

Early Western travelers, traveling whether to [India](#), Persia, Turkey or China, would frequently remark on the absence of change in fashion in those countries. The Japanese [shōgun](#)'s secretary bragged (not completely accurately) to a Spanish visitor in 1609 that [Japanese clothing](#) had not changed in over a thousand years.<sup>[4]</sup> However, there is considerable evidence in [Ming China](#) of rapidly changing fashions in [Chinese clothing](#).<sup>[5]</sup> Changes in costume often took place at times of economic or social change, as occurred in ancient Rome and the medieval [Caliphate](#), followed by a long period without major changes. In 8th-century [Moorish Spain](#), the musician [Ziryab](#) introduced to [Córdoba](#)<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[unreliable source]</sup><sup>[7]</sup> [sophisticated](#) clothing-styles based on seasonal and daily fashions from his native Baghdad, modified by his own inspiration. Similar changes in fashion occurred in the 11th century in the Middle East following the arrival of the [Turks](#), who introduced clothing styles from [Central Asia](#) and the [Far East](#).<sup>[8]</sup>

The beginning in Europe of continual and increasingly rapid change in clothing styles can be fairly reliably dated. Historians, including [James Laver](#) and [Fernand Braudel](#), date the start of Western fashion in clothing to the middle of the [14th century](#),<sup>[9]</sup><sup>[10]</sup> though they tend to rely heavily on contemporary imagery<sup>[11]</sup> and illuminated manuscripts were not common before the fourteenth century.<sup>[12]</sup> The most dramatic early change in fashion was a sudden drastic shortening and tightening of the male over-garment from calf-length to barely covering the buttocks,<sup>[13]</sup> sometimes accompanied with stuffing in the chest to make it look bigger. This created the distinctive Western outline of a tailored top worn over leggings or trousers.

The pace of change accelerated considerably in the following century, and women and men's fashion, especially in the dressing and adorning of the hair, became equally complex. [Art historians](#) are therefore able to use fashion with confidence and precision to date images, often to within five years, particularly in the case of images from the 15th century. Initially, changes in fashion led to a fragmentation across the upper classes of Europe of what had previously been a very similar style of dressing and the subsequent development of distinctive national styles. These national styles remained very different until a counter-movement in the 17th to 18th centuries imposed similar styles once again, mostly originating from [Ancien Régime France](#).<sup>[14]</sup> Though the rich usually led fashion, the increasing affluence of [early modern Europe](#) led to the [bourgeoisie](#) and even peasants following trends at a distance, but still uncomfortably close for the elites – a factor that Fernand Braudel regards as one of the main motors of changing fashion.<sup>[15]</sup>



[Albrecht Dürer](#)'s drawing contrasts a well turned out *bourgeoise* from [Nuremberg](#)(left) with her counterpart from Venice. The Venetian lady's high [chopines](#) make her look taller.

In the 16th century, national differences were at their most pronounced. Ten 16th century portraits of German or Italian gentlemen may show ten entirely different hats. [Albrecht Dürer](#) illustrated the differences in his actual (or composite) contrast of Nuremberg and Venetian fashions at the close of the 15th century (*illustration, right*). The "Spanish style" of the late 16th century began the move back to synchronicity among upper-class Europeans, and after a

struggle in the mid-17th century, French styles decisively took over leadership, a process completed in the 18th century.<sup>[16]</sup>

Though different textile colors and patterns changed from year to year,<sup>[17]</sup> the cut of a gentleman's coat and the length of his waistcoat, or the pattern to which a lady's dress was cut, changed more slowly. Men's fashions were largely derived from military models, and changes in a European male silhouette were galvanized in theaters of European war where gentleman officers had opportunities to make notes of foreign styles such as the "Steinkirk" [cravat](#) or necktie.



[Marie Antoinette](#), wife of Louis XVI, was a leader of fashion. Her choices, such as this 1783 white [muslin](#) dress called a *chemise à la Reine*, were highly influential and widely worn.<sup>[18]</sup>

Though there had been distribution of dressed dolls from France since the 16th century and [Abraham Bosse](#) had produced engravings of fashion in the 1620s, the pace of change picked up in the 1780s with increased publication of French engravings illustrating the latest Paris styles. By 1800, all Western Europeans were dressing alike (or thought they were); local variation became first a sign of provincial culture and later a badge of the conservative peasant.<sup>[19]</sup>

Although tailors and dressmakers were no doubt responsible for many innovations, and the textile industry certainly led many trends, the [history of fashion design](#) is normally understood to date from 1858 when the English-born [Charles Frederick Worth](#) opened the first true [haute couture](#) house in Paris. The Haute house was the name established by government for the fashion houses that met the standards of industry. These fashion houses have to adhere to standards such as keeping at least twenty employees engaged in making the clothes, showing two collections per year at fashion shows, and presenting a certain number of patterns to costumers.<sup>[20]</sup> Since then, the idea of the [fashion designer](#) as a celebrity in his or her own right has become increasingly dominant.<sup>[21]</sup>

The idea of unisex dressing originated in the 1960s when designers such as [Pierre Cardin](#) and [Rudi Gernreich](#) created garments, such as stretch jersey tunics or leggings, meant to be worn by both males and females. The impact of unisex expands more broadly to encompass various themes in fashion including androgyny, mass-market retail, and conceptual clothing.<sup>[22]</sup> The fashion trends of the 1970s, such as sheepskin jackets, flight jackets, duffel coats, and unstructured clothing influenced men to attend social gatherings without a tuxedo jacket and to accessorize in new ways. Some men's styles blended the sensuality and expressiveness despite the conservative trend, the growing gay-rights movement and an emphasis on youth allowed for a new freedom to experiment with style, fabrics such as wool crepe, which had previously been associated with women's attire was used by designers when creating male clothing.<sup>[23]</sup>

The four major current [fashion capitals](#) are acknowledged to be Paris, Milan, New York City, and London, which are all headquarters to the greatest fashion companies and are renowned for their major influence on global fashion. [Fashion weeks](#) are held in these cities, where designers exhibit their new clothing collections to audiences. A succession of major designers such as [Coco Chanel](#) and [Yves Saint-Laurent](#) have kept Paris as the center most watched by the rest

of the world, although *haute couture* is now subsidized by the sale of [ready-to-wear](#) collections and perfume using the same branding.

Modern [Westerners](#) have a wide number of choices available in the selection of their clothes. What a person chooses to wear can reflect his or her personality or interests. When people who have high cultural [status](#) start to wear new or different clothes, a fashion trend may start. People who like or respect these people become influenced by their personal style and begin wearing similarly styled clothes. Fashions may vary considerably within a society according to age, [social class](#), generation, occupation, and geography and may also vary over time. If an older person dresses according to the fashion young people use, he or she may look ridiculous in the eyes of both young and older people. The terms *fashionista* and [fashion victim](#) refer to someone who slavishly follows current fashions.

One can regard the system of sporting various fashions as a fashion language incorporating various fashion statements using a grammar of fashion. (Compare some of the work of [Roland Barthes](#).)

In recent years, Asian fashion has become increasingly significant in local and global markets. Countries such as China, Japan, India, and Pakistan have traditionally had large textile industries, which have often been drawn upon by Western designers, but now Asian clothing styles are also gaining influence based on their own ideas.<sup>[24]</sup>