or transformation of military dress or its elements to create new meanings (*bricolage*), expressing political ideologies and setting its wearers apart from mainstream culture has been well documented in studies of post-war

subcultures (Hall and Jefferson; Hebdige 1979; Narumi 2010). While subsequent subcultures became fluid and contradictory (Muggleton 2000) as well as elusive to the extent that (sartorial) elusiveness itself became an act of resistance (Evans 1997), the categorization and mythologizing of the subcultures arising from the working class in the 1950s, 60s and 70s through academic texts, exhibitions, popular media and fashion marketing popularized them (Woodward 2009: 83-85) and their bold sartorial styles babsorbed into the mainstream. This 'supermarket of style' (Polhemus 2010) offering anyone a limitless means of expression. Street wear is now widely associated with a quirky dress sense, creativity and the know-how, and sometimes nerve, to style new looks that best express one's individuality without conforming to the dictates of the fashion industry (Polhemus 2010; Woodward 2009; Davies 2014). Here the *sukajan* offers one vibrant possibility.

This article explores the historic links of the *sukajan* to Japanese craftsmanship, military conflict and subculture style and given these associations, explains how the garment was ideally suited for new vintage production, a growing trend in the highly competitive fashion industry. These connections are reinforced not only through design details and promotional materials but also the use of vintage garment reference collections linking present production to the past. The success of new vintage relates to the degree to which they convey uniqueness or the 'aura' of the original, serving as a counter-foil to mass-production (Gregson and Crewe 2003). As Heike Jenss has argued, while a contestable term, authenticity is nonetheless important to identity construction and a powerful force in selling fashion (2004). Conveying authenticity is fundamental to the marketability of new vintage *sukajan*¹ and achieved through a carefully orchestrated programme of design, communication and marketing.²

To tease out this complicated web of meaning, the ways in which *sukajan* have been manufactured and marketed as well as encountered and used will be considered in relation to their materiality as they are transformed across cultures, time and space (Appadurai 2001: 17). This study draws upon the object analysis of postwar *sukajan* made in Japan and those made during the Vietnam conflict for US servicemen in comparison to contemporary reproductions and is supported by the analysis of the ways in which souvenir jackets are communicated and marketed online and in retail settings. By doing so, dynamic design exchange through time and between cultures emerges rather than a tired dichotomy in which the European fashion industry steals inspiration from the exotic or historic 'Other'. As Sarah Cheang and I have argued, examining fashion as it moves across borders 'allows us to analyse creativity and cultural distinctiveness in relation to imitation, transformation and exchange, and to look for dialogues, rather than oppositions between the global and the local' (Cheang and Kramer 2017: 145-6). This article responds to the 'global turn' that design and fashion studies has taken in response to postcolonial critiques (Teasley, Riello, Adamson 2011) as well as recent efforts to move away from appropriation debates (Pham 2014) and decolonise fashion through the 'disrupt[ion of] persistent Eurocentric and ethnocentric underpinnings of dominant fashion discourse and ...construct[ion of] alternative narratives' (Research Collective for Decolonizing Fashion [2019]; see also Welters and Lillethun 2018; Jansen and Craik 2018).

Despite its ubiquity on the fashion landscape since the late 1940s, the *sukajan* has received scant critical investigation, which this article aims to address.³ This article contributes to Fashion Studies and wider debates around street style not only through the historic location of *sukajan* in relation to specific postwar subcultural styles such as *sukaman* but also through analysis of how the souvenir jacket became popularised through mass

media and its subversive attributes channelled through new vintage design and marketing to consumers globally. This study further enriches the dialogue around ‘military chic’, particularly through the analysis of how the previously unstudied *sukajan* has been drawn upon by the fashion industry in new vintage production. It has been argued that ‘militarism becomes normalized as everyday life becomes more militarized’ (Ahn and Kirk 2005). This article provides one example demonstrating need for further fashion-focused research geared to understand the relationship between military and civilian life. What are the implications of transforming a garment born from political, militaristic and social conflict into a mainstream, branded, fashionable garment, commodifying this history?

An Historic Overview of the Souvenir Jacket

The *sukajan* (スカジャン) was first embroidered by the Japanese for American soldiers during the post-war period. *Sukajan* is derived from two words: the city Yokosuka and the Japanese term for jumper/jacket, ジャンパー (*jyanpa*). Yokosuka sits strategically on the mouths of Tokyo Bay and Sagami Bay. The Yokosuka Navy Yard was one of the main arsenals of the Imperial Japanese Navy leading up to World War II, and following the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, the base came to be occupied by US forces and continues to serve Commander Fleet Activities to this day. As its name written in *katakana*⁴ and place of origin suggest, the *sukajan* was born from transcultural exchange in Occupied Japan following the Second World War. Sometimes it was a flight jacket that had been directly embroidered upon, other times it was made up from left over parachute silk or nylon, and acetate was also originally used due to silk shortages (Toyo Enterprise Company Ltd. 2015: 7). It was also constructed in the form of the American varsity or baseball jacket. According to Kosho & Co. history, upon noting the prevalence of traditional Japanese items purchased as souvenirs by American officers during Occupation, an employee of the

company created a jacket featuring embroidered oriental designs in the familiar shape of the baseball jacket, which was sold first in street stalls and then at the post exchanges of military bases themselves (Toyo Enterprise Co. 2018). Originally an import/export fabric company, Kosho & Co. was responsible for 95% of the original production of *sukajan* in the immediate post-war period (Toyo Enterprise Company Ltd. 2015: 9). These souvenir jackets were produced in nearby Kiryu and Ashikaga, towns long associated with the kimono industry, which had been severally disrupted during the war and no doubt welcomed the work (Suzuki 2019).

Sukajan feature stunning embroidered designs, which highlight their transcultural nature –made in Japan to be consumed by foreign soldiers. These include characteristic ‘Oriental’ motifs such as dragons, koi, tigers, *sakura* blossoms and geisha, but also maps of Japan as well as American military phraseology and iconography like fighter planes, eagles or even Native American motifs. The latter inscriptions and motifs emphasize strength, affiliation or participation in significant historic events and point to a longer history of souvenirs designed specifically for, and purchased by, military personnel.⁵ Historically, the tourist market aimed at servicemen was so well developed that companies sometimes tried to get a list of individually-named soldiers in advance of their arrival in order to pre-emptively personalise souvenirs.⁶

In addition to signalling strength, camaraderie and participation, analysis of some of the embroidered *sukajan* hint at the disparate ways in which local producers and foreign consumers experienced the same event, powerfully showing that economic necessity is an insensitive driving force. This is demonstrated in a reversible *sukajan* from the late 1940s (figure 2). One side of the jacket features a sinuous dragon while the reverse depicts a battle map of Japan that morphs into the majestic Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms. An

eagle swoops above the map, talons unfurled, and Nagasaki and Hiroshima have been marked by brilliant starbursts, indicating the nuclear detonations that occurred above each of these cities, transforming this Orientalist idyll into a scene of strength and domination achieved through horrific means. While this imagery may have suggested victory and a necessary means to an end to its American wearer, it certainly would have meant something very different to its maker. Cherry blossoms have long been associated with the fleeting nature of life because of their stunning but short-lived beauty but 'became a metaphor for sacrifice (dying for emperor and country) in the wartime years' when they were regularly used in textiles designed for servicemen (Atkins 2005: 65; 72; 97). Mount Fuji is likewise a long-established, powerful motif in kimono design, symbolising Japan, which 'took on a new meaning and was unmistakably intended as a symbol of nationalism' during wartime (Atkins 2005: 190). Although cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji are not combined with propagandistic motifs such as aircrafts and bombs as they were in kimono and textile design on the Japanese homefront during wartime, such associations would not be lost on the kimono producers now employed to make *sukajan*, which suggests another possible reading of this imagery.⁷ In a sombre viewing of this jacket while visiting TOYO Enterprises' archives, I asked what the embroiderers would have thought in stitching the starbursts above Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The grave reply suggested that economic necessity overruled sentiment in the desperate postwar climate.⁸

Sukajan remained popular souvenirs as the United States engaged in further conflicts in Asia, notably Korea (1950-53) and Vietnam. However, the souvenir jacket produced during the Vietnam War differed in some notable ways from earlier examples. While these jackets continued to fulfil a commemorative function, often featuring an embroidered battle map and motifs like the tiger to symbolize the strength of the American

military, in Vietnam soldiers routinely commissioned embroidery directly onto their military-issue clothing, featuring specific information relating to their individual tours of duty. As such, these jackets are often referred to as tour jackets. The tour jacket depicted in figure 3 belonged to Specialist James F. Stenger, who was deployed to Vietnam between 1967-68. Stenger's embroidered jacket identifies Cu Chi, where he was first stationed (James F. Stenger Collection). As demonstrated by Stenger's jacket, gone is the flashy fabric of the earlier *sukajan*, replaced by sombre black, utilitarian fabric. As can be seen on Stenger's jacket, mottos such as, 'When I die I'll go to heaven because I've served my time in hell', communicate vastly different sentiments than those expressed through post-war *sukajan*.

In the turbulent 1960s, anti-war protestors, including war veterans wore uniforms and camouflage as an act of protest against the conflict (Newark 2007: 164). *Sukajan* also began to accumulate associations around non-conformity and criminality. US veterans who served together came to ride together, forming motorcycle gangs with their own emblematic clothing and a reputation for rough or lawless activity. Perhaps unexpectedly, *sukajan* were also worn as an act of nonconformity by the Japanese. As the country's economy began to turn around, fashionable Japanese teenagers from privileged backgrounds adopted the Ivy look, based on American East Coast collegiate dress (Marx 2015). Those from a blue collar background chose a different sartorial path. As anthropologist Ikuya Satō observed, blue-collar teenagers thought college kids were 'effeminate and affected' and wanted clothing that manifested 'outright showmanship tinged with deliberate vulgarity' (1991). The working class were inspired by the 1955 fad for mambo and later rockabilly music, the dress of Japanese gangsters and rough American GIs of the postwar period (Marx 2015: 125-7). In Yokosuka, there was a working-class fashion movement called *sukaman* (Yokosuka Mambo) where young Japanese picked up style tips

from American GIs, including *sukajan*, which local teens bought at stores targeting Americans (Marx 2015: 127-28). The 1961 film *Buta to gukan (Battleships and Pigs)* cemented the garment's association with criminality and brought this style to wider attention in Japan. The subversive spirit associated with souvenir jackets has continued to be harnessed by male *and* female celebrities in- and outside of Japan over the decades, from Mick Jagger in the 1960s to pop star Katy Perry, rapper Wiz Khalifa or *kawaisa*⁹ performer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu in the twenty-first century. Like film and television, the internet and social media has greatly promoted the visibility of *sukajan* to consumers. In the film *Drive* (2011) Ryan Gosling's character dons a quilted *sukajan* with a large, golden scorpion embroidered on the reverse. The ivory-coloured jacket highlights the bloodstains it acquires as his character is drawn further into violent criminal activity (figure 4). Hideo Kojima, the Japanese game designer best known for *Metal Gear* (1987), a military action-adventure stealth video game, and many of its sequels, later posted a picture of himself online in the same jacket (Ashcraft 2012); and reproductions became widely available online at competitive prices. Paul Achter has pointed out that during World War II, the uniformed 'body of the serviceman was a privileged site for communicating national strength' (2019: 266); the *sukajan* depicted in figure 2 communicates this. During the Vietnam conflict, 'American warriors were often stereotyped as accomplices to a disgraceful war' (Achter 2019: 266) and the tour jacket depicted in figure 3 demonstrates a complexity of sentiments. *Metal Gear* and later *Drive* were born out of the 1980s, which witnessed the birth of a 'new militarism' with the portrayal of the warrior as athletic and attractive through popular media, which in addition to the rise of "support the troops" initiatives distanced the uniform or warrior's body from the blood, dirt and trauma of war and supported the criticism of those critical of war efforts (Achter 2019; Silverstri 2013; Tynan 2013). *Sukajan* continue to

feature prominently in films and TV series such as the Japanese drama *Majisuka Gakuen* (*Majisuka Academy*) (2010-2015), in which they were worn by delinquent students. Members of Japanese all-female idol groups, such as AKB48, feature in these roles, and the *sukajan* sold at Ameyoko Market next to Ueno Station in Tokyo, distributed by Okuma Shoukai, highlight this connection (Supermerlion 2011). The connection between celebrity and *sukajan* continues to be pointed out in retail settings. During fieldwork to speciality *sukajan* shops in Kyoto and Tokyo in February 2019, I noted images of celebrities in *sukajan* on display in all shops (figure 5). As Grant McCracken has argued, by purchasing products associated with celebrities, these associations transfer to the consumer (1999).

Through its portrayal in media culture internationally, worn by internet and international celebrities and featuring in television shows and films associated with subversive activity, the garment has become a popularised, fashionable garment with “bad ass” connotations. The current design and promotion of reproduction souvenir jackets for the fashion industry feasts upon its identification with ‘military chic’ and as a subversive garment, further drawing upon its history as an authenticating strategy.

Vintage and New Vintage *Sukajan*

As the historical overview of souvenir jackets demonstrates, these garments have been in constant sartorial use since the late 1940’s. As such, *sukajan* feature frequently in vintage collections and shops. In the 21st century, second-hand clothing has made considerable strides toward shedding its association with the financially destitute to become a particularly desirable commodity. The increased visibility of vintage has been made possible by its appearance in fashion magazines, film, television and on the catwalk (Cassidy and Bennett 2012: 247) and its accessibility has been supported by the internet, ‘transform[ing] the often musty displays of secondhand stores and hard-to-access racks of

top-notch consignors into an organized, global treasure trove' (Wolfe 2017), bypassing 'the bustle, chance and foraging aspects of used clothing markets' (Palmer 2005: 205).

Historically used by subcultures to sartorially set themselves apart, the rise of vintage has also been attributed to the desire to individuate oneself and a developing sense of responsibility and protest amongst consumers in response to unethical practices by companies, hollow brand identities and fast fashion (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013; McColl et al. 2013; Cassidy and Bennett 2012; Cervellon, Carey and Harms 2012; Palmer and Clark 2005). As vintage consumption has become increasingly mainstream Aleit Veenstra and Giseline Kuipers argue that vintage '...does not "rebel" against society, nor does it explicitly "subvert" items that are offered by mainstream consumer culture. On the contrary: through accumulating garments that are not recently produced...the commercial producer is initially brushed aside' (2013: 363).

The fashion industry is not easily brushed aside. It has recognized consumer demand for vintage and manoeuvred itself to take back control through a deliberate programme of collection, curation, design and communication. An examination of the design and promotion of reproduction *sukajan* provides an excellent example of this. Jennifer Ayres has argued that educating consumers about vintage styles creates and encourages a parallel with the art market: 'Instead of regarding vintage as a clothing fad, considering vintage as a commodity like art invites us to theorize its political economy: its production, circulation, consumption and...value ...' (2017: PAGE). This type of analysis can be extended to vintage-inspired fashion, such as *sukajan*.

In Tracy Cassidy and Hannah Bennet's survey of why people consume vintage, styling, quality and the possession of one-of-a-kind items were found to be the main reasons (2012). Vintage clothing is perceived as providing a better means of distinguishing oneself than that

offered by mass-produced garments accessible to the many. The vintage and reproduction *sukajan* as a statement piece is reinforced by the garment's history; retailers and distributors, supported by lifestyle and fashion blogging, emphasise the individual agency that a soldier had in selecting a souvenir jacket that best represented his personal experience. As one blogger emphasizes: 'The original spirit of the piece was all about messaging and customization, so the ideal jacket should say something about its wearer' (Li 2016). Retailers instruct consumers to take the time to select a souvenir jacket that best expresses their personality. Creativity is stressed here, unique or subversive qualities implied given a shared cultural memory of the garment's historical military or subcultural connections while communicating a particular political stance has been muted.¹⁰ Here uniforms, including off-duty apparel, appeal because of the very personal and memorable experiences that people may have had with them (Craig 2003: 128). Jenness argues that memories can be expanded and 'propelled through the accumulation and circulation of the past in material and visual culture' and notes the significance of this in response to the acceleration of fashion production and communication and expansion of global fast fashion (2015: 1).

There has been a growing movement away from the acceptance of poorly constructed fast fashion as well as from clothing indicative of ephemeral seasonal trends toward lasting investment in better-made vintage clothing. Quality construction likewise has become a noted characteristic of premium, new vintage Japanese labels.¹¹ This carries over to the promotion of new vintage *sukajan*. SUKAJACK, the online distributor of 'authentic Japanese quality' *sukajan* based in Kanagawa, Japan, devotes a detailed blog to the production of reproduction souvenir jackets emphasizing the number of steps and skills involved in their production as well as the time taken to complete all of these steps. The

reader is informed that although a sukajan is machine-embroidered, it takes 500,000 stitches to build up the embroidery: 'The number of stitches that can be hit in 1 minute with the embroidery machine here is about 800 needles. It will take approximately 10 hours and [a] half to complete [the] 500,000 needle embroidery' (SUKAJACK 2017b). As is the case with the Tailor Toyo reversible souvenir jacket retailing at Harvey Nichols for £1,045, which included a faded finish suggesting the passage of time (Figure 1), to promote the psychological impact of patina, the SUKAJACK blog explains, 'To give out a light vintage [affect], some sukajans are dyed. Dyeing up with a light beige will make the fabric and embroidery a calm color. At the same time there will be minimal damage to the fabric, so even a brand new texture will be born like a vintage [sic]' (SUKAJACK 2017b).

SUKAJACK also contrasts the *sukajan* of one of the brands it sells, SATORI, a premium label retailing at a high price (around \$500), to a cheap fast fashion version that the author purchased for \$50 from Amazon.com (2017a). This richly illustrated comparison attempts to convey quality that is difficult to demonstrate through online images alone but necessary nonetheless to justify the high prices commanded by the premium Japanese brands not widely available outside of Japan in the midst of a saturated market of inexpensive reproduction souvenir jackets. As Sonya Abrego argues in her discussion of heritage and the premium denim industry, the descriptive language and level of detail 'justifies its high price point through meticulous attention to the details of both materials and processes' (2018: 9). The blog highlights the greater number of colours used and high density of the embroidery of the SATORI example resulting in dynamic naturalistic representations for which Japanese embroidery has long been esteemed.¹² At double the weight of the cheaper example, the SATORI jacket embodies a 'sense of quality' one can feel (SUKAJACK 2017a) (figure 6). The blog further notes the superiority of material of the SATORI example (rayon as opposed to

polyester), praising its 'luxurious feeling' (SUKAJACK 2017a). The SATORI jacket is described as 'vintage processed' (SUKAJACK 2017a), as in the case of the Tailor Toyo jacket retailed by Harvey Nichols. Philomena Keet has argued in her article exploring Japanese 'new vintage' denim labels, that authenticity can be successfully relocated from the original to reproduction through manufacturing processes, incorporation of original design features, sales talk and advertising and even possibly surpass it as it is not sullied by the passage of time (e.g. being musty, stained) (2011). Given the international esteem held for Japanese new vintage or heritage denim, it is not surprising to see detailed blogs recounting the (re)production of *sukajan*.

Explicitly communicating the historical context surrounding the *sukajan* is another important aspect of marketing them. On retailers' websites, the level of product detail has moved beyond mere physical description (e.g. dimensions, material, colour) to include details regarding manufacturing process as well as historical context. This is reinforced by online magazine, lifestyle sites and blogs. These authentication strategies can be seen through the careful interweaving of brand narrative, product design, description and marketing around new vintage souvenir jackets, such as in the example of the American outdoor wear mainstay Schott NYC. Schott is a long-established company, which originated as a raincoat maker in 1913; its utilitarian heritage distinguishes it from the vagaries of fashion. Their brand identity is defined as 'a true-blue, real-deal, piece of Americana' (Schott N. Y. C. 2018), verified by historic and (some) continued manufacture in America¹³ and its association with fashion capital New York City, where it was founded. The US Air Force commissioned Schott to make its bomber jacket at the advent of World War II, which became a military and later fashion staple. Schott is also well known for its iconic Perfecto motorcycle jacket, first distributed by Harley Davidson in 1928 and worn by Marlon Brando

in the 1954 film *Wild Ones* and James Dean. Such jackets were worn in the 1970s and 80s by punk rock groups such as the Ramones, Blondie, the Sex Pistols and more recently, by rappers such as Jay-Z (Schott 2018a). So engrained are its garments in the music scene that a close-up detail of the Perfecto in which only the front breast pockets, belt and zipper are visible was featured on the front cover of the 25th anniversary issue of *Spin* magazine (2010). Its detailed heritage brand narrative reinforces the authenticity of Schott's new vintage souvenir jackets. While historic military commissions promise performance and quality, 'military chic' tantalises through its embodied contradiction of order and subversion (Craik 2005). These garments also relate to nonconformity and originality, the hallmarks of streetwear, through their association with motorcycle gangs, punks, rappers and rock n' roll celebrities.

Schott's product information goes a step further by detailing the ways in which its souvenir jackets faithfully reproduce features of historic souvenir jackets from the brand's own design archive in addition to an historical overview of these garments. For example, one tour jacket is explained to be 'made with heavy nylon flight satin and features intricate chest and back embroideries inspired by real vintage jackets from our archives' (Schott 2017a). Some of the jackets include embroidered motifs naming historic vessels, such as the U.S.S. Lexington CVA 16, an American aircraft carrier that served between 1941-47, and was referred to 'as a "ghost" ship for her tendency to reappear after reportedly being sunk' (Schott 2017b). While the majority of mainstream and fast fashion brands call these garments 'tour', 'souvenir' or simply embroidered jackets, Schott interchangeably uses the term '*sukajan*'. The inclusion of this word unfamiliar in the English language is significant as it demonstrates the cultural capital and cultivation of specialist knowledge accumulated by the connoisseurly fashion consumer further legitimizing Schott production.

New Vintage, New History?

New vintage souvenir jackets are susceptible to further manipulation. Uniforms and their trimmings such as badges, embroidery, pins and cording, are meant to communicate very specific information about their wearers, such as rank, specialism and membership.

The significance that these devices hold is noteworthy. As one general reflected:

It has always been surprising to me that such a simple device as a cloth service patch could hold so much significance, but I have come to believe that these symbols are the ties which bind us to our roots. Each is a short history lesson; a primary representation of the legacy to which the soldier who wears that patch belongs (General Gordon Sullivan quoted in Stein 1997: ix).

The ease with which the souvenir jacket is transformed into a canvas for communicating branded content is strongly demonstrated in a limited-edition MA-1 souvenir bomber jacket arising from a collaboration between Schott and the South Korean streetwear brand Brownbreath (figure 7). Product design and description of this transnational fashion collaboration reinforces the authenticity of the product: simultaneously drawing on the historic gravitas of Schott as a quality military outfitter whose garments have been worn by waves of subcultures and cool freshness of Brownbreath.¹⁴ Likewise, the faithful reproduction of features such as the bright orange lining (originally used to locate downed pilots), and midnight blue body are immediately apparent. However, the badges and embroidery construct a complex web of meaning interweaving military history, street style, and ethos of the collaborating brands. The commemorative emblem of the Flying Tigers has been incorporated in this jacket. The Flying Tigers was the nickname of the First American Volunteer Group, pilots who joined the Chinese Air Force between 1941 and 42 to help defend the country from Japanese forces, later brought to popular attention through a number of films and novels. However, rather than identifying a specific tour of duty, the phraseology embroidered on the jacket draws on the legendary Flying Tigers motto:

'Overcome difficulties; Accomplish the impossible' and 'Unity', while also communicating the edginess or the rebellious nature of streetwear by incorporating the words 'Against' and 'Majority', the latter of which is struck out. A number of badges and further phraseology is realigned specifically with the collaborating brands. This substitution provides a convenient way to promote brand loyalty. Here personal experience and squadron loyalty are effortlessly exchanged for brand content and loyalty.

The niche British streetwear brand maharishi goes a step further by wedding the allure of vintage, heritage and streetwear with the pressing issue of sustainability. Nathaniel Beard argued that such an alignment attracts the ethical consumer, who has a clear interest in making consumer decisions that are environmentally or socially sustainable (2008). As Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser point out, activism has become so commodified that '...within contemporary culture it is utterly unsurprising to participate in social activism by buying something' (2012: 1). In fact, it would be highly unusual *not* to find pages devoted to corporate social responsibility with regard to environmental policy, sustainability strategies or ethical treatment of workers on a fashion company's website. Maharishi claims to aspire 'to create environmentally sound...long-lasting, high-quality, utilitarian clothing', upcycling military surplus items 'to convey a strong anti-war sentiment through its use of camouflage -reclaiming its symbolic value away from war, back to its roots in nature...' (Contributor in Style 2015). Its SS2017 capsule, *Tour d'Afrique*, wedded sustainability with a pacifist agenda through the material form of the souvenir jacket. The clothing in a capsule is meant to function as staple items that do not go out of fashion, rather than following the trends that dictate seasonal collections. The souvenir jacket has well weathered the cyclical changes of fashion, but it is worth noting that this capsule corresponds to a time during which the '*vietjan*' was being widely drawn upon to inject a bit of fresh life into the trend for

souvenir jackets on the high street. The maha Tour Jacket (figure 8) has been constructed from a surplus garment that has been shipped to India ‘where the clothing is smudged with herbal incense, blessed, and washed in saffron water to symbolically cleanse it of its military associations’ (maharishi 2017a). While this may satisfy a consumer aligned with the pacifist ethos of the brand and point to sustainability through upcycling, the transportation involved in moving these garments to and from India seems contradictory. The maha Tour Jacket’s ritualistic journey to be cleansed of war connotations perhaps better attests to its elevation as luxury garment. This is supported by the maha Tour Shirt from the company’s AW2017 collection, which is made in 100% silk rather than the quick-drying, light-weight but durable twill cotton poplin used to construct tropical combat uniforms during the Vietnam War (Miraldi 2009: 62, 76), likewise elevating its value (figure 9).

The maha Tour Jacket is particularly similar to the embroidered woobies,¹⁵ or poncho liners,¹⁶ that soldiers had embroidered to commemorate their time in Vietnam, such as that originally belonging to Jacob Franklin Zimmers Jr. (figure 10). Zimmers was stationed in Vietnam with the 5th Transportation Command at Qui Nhon and then the 552nd Maintenance Company at Phu Thi as a machinist/truck driver in Vietnam between 1968-69 (Jacob F. Zimmers Collection). The location and dates of his tour of duty are embroidered around a map of Vietnam. A number of badges have been applied to the garment, demonstrating a high degree of personalisation, a featured seized upon in new vintage design. Among his patches, ‘Viet Kong Hunting Club’ resonates particularly poignantly. Such novelty patches were ‘likely purchased while on R&R or at a post exchange (and made by the South Vietnamese or Japanese), and not authorized to be worn on the uniform’, what is referred to as a “morale” patch today (Dissinger 2019). While a shocking image by today’s standard, fighting the Viet Cong was a necessary part of the conflict, resulting in many

casualties on both sides. As with the Schott X Brownbreath jacket, blood, state-sanctioned violence and death have been obscured as common with 'military chic' and altered in the maha World Tour Jacket and Shirt to communicate brand message and affirm brand loyalty. The relationality between self, place, platoon and tour of duty are replaced by 'MAHARISHI' and a Gall-Peters projection map. While the style of embroidery clearly references Vietnam tour jackets, the style of the map is intended to offer 'a more accurate portrayal of the world -no longer manipulated by the authors of the map -Europe and North America, to make themselves seem larger and more dominate than Africa and South America' (maharishi 2017b). On the maha shirt and jacket, 'The Names are Many The Truth is One' replaces 'When I die I'll go to heaven, because I've spent my time in hell' and on the silk shirt, the dates marking the foundation of the company and year in which the garment was produced replace tour of duty. Maharishi is also embroidered vertically in *katakana* next to the front bottom hem, a detail appealing to the specialist knowledge cultivated by the connoisseurial fashion consumer familiar with the high standards of craftsmanship associated with Japanese fashion.

The phrase 'Lest we forget' is used to remember and honour those who have given their lives in the service of their country; and through remembering, we aspire not to repeat the actions leading to such sacrifices. Thus, it seems important to pause to consider the implications of adapting a garment that powerfully communicates personal, social, national and cultural narratives into a branded fashion garment. Naomi Klein brought into sharp focus the transformation of social and political action into branded content in *No Logo* (1999). For example, she highlighted the way in which Apple's 'Think Different' campaign (1997-2002) transformed artists, innovators and entrepreneurs, including the civil rights leader Mahatma Ghandi, into branded content (2010: 84-85), aligning its customers

emotionally with the irrepressible, innovative excellence of Apple. While Klein warns that brands are taking over the part once played by political, philosophical or religious ideas (2010), Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that critics like Klein are asserting an inaccurate dichotomy where some activities, like art or politics, exist outside of the influence of the market (2012: 11-12). Understanding how the market relates to other arenas is certainly important to understand narratives of power, privilege and exploitation, as evidenced, for example, through an exploration of the relationship between lobbyists and political policy or that of the art market and artistic production. Indeed, scrutinizing such relationships is part of the 'inappropriate' discourse with which Pham urges fashion critics and designers to engage:

Inappropriate discourse asks what is not appropriate-able, what cannot be integrated into and continue to maintain the existing power structure of the high fashion system and why. In doing so, we truly challenge the idea of the absolute power and authority of the West to control how the world sees, knows, and talks about fashion (2014).

The example of the *sukajan* demonstrates how history that should be remembered has been stripped back and realigned with design, branding and marketing and how the garment's historic ties to social, political and military conflict and transcultural interaction are commodified.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the *sukajan*, this article has set out to explore how 'military chic', Japanese craftsmanship and the personalisation offered by streetwear intersect in new vintage production. As Jenss has asserted, 'the incorporation of the sartorial past in contemporary appearance has become one of the major developments across fashion and popular culture in recent decades, tying in with the promotion of ideas of individuality or authenticity' (2015: 1). Siân Jones argues that authenticity is '*a product of the relationships*

between people and things' and places (2010: 199, 198; her emphasis, which I share). In moving through time between geographical places, spaces (e.g. souvenir market, high street, film, rock concert, social media) and people (e.g. soldier, rock star, biker, working class teenager), the souvenir jacket has folded into itself multiple associations.

These associations as well as the *sukajan's* relatively obscure history have been seized upon by fashion brands to differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace and turn the current enthusiasm for vintage garments to their advantage. To achieve authenticity in the face of mass manufacture, deliberate design and communication strategies are called upon. In addition to replicating many original features like hardware, fabric and motifs, further manufacturing processes have been shown to be employed, such as dying fabric to give it a distressed appearance. The connection between past and current design is also strengthened through a romanticised heritage that highlights the use of vintage collections in the design of contemporary jackets or by calling attention to a brand's production and consumption history, such as the historic military commissions enjoyed by Schott, whose bomber jacket or Perfecto were further embraced by celebrities.

In addition to its vibrant features and associations with popular icons who wore them, the souvenir jacket's transcultural history is fundamental to its appeal as a quality, statement piece. The Japanese origin of the garment is emphasised, as 'made in Japan' globally connotes quality craftsmanship. Not only do European or American companies such as Schott or Harvey Nichols emphasise these connections, but so too do Japanese distributors of premium Japanese brands to justify the high price to the connoisseurial consumer. From its inception, the *sukajan* has shown itself to be a product of dynamic global interaction demonstrating the weakness of the persistent assumption that fashion originates in, and circulates outward from, the 'West', occasionally drawing inspiration from

the 'Other'. This is demonstrated not only by an investigation moving between Japan, Korea, Vietnam, India, the United States and United Kingdom of the design, manufacture, retail and consumption of sukajan but also through an investigation of the materiality of the garments themselves -their form, colours, material and iconography.

This article cautions that because the *sukajan's* history and origins are commodified, it is simultaneously altered. The embroidery, patches and iconography that communicate very personal stories of individuals, small groups or nations are altered to communicate branded content. While the historic associations of the souvenir jacket add to its cache, the troubling aspects of its entanglement in military, class or political conflict have been stripped away. As Abrego reflects in her discussion of the 'heritage' denim manufacturer White Oak, origin stories are highly effective but must be cleansed of conflict, shame and guilt (2018).¹⁷ Critics and activists have warned that the transformation of social and political action or values integral to humanity into branded content leads to 'cultural irrelevance' (Delgado 2018; see also Klein 2010). A close study of the history and commodification of the *sukajan* emphasizes the importance of what is discarded or left unsaid when fashion pulls on history, contemporary issues and cultures for inspiration.

Figures:

Figure 1: Detail from screengrab of five Tailor Toyo *sukajan* available on Harvey Nichols retail website, <https://www.harveynichols.com/brand/tailor-toyo/>, accessed 26/6/2018, screenshot by author.

Figure 2: Kosho & Co. *sukajan*, late 1940s, uncatalogued collection of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd. Reproduced by kind permission of TOYO Enterprise Company Ltd.

Figure 3: Tour Jacket (1968), MHI2016.73, James F. Stenger Collection, US Army Heritage Museum & Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA. Reproduced by kind permission of Army Heritage Museum.

Figure 4: Nicolas Winding Refn (2011), *Drive* [film still 1:15:12].

Figure 5: 'So Cool Suka-jan Style What a COOL we are!!', sign at BSC Gallery, Kyoto (2019). Photograph by Author.

Figure 6: Screenshot from the blog post SUKAJACK (2017), 'Compared the Jacket of SUKAJACK with the Jacket of AMAZON!' (8 Jul), <https://www.sukajack.com/blog?page=4>.

Last accessed 28 June 2019.

Figure 7: Screenshot of Brownbreath and Schott N.Y.C., BBSXB AGAINST SOUVENIR JACKET - NAVY,

http://brownbreathshop.com/product/detail.html?product_no=3882&cate_no=1&display_group=2#none. Last accessed 28 June 2019.

Figure 8: maharishi, 8555 maha World Tour Jacket (2017). Reproduced by the kind permission of maharishi.

Figure 9: maharishi, maha World Tour Shirt (2017). Photograph by the author.

Figure 10: Embroidered poncho liner or 'woobie' belonging to Jacob Zimmer Jr. (1968), MHI2006.119, Jacob F. Zimmers Collection, US Army Heritage Museum & Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA. Reproduced by kind permission of Army Heritage Museum.

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¹ As context implies number in the Japanese language, *sukajan* can refer to a single jacket or multiple jackets. As it is a Japanese word, the author will follow this language convention.

² See the case studies offered by Keet (2011) and Abrego (2018) on the paradoxical construction of authenticity in new vintage; see also Davies' case study of how Dr. Martens emphasizes how its shoes were worn sartorially by youth subcultures in the past to shape the current identity of the brand (2014).

³ *Sukajan* are briefly mentioned in Marx's wider discussion of the development of Japanese fashion in the postwar period with regard to its relationship with American fashion (2015). Suzuki considers the place of *sukajan* among various types of Japanese garments (e.g. kimono, hapi jackets) made for foreign tourists (2019).

⁴ Katakana script is usually used to write Japanese words that are derived from foreign encounters.

⁵ See for example Schwartz (2012), in which he has analysed the textile mementos designed for sailors that were available in Japanese trading ports from the nineteenth century onwards.

⁶ I would like to thank Tommy Tanaka of TOYO Enterprises for bringing this to my attention.

⁷ I would like to thank Dr Sheila Cliffe for bringing this possible reading of the iconography to my attention.

⁸ I would like to thank Tom Tanaka and Tatsuro Matsuyama of TOYO Enterprises for allowing me to view this jacket and discussing this difficult period of history with me.

⁹ *Kawaisa* is a dress sense associated with cuteness.

¹⁰ See Davies 2014 for an example of how this has been done with regard to the Dr Martens brand.

¹¹ See Keet 2011 for an example.

¹² For an historical window on the perceived excellence of Japanese embroidery outside of Japan in the nineteenth century, see Kramer (2009-10).

¹³ At least 60% of its products are made in the USA (Schott N. Y. C. 2007).

¹⁴ South Korea has become a leading exporter of its own popular culture (Hong 2014).

¹⁵ I would like to thank Kaleb Dissinger for informing me about woobies.

¹⁶ Miraldi 2009: 185-6 offers a brief discussion of the quick-drying, light-weight liners that came to replace wool blankets in jungle warfare.

¹⁷ Abrego (2018) drawing on Kammen (1993), 688.