

The Evolution Path of Clothing Style and the Development of the Concept of Unisex Clothing

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Abstract: Nowadays, the development of clothing tends to be diversified, and the concept of gender is constantly blurred in fashion design. Exploring the development trend of contemporary clothing in order to better meet the consumption demand of modern clothing, is the focus designers need to pay attention to. This paper uses the literature research method and case analysis method to discuss gender ambiguity in fashion and analyzes the reasons for the formation of gender ambiguity in clothing, its evolution stage, and the characteristics of clothing. It is found that the development of the economy and society and the change of productive roles of men and women during the war led to the formation of gender ambiguity. The development and evolution of the gender characteristics of clothing roughly went through three stages, which were reflected in the period of strengthening the gender characteristics, the period of weakening the gender characteristics, and the non-sexist style. The characteristics of the sexist type are mainly reflected in color, silhouette, and fabric. This study has guiding significance for today's fashion design.

Keywords: gender consciousness, unisex clothing, modern fashion design

1. Introduction

Sex difference consists of sex and gender. Sex refers to the innate differences in the physical structure of the sexes, while gender refers to the acquired norms in the social roles of the sexes. As a part of gender construction, clothing is closely related to gender. Since ancient times, human clothing styles have evolved around gender and gender roles, and clothing has been distinguished as a gender symbol. However, with the progress of society and the liberation of people's minds, the gender line of clothing is gradually blurred. In modern fashion, gender-ambiguous clothing styles have become more and more of a fashion trend. Therefore, clothing can not only regulate the gender order but also overturn certain fixed gender discourses and play a role in gender liberation.

In terms of the gender attribute of clothing, Raewyn Connell argued in 2004 that people are conditioned by culture to take for granted the dress that conforms to their gender role. In the gender dichotomy, wearing a leather jacket and boots suggests masculinity, while opting for a lacy collar and pleated skirt implies gentle femininity [1]. With the liberation of people's thoughts and the blurring of social gender role orientation, clothing gradually develops towards the direction of assimilation. For example, Liao Xuemei elaborated on the influence of the feminist movement on the process of unisex women's wear design [2]. Judith Butler proposed "queer theory", which challenged and

subverted the antagonistic relationship between the sexes and challenged the patriarchal culture [3]. Cai Jianmei has conducted a systematic study on the aesthetics of men wearing skirts [4]. Sheng Jinyuan studied the development and application of gender ambiguity in the field of fashion design [5].

To sum up, there is no lack of discussion on the relationship between gender and clothing in existing studies, but most of them focus on the elaboration of sexism and the evolution process of female clothing, and there is a lack of research on the correlation between the evolution of clothing style and gender construction. Therefore, this study will analyze how gender consciousness is reflected in the growth of clothing style through a systematic literature review. It is divided into three stages: binary dress style, gender weakening, and unisex dress style. Starting from the historical background and the reasons for its development aims at a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender and clothing.

2. Gender Consciousness in Society and Its Influence on Clothing

In the conventional understanding of sociology, clothing is divided into male clothing and female clothing according to the sex of the wearer. In the commercial complex, clothes can be divided into men's and women's areas in most cases, and consumers will choose the appropriate regions for consumption according to their actual gender. Gender has long been considered to be one of the most important and fundamental characteristics dividing clothing types. But in fact, clothing itself, as an external, inanimate property of the material, does not have gender properties. The gender difference between men's wear and women's wear is due to the gender of the wearer. Therefore, the gender of clothing is a common understanding of people, which is based on the binary division of gender in social cognition.

As early as childhood, before the subject had any sense of gender, children would be dressed in blue or pink according to their biological sex, followed by pants for boys and skirts for girls. Men are expected to dress in a masculine way, while women are expected to dress in a feminine way. The use of explicit clothing to distinguish the gender of people in a variety of social situations.

With the rise of various social resistance movements, feminism, youth culture, gay liberation movement, the sexual revolution, and other opposition to the social tradition and mainstream, all these have given multicultural, more tolerant living space, and people began to have a further understanding of gender, realizing that gender is not the difference between man and woman in the traditional sense based on physiological differences. The social revolution at all levels and groups in society has made people's knowledge more extensive and open, and their ideas of thinking and aesthetic consciousness have also changed. The deep-rooted cognitive concept of "men should wear men's clothes and women should wear women's clothes" begins to be challenged, and gender is no longer an immutable line in clothing.

2.1. The Development of Gender Consciousness

2.1.1. Gender Binary Opposition in Traditional Society

Binary opposition is a kind of dichotomy that implies the idea of hierarchy. One side of the duality is always in a central and decisive dominant position, while the other is always in a marginal and subordinate position [6]. Take the binary opposition between races as an example. Western racism believes that white people are the master race and colored people are the inferior race, which should be excluded or even disappear. As a result, the pervasive "white privilege" often leads to all kinds of unfair treatment of people of color. The gender binary means that men are superior to women and have undisputed sexual supremacy.

The reason why men can dominate politics, economy, culture, and other aspects for a long time is not accidental but the natural selection in the evolution of human society. Before the Industrial Revolution, human society had been under the agricultural economy for a long time. Men's physical conditions were more suitable for agricultural production based on manpower and animal husbandry than women. On the one hand, women's physical strength was inferior to men, and on the other hand, they often faced the problem of fertility. Compared with men, they are at a disadvantage when they directly participate in agricultural production, which makes women lose the conditions for economic balance with men [7]. At that point, gender inequality begins to appear in society. Women's social roles, including the right to education, property rights, and citizenship rights, were all limited by men. Women became wives, daughters, or sisters attached to men and became the tools to ensure racial reproduction.

Additionally, the greater the differences between men and women, the easier it is for men and women to unite respectively. People began to consciously define gender categories for men and women. Differences between the sexes are rationalized, forming habits or cultures about gender. People are required from the day they are born to be consistent with their biological sex. So, the individual, whether male or female, has to give up his individuality and become a member of the male group or the female group. Men rightly occupy the central position in the economic, political, and cultural fields, while women are marginalized under the control of the patriarchal ideology and culture. The binary opposition between the two genders arises.

2.1.2. The Awakening of Female Gender Consciousness

The awakening of female gender consciousness originates from the consciousness of persecution formed in the growth of women themselves. When it comes to men and women living in partnership, there is a tendency to view the relationship from a traditional perspective, and women are often the subordinate, weak force. They are aware of the unfair distribution of power in society and that they are victims of this unfair treatment.

The modern bourgeois industrial revolution and the enlightenment directly led to the emergence of feminism among middle-class women in Europe. In October 1789, Parisian women entered Versailles Palace after the outbreak of the French Revolution to fight for equal legal human rights with men, which symbolized the beginning of the feminist movement in France. The meaningful word "Feminism" did not appear in Western countries until the 1880s. Feminism not only focuses on social, political, and economic inequality but also constantly explores women's self-identity and value. Feminism advocates that women should have their own identity and freely choose their own lifestyle without violating women's particular gender identity and characteristics.

With the development of the Industrial Revolution in the West, feminism went through three stages of development, namely, first-generation feminism (late 19th century -- early 20th century), modern feminism (early 20th century -- 1960s), and postmodern feminism (1960s now). In the first stage, women focus on economic demands, demanding equal rights to education and legislation, but it is still in the practice stage. In the second stage, the liberation movement of American middle-class women broke out. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the social division of labor at that time and advocated "eliminating gender differences". In the third stage, more and more women occupy a leading position in social work, and feminism is no longer limited to practice but rises to philosophical thinking, with a more robust color of socialism and sexual freedom [8].

2.2. Polarization and Blurring of Gender in Clothing Development

2.2.1. The Period of Intensification of Sexual Characteristics of Dress

In the ancient period, when the form and culture of clothing were still underdeveloped, the limited range of clothing was extensive, and the boundary between the sexes was not very clear. Due to the relatively backward level of productivity and the emergence of class, only the upper class can wear clothing, so clothing is used to distinguish class, as a symbol of status. In the middle and ancient times and modern times, influenced by the concept of “men are superior to women” in the patriarchal society, gender differences in clothing began to emerge.

Since the Renaissance in the West, clothing began to strengthen the physiological characteristics of men and women, fully showing the human body lines. Men wore extremely short tops and tights, creating an “inverted triangle” male style; Women wore maxi dresses and cinched waists to accentuate their curves [9]. In addition, clothing also defines the difference between the two social roles. The male is serious and neat and has a dominant position (the clothes are dark and dark with few accessories, the clothes are less restricted and easy to activity); Women are quiet and dependent on others, becoming appendages of the patriarchal society (the clothes are rich in color and the ornaments are stacked with flowers and flowers, but the clothes greatly restrict people’s activities).

2.2.2. The Period of the Weakening of the Gender Characteristics of Dress

The Industrial Revolution and the World War were the turning points and catalysts for the intensification and dilution of the gender characteristics of clothing. Women’s wear, in particular, underwent historical changes during this period.

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the outbreak of the World War I, a large number of young and middle-aged men joined the army, and women began to go out of the house and become the primary labor force of society. The traditional complex skirt suits were no longer suitable for the needs of women’s work, and the corset and the typical silhouette of women’s dress with the bustle that appeared and extended since the Renaissance was gradually abandoned. Women’s clothing is no longer exaggerated, and emphasis on the curves of the female body shape began to light, practical direction closer [10]. The style of women’s dress in this period broke through the old moral norms and went to the other extreme. That is, to deny the feminine characteristics and to converge to the male. Women’s skirts are shorter and shorter, the breasts are deliberately flattened, the position of the waistline is moved down to the hip line, the buttocks are tightened, and the overall shape is “tubular.” In order to shape the tubular figure and emphasize the characteristics of the body as if it were a boy, the linear underwear made of elastic rubber cloth was produced, which intangibly pushed women themselves to the point of self-restraint.

The outbreak of World War II also catalyzed a change in the form of women’s clothing. The shortage of the male labor force provided employment opportunities for women. With the advent of the industrial age, large machines posed safety risks for women working in long skirts. For ease of work, women began to wear sturdy jeans and overalls. Positive and dynamic female power has become the archetypal image sought by a new generation of professional women. After the end of the war, women’s wear was significantly liberated and improved, and the style of women’s wear has gradually become the mainstream.

After World War II, the thoughts of European and American society were strongly impacted by the youth subculture, which often adopted a subversive attitude towards the adult social order, that is, opposed to war, against the capitalist system, and pursued peace and freedom. This culture also reversed the fashion trends of the second half of the 20th century [11]. The clothing characteristics of the youth subculture mainly have two characteristics: one is the pursuit of youth personality, and the

other is the pursuit of gender equality. At that time, the youth group hippies broke the elegant and aristocratic style formed in the early years and dared to approach the direction of unisex clothing and mass, which considerably shook the universal gender concept. After this period of time, people's clothing towards a more diversified direction.

In addition to womenswear evolving, menswear is breaking the mold. The feminization of men's wears actually appeared earlier, in Europe in the Middle Ages had appeared. Louis XV generation of France, men's wear became a fashion of feminization. Complicated decoration, luxurious fabrics, fine cutting, colorful embroidery, etc., all become part of men's wear, making men's wear look luxurious and charming.

In the middle of the 20th century, men's wear design showed the trend of feminization again. In the 1960s, a radical younger generation began to challenge convention and question traditional ideas of values and dress. The Peacock Revolution at the end of the 1960s challenged the simple dark three-piece suit which had been maintained for nearly two centuries. It brought men's fashion back to the stage, made men's color no longer dull, and showed the tendency of feminization of men's wear.

Punk in the 1970s took the pursuit of feminization in menswear to a new level. Punk culture is independent of Western contemporary mainstream culture. They advocate expressing themselves with a rebellious and decadent attitude. In terms of clothing, they subvert established gender differences with masculine styles of women's wear and feminine styles of men's wear.

3. The Birth and Development of Unisex Style in Clothing

Unisex, based on a diverse gender culture, aims to break the traditional binary gender concept and gender bias. Unisex clothing is an expression of unisex in the upper realm. Unisex clothing is clothing that can be worn by men, women, or people of any other gender. It does not target a certain lifetime sex group or a specific social sex group. It transcends gender norms by means of weakening, blurring, or subverting gender temperament, and is committed to breaking the immutable gender stereotype, breaking the binary opposition way of thinking, and pursuing the diversity and inclusive aesthetic way.

The term "Unisex" first appeared in 1968 in the New York Times in a story about "monster shoes" [12]. Department store catalogs of this period began to include a new category called "his & her," in which male and female models wore identical styles of lace bell bottoms with button-down shirts. In the context of the gender ambiguity of clothing reviewed above, people can see the evolving trend towards masculinity of women's clothing and feminization of men's clothing, and the term Unisex was coined. Next, this paper will analyze the characteristics of genderless clothing styles through genderless designers and design styles as well as the typical elements of a single product -- trench coat.

3.1. Unisex Designer

The formation and development of fashion styles not only depend on the historical background, social and economic conditions, public preference, and media promotion in a specific period but also on the role of designers in promoting the development of fashion styles. In the process of the development of unisex clothing styles, many designers express their own feelings in the creation, committed to breaking the shackles of gender and shouting for women.

Gabrielle Chanel, one of the most famous designers in the world who was born in the era of feminism, was the first generation of feminism from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. In the era of women's clothing advocating complex style, Chanel changed the concept of fashion design, the male vision as the center of the design, into women's comfort, comfortable and beautiful as the starting point. Her designs make clothes better serve the wearer and show women's self-

reliance. Her blazers, double-breasted cropped jackets, and baggy knitted cardigans became classics of the “Chanel” style. Chanel also launched women’s knitted wool sportswear derived from men’s wear, ultimately opening the range of women’s activities so that they can ride horses, play ball, party and socialize like men. Her “Little Black Dress” was featured in Vogue magazine in 1926, with its simple one-line collar and knee-length that freed women from the corset and enabled them to participate in society as well as men. The suit has also become the representative clothing of Chanel, using multiple pieces of tailoring, knee-length skirts with the wool texture of the straight loose coat; the overall style is simple and neat, and is regarded as the embryonic form of modern professional women’s wear [8].

By the second stage of feminism, that is, modern feminism (from the early 20th century to the 1960s), feminism had a certain foundation for development, and the style of clothing had also changed. The most representative designer in this stage is Yves Saint Laurent. He cleverly displayed the elegance of women with his sophisticated tailoring, which greatly promoted the “neutralization” of clothes.

In 1966, designer Yves Saint Laurent pioneered a unisex style with the “Smoking Suit”, the first tuxedo for men and the first for women. Women wearing trousers became the fashion in Paris, marking the birth of a new fashion era. From this period, women were able to break the shackles imposed on them by traditional society and boldly wear suits that were borrowed from men’s suits. As Pierre Berger, a close friend of Saint Laurent, put it: “Chanel liberated women’s bodies, while Saint Laurent empowered women in menswear.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminism entered a new stage, that is, the era of postmodern feminism. Designer Giorgio Armani was the leader of the “neutral” style of women’s wear during this period. The Armani Power Suit is emblematic of this period. Giorgio Armani made a bold subversion of the style of women’s wear, integrating the characteristics of traditional men’s suits into the design of women’s wear, with broad, and rounded shoulder pads as the prominent feature, plus suit lapel, loose body structure, the monotonous primary color, and wide pants, together outline the free and natural and slightly heroic new female image of The Times. The Armani power suit became a favorite of senior career women in the 1980s.

The Times have moved on, and so has the acceptance of gender-neutral clothing. More and more designers are applying gender-neutral styles to fashion design. Yohji Yamamoto’s concept of clothing defies gender stereotypes and is the best example of Asia’s gender-ambiguous fashion brand. In women’s clothing designs based on men’s clothing, he likes to use exaggerated proportions to conceal women’s figures and adopt gender-neutral black colors to present an androgynous and asexual beauty. The design works of Vivienne Westwood, the “mother of punk”, never fixed on a certain form of expression but was famous for her distinctive, alternative, and rebellious designs, which were sexy, provocative, and witty with female meanings, but more subversive to the rules of the form of clothing. Jean Paul Gaultier, who strongly questioned sexual consciousness, said of the division between male and female clothing: “Women have the right to show their strength, and men have the right to show their weakness. So much has been done with women about masculinity and femininity, whereas for men, there is still a mountain of things to do in the fashion world.” He made men wear skirts and breasts and women wear men’s suits [11].

3.2. The Evolution Trend of Gender Consciousness in the Clothing Itself -- Taking Trench Coat as an Example

The following will analyze how the gender evolution trend of clothing itself is manifested through the style changes of the trench coat in different time periods.

During the First World War, British soldiers spent long hours in trenches, hampered by heavy woolen coats soaked in water and rubber raincoats that were not warm and breathable. In this case,

Burberry Thomas was commissioned by the British Army to design a waterproof trench coat for use in trenches through repeated research and experiments. This is the original trench coat.

The trench coat continued to be popular in the military during World War II. When the war was over, the soldiers returned home. In order to facilitate daily wear, the military overcoats brought back were cut short, which inadvertently promoted the trench coat among the people, transforming it from trench clothing to life clothing. At this time, the trench coat is a man's exclusive, showing male masculinity and heroism.

The trench coat became famous around the world because it was paired with a wide hat in a number of Hollywood films during the 1930s, such as *Waterloo Bridge* and *Casablanca*, in which male officers wore trench coats. They, in the strong trench coat, set off, more elegant, handsome. At this time, women in trench coats began to appear in movies. But in contrast to the gritty male image, women in the film tend to wear trench coats with a cinched waist, paired with skirts and high heels, in order to better show off curves and elegant, intellectual femininity. It can be seen that the trench coat of this period was still reinforcing gender stereotypes.

With the development of the feminist movement, women's awareness of gender equality began to awaken, and the style of trench coats also gradually changed to a gender-free style. Trench coat genderless style transformation, mainly from the color, silhouette, and fabric three aspects. From the perspective of color, women's trench coat is different from traditional women's use of bright colors, but the use of low saturation color reflects the personal charm of independent women. Men's trench coats in color began to try bold colors, no longer attached to the performance of male calm and gentleman; From a silhouette perspective, the trench coat is no longer focused on accentuating the curves of the female body and the broad figure of the male body. It constantly subtracts the iconic elements of men and women, highlighting the themes of comfort and fashion; In terms of fabric, the trench coat does not use satin, lace, and other thin fabrics as traditional women's wear. Instead, it uses a pure cotton fabric called gabardine, which changes a woman's traditionally soft feeling. Meanwhile, more rigid materials, such as leather and PU, are also being experimented with by designers in trench coats.

4. The Enlightenment of the Development of Gender Consciousness to Modern Fashion Design

The gender ambiguity of clothing creates conditions for people to show their unique style, and their dressing style is no longer bound by gender. At the same time, the genderless style also gives modern fashion design a broader and more accessible creative space. Designers break through the audience's traditional understanding of the limitations of clothing gender in order to convey more diverse gender concepts.

The Inspiration sources of gender-neutral clothing are diverse, and the elements used in the design are also various, not limited to a single inspiration or design element. In the design process, the usual method is to superposition, collide, and penetrate the elements such as profile, color, and material to produce a unique effect.

Unisex style clothes are bright and bold in color, maximize personality and reflect self-attitude, and no longer define gender by color. Traditional female clothing uses bright, gentle, and dignified colors to show the lovely, lively, and gentle feelings of women. On the contrary, in modern gender ambiguity fashion design, women's wear, brown, black and white, and other low saturation colors are used to reflect the personal charm of independent women. Men's wear uses a lot of bright colors, such as green, pink, red, and so on. A change from the traditional dark and deep color of men makes the dull men's color vivid, reflecting different rebels and personalities.

In terms of the silhouette of clothing, the slim and slender outline of women's clothing is usually applied to men's clothing to weaken the traditional male stereotype. Instead of the thick shoulder pads

of the traditional suit, the emphasis is placed on the silhouette of the man's own body. Women's clothing is mostly processed in the way of men's clothing. By strengthening the shape of the shoulder contour, the overall neat and straight feeling is created, highlighting the atmosphere and independence of women. At present, women's wear tends to be more and more concise silhouettes. Designers keep subtracting the symbol elements of both sexes and adopt minimalist and casual designs in silhouette structure to highlight the design theme of comfort and freedom.

In clothing, fabrics can directly show the texture and connotation of clothing. In gender-neutral style, men's wear usually adopts satin, lace, and other light and light fabrics and uses the technique of overlay of fabrics to show the smart feeling and multi-level changes, which changes the dull feeling of men in the past. Women's rich and diverse fabrics and complex techniques of expression are applied in men's wear, such as embroidery and beading. For women's wear, heavy and stiff materials will be used to enhance women's sense of firmness and competence and change women's feeling of weakness in the past, such as nylon, leather, denim, and other fabrics [13].

5. Conclusions

By combing the formation and development of gender consciousness and analyzing the shaping effect of society on the formation of gender consciousness, it can be found that gender consciousness has gradually turned from the traditional binary opposition to diversification, and the phenomenon of gender ambiguity has begun to appear. At the same time, as an expression of ideology, the style of clothing is constantly updated with the development of gender consciousness. In the 20th century, influenced by multiple factors such as production structure, economy, war, and ideological liberation, the gender boundary between men's and women's clothing became increasingly blurred. After experiencing the polarization and ambiguity of gender, clothing develops the style of unisex. A large number of excellent no-sexism designers also emerge at this time.

By analyzing the characteristics of unisex style clothing, this paper finds out how color, silhouette, and fabric play a role in unisex style so as to make traditional men's and women's clothing carry out unconventional integration. These bold, innovative designs interpret modern people's pursuit of equality between men and women, break the gap between men and women, and provide ideas for modern clothing design. Finally, the literature research method and case analysis method cannot fully cover all the influencing factors of the development of degendered clothing, and there may be different influencing factors in specific cases. In the future, the influencing factors can be further refined to facilitate the in-depth study of this issue.

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