

'Fashion is serious business.' Discuss.

Faith Lim (17S35)

When meeting someone for the first time, it is said that the judgment of his or her character and personality can be formed in a matter of seconds, based on his or her outward appearance. Besides body language and facial expression, there is no doubt that fashion plays a huge role in this. That is why since time immemorial, much emphasis has been placed on fashion. In fact, almost every era in time can be largely defined or identified by not just war events or disease outbreaks that happened during that time, but also by fashion trends popularised by the people back then. Fashion also differs not just across time and space, but also across geographical borders, and forms a huge part of different cultures. Fashion can thus be regarded as serious business as it reflects one's economic status, creates immense job opportunities in the retail sector and is a form of self-expression. Despite fashion still being regarded lightly by some, I feel that fashion should be held in high regard.

Fashion is serious business as it is an indirect way of voicing one's opinions or stands on certain issues due to its expressive nature. On a simple level, fashion can reflect one's mood and personality. Using vibrant colours, one may be perceived to be happy and cheerful. Contrast it with dark and dull colours, and almost immediately, it forms a mysterious and gloomy aura around the wearer. On a much deeper level, many celebrities and public figures that are unable to properly express their views due to constant public scrutiny often resort to the use of fashion instead. One example would be Janelle Monae, who donned a rainbow-coloured dress at the BET awards to make clear that she was a supporter of LGBT rights and was against discrimination of such people. When Melania Trump, the First Lady of the United States, donned a \$38 jacket with the cryptic message: "I really don't care, do you?" scrawled on the back, many speculated that this was a sign of support for her husband's controversial immigration policies and that she did not care about political criticism. It is evident that fashion, in such cases, is more than 'just clothing'. To such figures, fashion is literally a statement and a form of expression and the huge buzz that surrounds their choice of clothing proves that it can indeed have a big impact. Fashion can even help to reflect one's emotional state of mind and be a cry for help. In Japan's famous *harajuku* fashion, known for its wacky styles, there is a subset of fashion called "Yami Kawaii". This sub-culture entails wearing clothes that have suicidal undertones, like cute cartoon characters taking drugs or wearing a noose as a necklace. Many of the Japanese store owners and clothing creators that have been interviewed suffer from depression or have previously attempted committing suicide. Such an art form is a platform to vent their pent up feelings and a way to connect and interact with those that feel the same way. Fashion has evidently created communities that support each other and give the voiceless in developed countries a way to express themselves, giving it weight that is undeniable.

Fashion is also often a reflection of a person's or country's economic status which is something that is taken very seriously. Singapore, Tokyo, New York and Milan – these places are often held in high regard due to their bustling fashion districts like Orchard Road and Shinjuku that have attracted tourists from all over the world who soak themselves in an environment of luxury. High fashion is thus a 'trophy' of sorts to show others how developed one's country or city is. On an individual level, having luxurious clothing items or accessories is also an obvious way of displaying one's wealth and excess. In the past, for example, only emperors in China were allowed to wear golden clothing with dragon patterns on it, and favoured or higher ranking concubines were gifted with bigger and more elaborate hair accessories from the Palace. In the present, a new trend among millennials called "flexing" involves children as young as nine years' old showing off their Louis Vuitton bags or Adidas

shoes on social media platforms to gain clout and a following in the social media world. As one can infer, the higher the fashion sense one can afford, the more recognition one gets. This makes fashion immensely important when rising up the economic and social ladder. Indeed, fashion is both a reflection and determinant of the social ranks that people belong to.

The fashion industry also forms a huge component of many countries' economic sector and can bring immense job opportunities to people. It also entails the economic success of events and movies. It is, quite literally, serious business. For instance, Adidas and Nike are huge companies that have huge markets in the world. If these companies were to close down, undisputedly, many jobs will be lost, including offshore factories in developing countries like China and India resulting in a loss of income. There are also magazines and YouTube channels purely dedicated to showcase retail items on sale for people's consideration. If fashion were not to be taken seriously, it can result in complete closure of magazines like Cosmopolitan and YouTube channels like Safiya Nygaard. That is why fashion is never taken lightly as it can have detrimental effects on households and economic stability of markets. In fact, fashion often plays a huge role in the success of movies, events and music videos. To reach an elevated aesthetic sense and produce movies that are interesting, millions of dollars are often splurged on getting fashion designers to coordinate the outfits of cast members to fit the theme. For instance, in the movie "The Shape of Water", to match the gloomy and underwater theme of the plot, cast members were decked in green and blue outfits of different shades and styles. The colour theme and good clothing choice were some of the factors that allowed it to snag the Best Motion Picture and Best Production Design at the Oscars this year. Due to the economic impact that fashion has on the livelihoods of many and the success of projects pushed out in the entertainment industry, fashion is thus taken seriously as companies continue to innovate and produce higher quality goods so as to maintain their market share.

It can be argued, however, that for the layman, fashion is often not a priority, much less a concern, especially in Asia where frugality is valued, or in poorer countries where people are not willing nor able to splurge on shoes that cost \$300 dollars and would rather opt for more comfortable and convenient clothes with higher aesthetic value. For instance, Singaporeans are often criticised for our choice of streetwear – flip-flops, old T-shirts and shorts that are often worn at home as well. Many countries like China and Korea also have a huge market for counterfeit products. Walking along the streets of Myeongdong and Shanghai, it is not uncommon to see street vendors selling fake "Supreme" or "Off-White" shirts. People simply do not care about the style or authenticity of apparel and fashion and are content with wearing clothes that are of a lower grade if it means saving money for more pragmatic uses like purchasing food or electronic devices. In countries and households that struggle to afford basic necessities and live a frugal lifestyle, fashion is hardly a cause for concern.

All in all, fashion is serious business. Though poorer countries and households do not care about fashion in their daily wear, many Asian cultures, even in villages, have traditional clothing that are worn on special occasions, showing that fashion is still relevant to them. Many of those who maintain a practical stance on fashion belong to the older generation. Many of the newer generations like millennials or Gen-Zs place huge emphasis on the way they dress. Fashion is becoming more and more relevant, and we must not take it lightly.

Comments:

There is a broad range of arguments and appropriate examples raised in your essay, demonstrating your knowledge of fashion. There is also depth and nuance in your discussion. Your writing is fluent

and your conviction is clearly portrayed. Just be mindful of grammatical and expression errors. Aim for a more sophisticated and refined style of writing. Try not to introduce a new point (i.e. traditional clothing) in the conclusion. Overall, a good and organised piece!