

The Transformation of Female's Social Status from the Evolution of Female's Clothing

Haoyang Guan^{1,a,*}

¹College of Journalism and Communication, Jilin University, Jilin, 130012, China
a. guanhy9921@jlu.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: Nowadays, since the social modernization has made huge strides, there is a considerable leap in living standards. In the field of garment, people began to pursue using clothing to showcase physical beauty and express themselves. At the same time, the rise of individualism and the hot topic of feminism can't be ignored in the changing status of women in social development. The theme of this article is to explore the changes in women's social status reflected in the development of clothing. The research significance lies in: revealing the gender differentiation of clothing by exemplifying the development and origin of clothing styles; Cross research on clothing and gender, exploring the historical and social factors behind the transformation of functional properties of women's clothing; Through research on unisex clothing, understand the current trends in clothing development. The author concludes that the purpose of women's clothing has shifted from satisfying patriarchal social authority to comfortable and portable modern attire, thanks to social change and the emergence of professional women. The status of women and the development of clothing go hand in hand and influence each other, gradually blurring gender differences. The purpose of people wearing clothing is gradually shifting towards showcasing unique individuals in social life.

Keywords: gender expression, unisex clothing, feminism

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the development of social modernization, the birth of individualism, and the improvement of self-awareness, people's pursuit of life has gradually risen from meeting basic survival needs to pursuing high-quality living standards and deeper spiritual enjoyment. Under the influence and assistance of the French Bourgeois Revolution and the Enlightenment, women's status changed significantly. At the same time, International Women's Day on March 8th was also born at this stage. In the era of ideological liberation and unprecedented prosperity in material resources, more and more women are paying attention to themselves, specifically reflected in their clothing, hoping to express their image and stance through clothing. In such a social state, social development has sparked endless discussions about feminism, and the development and changes in women's social status have gradually attracted people's attention. This study aims to explore how changes in clothing development reflect the rise of women's status, and to delve into the leap in women's status that is evident in the history of women's clothing development. This study will use text analysis and literature analysis methods to list fashion styles such as suits and bubble sleeves, starting from the expression of the wearer's identity in clothing and exploring gender awareness in clothing. At the

same time, it will horizontally list the development history of bubble sleeves, suits, and trousers. Clarify the development process of gender expression in clothing through the changing trends in the vertical development of various clothing styles. Next, this study will explore the concept of unisex clothing, elucidate the social reasons and development trends for the emergence of unisex clothing, and explore its popular reasons and design concepts. Subsequently, it diverged from the specific style of unisex clothing, focusing on women's clothing and their status. After completing the discussion and analysis of the above content, this study will explore the restraining effect of gender on the clothing choices of wearers in the process of social development and the rise of women's status in contemporary society in the final part. The following text mainly explores three aspects: the manifestation of gender awareness in clothing, the trend of asexual clothing development, and the relationship between clothing development and changes in women's status. It analyzes the gender expression conveyed by clothing and deeply understands the language behind clothing and its symbolic social structure reform.

2. The Gender Expression of Garment-Bubble Sleeve and Suits

During the long-stand development of human social history, the garment is an essential carrier of human self-expression. The garment has distinguished gender by having huge differences in external clothes between males and females since birth [1]. From the historical review, the gender expression of the garment can be found throughout society. Male garments exist to reveal authority and profession. In contrast, female garments emphasize the modification of body curves and the wearer's temperament, therefore adapting to the aesthetic needs of the patriarchal society and satisfying the stereotypes under the male perspective [2]. In the wake of social progress, the development of garments has generated a heated discussion.

When it comes to the pattern of bubble sleeves that once again sparked a current trend in the 2020s, it first originated in Europe as a symbol of power and nobility. The aristocracy used the bubble sleeve as an exclusive pattern to improve the shoulder length, therefore, revealing the authority of the upper class. However, thanks to the awakening of self-awareness during the era of Renaissance, woman's social status has been uplifted and bubble sleeve has gradually become a representative female pattern. Since it has the function of suiting the cute or elegant characteristic of people, cultivating the body shape and arm line, and also reshaping the ratio of head-to-shoulder, bubble sleeve has gained favor from the gender group of females. In the following decades, the various development of bubble sleeve has closely related to the female roles in the historical stage. In other words, the bubble sleeve pattern has become a female symbol, distinguishing it from the male.

At the same time, the development of suits also reflected the gender expression of the garment. Since the late 18th century, the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the Bourgeois Revolution spread to the garment field [3]. Men's dressing concepts have greatly changed, and they have begun to pursue the practicality of clothing. The impact of the revolution on society was sensational, and men's clothing was no longer exclusive to the aristocratic class but instead became more common, resulting in the emergence of suits. As a typical international garment, the initial existence of suits was for the external manifestation of professionalization. To meet the needs of man's daily life, the suits adopted tailoring widely under narrow so that the male wearer could move flexibly over a long distance.

Thus, it can be seen that there is a huge difference between male and female dressing both from the external pattern and internal wearing purposes, which provide various references for the gender expression of the garment.

3. New Fashion Trend-Unisex Clothing

Just like suits and bubble sleeves, although they initially had strong gender expression characteristics, now this gender expression is becoming increasingly blurred. Such patterns and designs have been widely used in a neutral style of garment which is called unisex clothing. Just as its name implies, unisex clothing is a current garment trend that can be worn by both males and females [4]. From the designer to the wearer, both of them use the unisex pattern to convey the concept of gender mobility [5]. During the past few decades, people's gender stereotypes gradually disappeared, manifested in the fields of garment and fashion, as the boundary between male and female output began to blur. Thanks to the development of modern society, people's bias between gender has been gradually removed, which is the main reason why unisex clothing could become an emerging fashion trend. In the course of historical development, especially in the past 100 years, due to war, social revolution, and other factors, the inherent class and gender division of society has undergone dramatic changes, and people's demand for clothing tend to be practical and professional. Focusing on female characters, social turmoil, and people's repeated struggle for their own rights have driven the progress of this gender group. They have shed their heavy dresses and put on convenient pants, leaving their homes to participate in society. The so-called 'catering to patriarchal society' clothing styles in female clothing have also contributed to the progress of this gender group. These are all background factors for the emergence of unisex clothing.

The tendency of unisex clothing can be summarized in two aspects: the feminization of man's clothing and the masculinization of woman's clothing. The former seems can be found in the period of Rococo, where the male aristocracy pursued luxury by adding Lace, bubble sleeve, and embroidery into the pattern of their costumes. As a result, the difference between male and female clothing has narrowed, and male clothing has begun to integrate some feminized clothing or patterns actively. As for the latter, the masculinization of women's clothing is inseparable from social change. After experiencing World War I and World War II, the social division of labor is undergoing significant changes in the whole world [6]. Women started to remove the onerous and inconvenient high heels and long dresses, which entirely restricted the moving range of females in Medieval, choosing the light and loose-fitting clothes, such as trousers and suits that were convenient with fewer ornaments. People are awakening to self-awareness, paying more and more attention to themselves [7], and expressing their inner feeling and position through their external clothing. In conclusion, both the feminization of man's clothing and the masculinization of woman's clothing is the instrument to maintain the artistic and function of clothing. Unisex clothing is also a response of answering the pursuit of minimalist style, which will soon become a need of the day. These are the reasons why unisex clothing has existed. It can be discovered from the fashion shows of major fashion brands and people's daily wear patterns that unisex garment has become a fashion trend during the past few years.

Taking trousers as an example, although trousers were exclusive to males in the earlier time, they became cross-gender clothing in the 20th century, which was the turbulent period leading to cultural forced exchange [8]. In the high-speed process of the Industrial Revolution, which swept from Europe to the world, women began wearing trousers instead of putting up heavy dresses, staying in their rooms, and waiting for their husbands. They went outdoors and soon became a large amount of labour force in society. Soon COCO Chanel designed the first trousers for women to widely spread the gender equality ideology, and trousers were becoming more and more popular among women [5].

4. The Reflection of Women's Growing Status

4.1. Awakening of Female Consciousness in the Development of the Times

Clothing has had the function of marking the gender of men and women since its birth. Indeed, clothing has a restraining effect on gender. Anne Holland attributes the “motivation” of clothing to three points: sexual needs, physiological needs, and psychological needs. In the patriarchal society of the past, women's clothing constantly demonstrated recognition of men's status.

From the perspective of women, during the development of social history, women have gradually shed long skirts and high-heeled shoes that are inconvenient to walk and then pursued comfortable and functional, unisex clothing as their daily wear, which is a manifestation of women's rising social status. Throughout the history of human clothing, male and female clothing has evolved from a clear boundary in gender expression to the emergence of a third gender clothing that connects the two, which is closely related to the development of women's status. As the writer aims that bubble sleeves and suits are symbols that match the self-expression of different gender, they became more and more neutral during their historical development [9]. Men started to wear clothes in bubble sleeve patterns to reshape the ratio of head and shoulder, while females began wearing suits to show their profession.

Especially in bubble sleeves, in the 1980s, the rise of disco trends and the return of excess at fashion weeks made bubble sleeves a defining feature. The most fashionable style in the 1980s was the mostly double-breasted old-fashioned suits with thick shoulder pads, symbolizing their authority and strength. Many couturiers use shoulder pads to enhance the shape of women's shoulders and make the female wearer more masculine. It is a concrete manifestation of women's self-expression in today's society that advocates gender equality, openness, and inclusiveness. These garments are well-cut, have generous shoulder pads, and are worn with a well-crafted shirt under the garment. Many people define bubble sleeves as a sign of 80s vintage style, even though they've been around for hundreds of years. This may be due to the awakening of women's consciousness and their increasing social status as the number of professional women surged with the significant increase in productivity and the emergence of globalization.

With the emergence of more and more professional women after the Industrial Revolution, this gender group has significantly contributed to the development of the world economy. Similarly, to adapt to the development of professional women, clothing has become increasingly lightweight and efficient, demonstrating its practicality. The essence of clothing is that people choose the clothes they purchase and wear based on what they mean or the information they believe they will send [10]. With the development of social history, people's gender stereotypes and prejudices about clothing have weakened, starting to use gender as a tool for expressing self-awareness rather than a constraint. This also explains why fashion is a reincarnation.

4.2. Discussion on Gender Differences and Garment

The development of clothing is closely related to gender differences. The formation of this difference is influenced by various factors.

From a social-cultural perspective, society's expectations and limitations on male and female roles shape gender-specific clothing styles, and the traditional society expects men to have prestige and professionalism; It expects women to be elegant, gentle, and graceful, with men wearing suits and women wearing dresses.

From the perspective of wearer psychology, research has shown that gender differences are also related to individual psychological factors, with women paying more attention to the appearance and emotional expression of clothing [11]. Clothing can be used as an expression of identity. People of

different genders can show their identity through different clothing. For example, transgender people may choose to wear clothing that matches their identity.

In addition, the traditional gender-based clothing consumption model has had a negative impact on the environment, and promoting gender-neutral clothing is also an environmentally friendly way.

The gender differences in the fashion industry have raised many issues and guided multiple paths of exploration, making this work a great undergraduate course in gender and society. People are working hard to solve thorny theoretical issues related to gender and sexuality, which are far from being resolved [12]. Everyone will wait and see how the clothing will develop in the future.

5. Conclusions

This article starts with the expression of gender differentiation in clothing, discusses the improvement of women's status reflected in the trend changes in clothing trends, and then deeply analyzes the multiple factors that generate gender differences in clothing and delves into the connection between people's daily clothing and gender. The limitation of this article lies in its limited space, as the topic is too closely related to the social background. Therefore, the function is to briefly summarize gender expression and female power in clothing. In subsequent research, researchers can further refine and explore gender differences and integration in clothing, increase research methods such as interviews and surveys to understand the attitudes of different age and gender groups towards this topic and conduct cross-research on multiple variables.

References

- [1] Yuqin Z. (2010). *The Changes of Women's Social Status in the Origin and Development of Women's Trousers*. *International Textile Journal*, 38(07), 72+74-75.
- [2] Yurchisin, J., Lennon, S.J. (2016). *Introduction to special collection on fashion and gender*. *Fash Text* 3, 14.
- [3] Lee, H.R., Kim, J. & Ha, J. (2020). 'Neo-Crosssexual' fashion in contemporary men's suits. *Fash Text* 7, 4.
- [4] Aurore Bardey, Judith Achumba-Wöllenstein & Pak Chiu. (2020). *Exploring the Third Gender in Fashion: From Consumers' Behavior to Designers' Approach towards Unisex Clothing*, *Fashion Practice*, 12:3, 421-439.
- [5] Xinyue L. (2020). *Analysis on the formation and development of unisex clothing*. *West Leather*, 42(23), 90-91.
- [6] Yang Y., Xu J. (2019). *The Application of New Unisex Style in Modern Clothing Culture and Art*/Institute of Management Science and Industrial Engineering. *Proceedings of 2019 International Conference on Art Design, Music and Culture (ADMC 2019)*. Francis Academic Press, 4.
- [7] Lili X., Yuhua L. (2011). *Analysis of social change of neutral fashion*/Intelligent Information Technology Application Association. *Proceedings of 2011 2nd Asia-Pacific Conference on Wearable Computing Systems (APWCS 2011 V3)*. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 3.
- [8] Yun H. (2015). *Interpreting Female Art from the Development of Women's Clothing*. *Scientific Consultation (Technology · Management)*, 413(02), 146-147.
- [9] Qingqing G. (2022). *Opposition and Reconciliation: Research on the Influence of Unisex on Modern Clothing*. *West Leather*, 44(20), 37-39.
- [10] Dujé Kodzoman. (2019). *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CLOTHING: Meaning of Colors, Body Image and Gender Expression in Fashion*, 2 (2), 90-103.
- [11] G·Santayona. (1955). *The Sense of Beauty*. Dover Publications, 6-10.
- [12] Jennifer Reed. (2016). *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism, and the Sexual Revolution*. *The journal of Popular Culture*, 49(6), 1393-1394.