

The Evolution of Chinese Women's Image Before and After the Reform and Opening up --Changes in Clothing

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ABSTRACT

Reform and opening-up is a great events in Chinese history. As an important turning point, women's clothing has undergone obvious changes. In the 70 s and 80 s in China, based on the women's clothing as the research object, this paper studies the female clothing style of specific changes, the social reasons behind the change, and the resulting changes in the image of women. With the change of women's clothing as the mainline, the social features of this transforming period have been systematically researched, and the spontaneously changes in women's status have also been explored and discussed in this paper. The conclusion is that after the reform and opening up, the political-dominated clothing style evolved into a personal-dominated clothing style, and the female images have become diversified, international, and personalized.

Keywords: Reform and Opening up, Women's Clothing, Women's Social Image, Women's Social Status.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1970s and 1980s in China can be considered a watershed in the transformation of the image of Chinese women. After the decade of the Cultural Revolution, which severely hampered China's development. In 1978, China adopted a policy of internal reform and opening up to the outside world: opening up special economic zones, restructuring the national economy, implementing the household contract responsibility system, gradually setting up economic and technological development zones and open economic zones, and establishing a planned commodity economy based on public ownership. During this period, the emancipation of women's minds, the transformation of their social image, the enhancement of their social status, and the awakening of their self-awareness took on a very positive dimension after the reform and opening up. During this period, women's clothing ranged from unisex military uniforms to colorful women's skirts and trousers, and the awareness of women's clothing ranged from rejection to

active pursuit, all reflecting the awakening of women's consciousness.

2. WOMEN'S CLOTHING IN CHINA IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

Before the reform and opening up, China was still a sea of gray, green, black, and blue: military uniforms, liberation uniforms, and Zhongshan uniforms. Due to the social psychology of "resting on the status quo and following the crowd", the development of women's clothing stagnated during this period: the present, single style, and dull tones. In the late 1970s, when people's material life was improving, and their minds were gradually opening up, everyone shed their Lenin, military, and civilian uniforms, but blue, green, gray, and black remained the main theme of Chinese dressing [1].

2.1. The first and middle 1970s

The clothing trend of the first half of the 1970s continued the military fashion of the 1960s, and the

fashionable clothes of the children of the Beijing compound in the early 1970s.



Figure 1. the Chinese Red Guards in the Chinese Red Guards in 1971 [2]

The green uniform of this period was the most fashionable clothing among women, commonly known as "national defense green", in response to Mao Zedong's "I do not like beautiful clothes, and I like military uniforms" call. At this time, cheongsam, which was considered a symbol of feudal capitalism, was destroyed in large numbers, so there was not much difference between the male and female dress. Figure 1. shows the picture Chinese Red Guards in 1971.

Despite the stagnation of women's clothing at the time, there were still women who sought beauty, and the white dress was their first choice: simple and understated. Despite the lack of special decorative patterns, which still looked far better than the rustic workwear, this dress code was still not socially acceptable at the time; as writer Su Tong once wrote: "Even in summer people wore skirts, only school-age girls wore flowered skirts, while adult women's skirts were blue, gray or black, with careful pleats on them, and the most fashionable beauty-seeking girls would wear white skirts. The most fashionable beauty-seeking girls would wear white dresses... girls in white dresses were often seen as 'uneducated' wannabes."

2.2. "Diqueliang" fabrics

In addition, in the middle 1970s, a type of fabric called "Diqueliang" became popular. Until 1976, people were dressed entirely in cotton, but later on, to reduce the amount of land used for cotton and increase the area for food and vegetables, the state began to introduce chemical fiber technology and imported chemical fiber equipment, and "Diqueliang" fabric was made of polyester. At that time, this chemical fiber fabric was just entering the market and the price was much higher than cotton, so owning a "Diqueliang" shirt became a major status symbol. Even the kids would stuff snowballs into their friends' clothes during snowball fights and shout "Cold Indeed! (Pronounced as in Chinese 'Diqueliang')[3]. It was a popular item throughout the country.

At the end of the 1970s, as people's material life improved and their thinking progressed, some women

took the lead in shedding their black, blue, and gray clothes and replaced them with brightly colored, avant-garde styles.



Figure 2. the girl in the long dress [4]

In 1978, when the winds of reform and opening-up began to blow, the first thing to change was the color of people's bodies. Compared to cotton, "Diqueliang" fabric was strong, wrinkle-free, durable, and easy to dye, with high color rendering, and the creation and popularity of this fabric laid the material foundation for the subsequent flourishing of women's clothing. Even though it was expensive, it became synonymous with 'fashionable' in those days.

At this time, women were repressed by the Cultural Revolution and the planned economic system, and the love of beauty nature began to release, is in the young girls' home, naturally also following the trend. They wore long red and blue floral dresses with carefully pleated edges, while the best-dressed girls wore white skirts of "Diqueliang" texture and then a petticoat. Figure 2 shows the girl in the long dress at the time.

2.3. Colorful women's clothing

In 1979, the famous French fashion designer Pierre Cardin came to China for a fashion show, unveiling the "redhead" of Chinese clothing. Cardin came to China for a fashion show, unveiling the "redhead" of Chinese clothing. Thus began the prosperity of Chinese women's clothing.

In the early 1980s, the pace of fashion and change was relatively slow, but by the mid to late 1980s, the market had matured, and fashion had accelerated, at this time, women's clothing began to change fashion, adding a mature element to the romantic and delicate design style, highlighting artistic and contemporary styling and decoration, emphasizing fitted corridors and waistlines, and often using light and translucent materials such as silk to bring the style closer to the wearer. The style of dressing was closer to the needs of the dresser, fully

demonstrating the interest of women in enjoying the beauty of fashion at the time. Under the influence of RTHK, women began to develop in the direction of softness and sensuality. Men's and women's clothing also took on distinctly different characteristics: women's clothing became more and more focused on choosing lighter fabrics and appropriate cuts to accentuate their figures[5].

At that time, major television series entered the country, leading women to start to try new things, and many brightly dressed young women appeared on the streets, leading to a new trend: toadstool glasses, flared pants, sports tops, short pants or short skirts. Toadstool glasses, flared pants, sports tops, short pants, or short skirts.



Figure 3. trendy women dressed in bright colors on the streets of Beijing in 1986 [4]

In the late 1980s, clothing styles became more and more abundant, from jeans to cultural shirts, casual wear, bodybuilding pants, bat shirts, evening dresses, flared skirts, one-step skirts, A-line skirts, and even ultra-short skirts, mini-skirts, etc., young women distinguished, chased, imitated, and mixed the old and the new with a variety of patterns, and bodybuilding pants even once flooded women at all levels across the country, from school girls to female factory workers The company's main business is to provide a wide range of products and services to the market. Figure 3 here are some of the trendy women dressed in bright colors on the streets of Beijing in 1986.

3. THE REASONS FOR THE POPULARITY OF MILITARY UNIFORMS IN THE 1970S

Before the reform and opening up, the 1970s was still the period of the Cultural Revolution. Although it is called the "Cultural Revolution", its influence on Chinese society was not limited to culture, and every aspect of social life had a strong "Cultural Revolution" color, with a very distinctive feature of the times and unique appearance. With the change in economic production, social structure, and values, the status of women as a social group and the value of times were also changing constantly, reflecting the changes and progress of society. In this era, many female students and young women,

holding the "little Red Book", "striving for revolution to promote production", "criticizing Lin and Confucius to reverse rightist leanings", "going up and down the mountain to receive re-education", all young women and young men were experiencing the same political test. In this period, it was believed that "men and women are alike". Boys could do things; girls would not be inferior to complete. It can be said that women of this era did not hesitate to devote their youth and beauty to the red cause and were as active in political activities as their male counterparts. The idea of equality between men and women developed during this period.

This period of national daily life had a clear political tendency; society set off a craze for military uniforms. The "National Movement to learn from the People's Liberation Army" in the 1960s provided an important backdrop for the "army uniform fever" of the 1970s. In this movement of the sixties, people worshiped soldiers. Naturally, a soldier's handsome and capable military uniform was also sought after by young people. Therefore, the military uniform also successfully entered the fashion circle at that time. At that time, the military uniform was the revolutionary prop of the Red Guards and rebel soldiers in the Cultural Revolution, with strong political color. But it was a hit in these crazy times. It is worth mentioning that personality worship was a serious problem in society at that time, and Mao Zedong, the national leader at that time, often wore military clothes on major political occasions. Such a military image had a strong demonstration effect, and people wanted to learn from the national leader. Mao Zedong's reception of red guards in a green uniform on August 18, 1966, helped fuel the military's popularity. Secondly, if we discuss the Chinese social system during this period, we will find that it is quasi-militarized. Take the rural people's communities of that time as an example. It was an organization of "militarization, the militarization of action, collectivization of life". Not only in the arrangement of villagers according to the arrangement of the army but also in the way of organizing large regiments to fight labor production. Under the military atmosphere at this time, people naturally required their ideas according to the standards of soldiers and placed the beautiful ideal of the revolution with the military uniform.

Focusing on women's dress in this period, different from the past, the enthusiasm for military uniform and plain blue-gray dress and the social ethos at that time made the gender boundary no longer so clear and thus tended to dilute the gender characteristics of women. Mao Zedong once said: "Times are different. Men and women are the same." Both men and women loved military uniforms, and the styles of military uniforms were not too different for men and women. In a poem written by Mao Zedong during this period, "I do not like beautiful clothes, and I like military uniforms", which reflects that women at that time were no longer satisfied

with colorful fancy clothes and the bondage to traditional women behind them, and denied the gender characteristics behind Women dress [6]. Women believed that they could shoulder the responsibility of defending their country and competing with men. They wanted to pursue equality between men and women, which was not properly recognized at that time. And this desire is also reflected in women's clothing of the time. They believed that if they changed their clothes and appearance, they could show the same strength as men. Therefore, women at that time regarded military uniforms as a symbol of gender equality.

The lack of women's clothing was also based on the lack of all clothing, which was also related to the difficult economic development at that time. At that time, under the difficult conditions, most people could barely maintain food and clothing, and the pursuit of exquisite clothing in such a situation can be said to be unrealistic. It was hard for countries to produce, and people could not afford to buy new clothes.

If the period before the reform and opening up of women's clothing towards aesthetics is bleak, then the reform and opening up can be said to be a huge turning point. The reform and opening up in 1978 were of great significance to China's economic development, political system improvement, and ideological progress. At the same time, it also played an important role in the promotion of women's status, the development of social roles, and the emancipation of the mind.

Both people's ideas and external forms began to change in the early stage of reform and opening up, which was most intuitively reflected in the dress. Before the 1980s, it can be said that the whole country was dressed in blue and gray tones of a single style of clothing, almost no bright colors and novel styles of clothing appeared. But in the late '80s. Fashion-conscious women led the way.

After the reform and opening up, the reform of the market economy has made the national economy develop rapidly, and social productivity and people's income have improved. This made it possible for people to pursue beauty and fashion instead of just food and clothing. As women's employment and income rose, they began to pay attention to fashionable clothes with new styles and bright personalities and set off waves of fashion.

In addition, reform and opening up also opened China's previously closed doors, and the cultural exchanges and exchanges between China and foreign countries increased during this period. This brought a huge impact on Chinese clothing enterprises and designers and let them begin to pursue the diversified development of clothing culture. In the spring of 1979, Pierre Cardin, a French fashion designer, was invited to hold a fashion show at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing, which was then called the "Costume

Exhibition", and let the Chinese people know that "the outside world is wonderful" for the first time. In 1979, Although there was still a gap between Montegut and real fashion, for almost a decade, Chinese people still admired it as a Must-have French brand for a makeover and even felt happy to wear counterfeits. Meanwhile, foreign fashion brands and fashionable items also entered the field of vision of Chinese women, and these fashionable foreign clothes were quickly promoted among the trend-loving Chinese women [5][7]. In May 1985, Yves Saint Laurent held a retrospective exhibition of 25 years of personal works in the National Art Museum of China. Saint Laurent wrote in his preface to the exhibition as follows: "China has always fascinated me, the culture, the art, the clothes, the legends. Western art has been greatly influenced by China. The influence is multifaceted and obvious. Without China, our civilization would never have reached what it is today." Saint Laurent's language was sincere, making us see the exchange of Chinese and Western culture in his three series of Chinese-style clothing works.

At the same time, the national policy was much more relaxed and no longer advocated the uniform of men and women as before. Under the country's vigorous promotion of equality between men and women and the free social atmosphere, the image of women has become more diversified with traditional motherhood. There appeared a new image of life, fashion, and popularity, and women's self-consciousness was aroused. This led them to pursue more diverse and fashionable clothes to express their individuality.

4. HOW THE CHANGE IN CHINESE WOMEN'S CLOTHING AFFECTED SOCIETY

4.1. Women became more involved in society

As introduced, the apparel styles before the reforms started in the late 1970s were highly influenced by political factors. In 1978, chairman Deng Xiaoping started the reforms and openings, which opened the country's gate to foreign investments and technologies. It led to a wide acceptance and influx of foreign ideas, with which one of them was clothing fashions. As Pierre Cardin brought French clothing fashion to China in 1978 and 1979 and started fashion shows in China for the first time, western vogue widely changed the tides of how Chinese ladies dressed, though its influence was not restricted to that of Chinese women. It brought a brand-new concept of women's fashion that paid more attention to women. Well-designed, fashionable outfits lifted the status of women in Chinese society as compared to their status in the pre-reform times. Thus, unprecedented modern careers appeared in China, allowing women to become more involved in society. Models were a popular

career for women at the time, exhibiting fashions that combined Chinese and newly-introduced elements.



Figure 4. Chinese models in the early years of reform and opening up [8]

Presents two Chinese models with newly-designed clothes at a fashion show, which had never existed until the reform and opening in 1978. The audience in the picture was a solid witness to the rise of women's status and involvement in society. Not only did the career thrive in the 1980s, but it has also been a popular choice of women for decades. Statistically, Chinese models have surged from a mere 11 in 1980 to nearly six million in 2012 [9]. Besides models, with the influx of televisions in China in the 1980s, TV stars also became a popular career for women. By 1985, the number of televisions production had already reached a high of 16.63 million, becoming the second-largest TV producer in the world. Figure 4. shows Chinese models in the early years of reform and opening up. The rapid growth of the television industry since the reform and opening allowed citizens in China to own televisions if they were able to afford them. The industry, overall, allowed most Chinese to have access to TV shows, whether they were able to afford a television or not. Those who could not afford it could rent, share, or use public possessions to use the TV. Thus, many women found their careers in the tides of TV shows. They became TV stars and participated in popular shows. The factor that raised their social status was once again their clothing fashion. Due to the large influence of televisions, how female TV stars dressed soon became a factor that often led to the change in fashion trends. People - largely women - tended to follow the dressing style of TV stars. The western-styled outfits of female TV stars thus affected the tides of fashion throughout the country. When the TV show "Red Dress is in Vogue Downtown" became popular, everyone was eager to possess a red dress. Soon after that, ladies with red dresses were in cities throughout China [10]. From these careers, it can be seen how the change in clothing fashions due to the reforms and opening allowed and has allowed women to be more involved in society and influenced tides of public fashion.

4.2. The change in women's clothing changed public ideas and values in Chinese society

The public idea of clothing before the reforms and openings in 1978 could be concluded as unitary and politically influenced. Before 1978, "neat", "unpretentious", "popularized", and "civilianized" were the popular characteristics of women's clothing. How women dressed was dominated by political factors, unifying everyone into the same dressing style.

Individualism was diluted, and seldom was a particular person or group of people emphasized. The concept of men and women being equal in the labor force was blind, since it neglected the physical and psychological differences between men and women and suppressed women's characters. Many ladies wore outfits that were of the same size, color, and design. These styles of dresses that were without color, personality, or gender "distort people's aesthetic psychology", making clothing culture once again a victim of political changes [11]. During the cultural revolution, "Lenin dresses", "Mao suits", and "Students' wear" became popular, which is why scholars have described the clothing fashion between the 1950s and the late 1970s to be closely linked with the revolution [12]. Lenin dresses, Mao suits, and student wear represented revolutionary ideas, which dominated people's ideas at the time since these costumes were popularly worn. Hence, the public ideas and values were tightly connected with communism and Maoist political ideologies, which were directly reflected by the clothing fashion.

The shift from the cultural revolution to the reform and opening was a dramatic change in the fashion of clothes which changed public ideas and values in the society.

The purpose of the reform was to fundamentally free people's ideas in China, develop the economy and improve the quality of people's lives. The policy was issued to "break through the confinement and open the situation" [13]. The confinement refers to the restriction of people's thoughts which were heavily inclined by political tides. By opening up the new country's borders, the restriction of public ideas could be freed, and the economic and societal aspects of people's lives could improve or change differently. The relationship between the policy and the improvement of people's lives is fundamentally similar to the relationship between the change of women's clothing fashion in China led by the reform and opening and its impact on public values as well as the self-perception of women and the understanding of the importance of clothing fashion. The public ideas and values after the reform and opening in 1978 could be summarized as inclusive and innovative. With Pierre Cardin being a representative example, European fashion began to walk into China. The traditional outfits - "Lenin dresses", "Mao suits", and

“students wear” - gradually diminished. Yang Zhuang, western-styled clothing especially for women, became the new trend. Chairman Deng Xiaoping’s goal of policy - to break the confinement and closure of people’s minds - succeeded. The reformation of clothing in the 1970s and 1980s allowed the Chinese to open their minds to accept new fashions, creating an inclusive society [14]. Compared to the public ideas and values before the reforms, the general value shifted from chasing politics to embracing new fashion. This is a large step from confinement to internationalization [14].

Due to the change in clothing fashion, the perception of the status of women changed. As introduced, the new western fashion put more focus on women individuals. In the early stages of the reform, women were able to find a broader boundary in the definition of beauty and fashion [14]. The definition of beauty was no longer restricted by politics or any political background. They also adjusted their perception of beauty and fashion based on foreign designs. Personalism and individualism began to come into existence. The influx of foreign designs has made Chinese women realize that they could have personal clothing choices depending on their moods and occasions [14]. They realized that outfits could be flexible and loose in restrictions and that clothing could be important in that they more or less reflect and affect their social status. Their costumes allowed them to participate to different degrees in society. They were given groundbreaking independence and confidence by the change in their apparel, which was important accessories as they fought for their social status and job opportunities [10]. New clothing fashion brought women into various aspects of society, achieving diversity.

Throughout the process in which public ideas were changed due to the influx of foreign clothing fashion, it is interpretable that in the late 1970s and 1980s, political opinions that affected how people dress were not as common in people’s minds anymore. This was the time when the public idea shifted from heavily political to internationally open. This was the time when Chinese women particularly experienced a rise in their social status and rates of attention. This was also the time when their understanding of the values of clothing changed. All these changes occurred with the influx of new clothing fashion being the dominant factor.

Since then, the public idea of non-political individualism, or the emphasis on individuals, especially women, has continued to today. Being influenced by the change in women’s apparel in the 1980s, how women dress today tends to put more emphasis on individuals. They have developed unique insights and ways of approaching how they dress and see the word “fashion” [14]. As a fact, women today do not tend to uphold one certain type of clothing but instead follow the trend of fashion [14], obtaining more self-importance and self-esteem.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper covered the impact that the transformation of clothing fashion had on women’s social status in the 1970s and 1980. To conclude, this paper focused on major changes in women’s clothing itself, from monotonous-styled clothing to those that were influenced by western designs. This paper has also identified the background information behind the change of clothing fashion, which includes political movements such as the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao and the reform and opening under chairman Deng. Conclusions have been made on how new apparel has influenced Chinese women and the rest of society, that the female images have become diversified, international, and personalized after reforming and opening up. These three major aspects cooperate and provide an answer to how the change in Chinese women’s fashion in the 1970s and 1980s has influenced society. Our study provides a basic and introductory analysis for researchers and learners who are finding information about this topic. It provides a closer look at the modern history of China, and allows people to have a clearer understanding of the evolution of women’s fashion and the development of women’s image in China.

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