



Impacts of Modern Chinese Women's Liberation Movement on Changes of Women's Apparel

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Abstract. Chinese society has undergone a profound transformation from feudalism to modernity. As important participants in social change, women have undergone significant changes in their ideological concepts, social status, and way of life. Especially with the rise of the women's liberation movement, women began to pursue equality, freedom, and personal expression, and these changes were intuitively reflected in clothing. In the against foot binding movement, women have freed themselves from traditional constraints and begun to pursue more comfortable and practical clothing. The clothing style has shifted from complexity to simplicity, reflecting a new image of women in social public spaces. The hair cutting movement further strengthened women's awareness of liberation, and short hair became a symbol of modernization and fashion for women. The Natural Breast Movement reveals that after women break free from feudal constraints, the popularization of bras and the improvement of cheongsam not only improve women's comfort, but also become an important way for women to express their fashion and personality.

Keywords: women's liberation movement, women's apparel, cheongsam

1 Introduction

Clothing is a materialized characteristic of human social development and social culture, especially the cultural connotations expressed by women's clothing, which also reflects the historical status and social value of women. The changes in modern Chinese women's clothing vividly reflect the beginning of women's thinking towards freedom and liberation, the pursuit of practicality and harmony in clothing, and the shift from conservatism to openness and innovation in form. Women express a spiritual concept of liberating themselves and pursuing individuality through the shaping of clothing images, while reflecting the face and value orientation of the times. In feudal traditional life, marriage and family property were all controlled by parents, and even food and clothing had to be controlled by parents [1]. Women became the victims of the patriarchal system. Women are completely subordinate to men, therefore, the focus of women's lives is everything for men, while achieving gentleness and obedience, respect and humility, diligence and frugality, and

adherence to women's ethics towards their husbands. From beginning to end, they completely lose their personality and dignity.

The liberation of women is a product of the development of human society to a certain historical stage, and also a symbol of social progress. The true Chinese women's liberation movement only emerged after the bourgeoisie stepped onto the historical stage. With the emergence of capitalism, a group of democratic thinkers emerged in the intellectual world, who voiced their opposition to feudal autocracy. Opposing feudal autocracy cannot but involve women who were cruelly oppressed by feudal autocracy, thus proposing some ideas that contradict feudal ethics, and the idea of women's liberation in modern China began to sprout. However, the Opium War opened the door to China's isolation, gradually integrating China into the chain of international capitalism, which determined the foresight of China's women's movement. The transformation of women's clothing, like the pace of the women's liberation movement, has never stopped. From the initial pursuit of class equality, cutting off everything from the past without hesitation, cutting off men's clothing, to the pursuit of human equality and physical liberation, and finally embracing and improving Eastern and Western clothing to find suitable clothing culture for Chinese women, the two levels of revolution are closely related. This is a comprehensive transformation from spirit to body. It has become a watershed in the development process of Chinese women's clothing [2].

This article takes modern women's clothing as the research object, summarizes the historical process of modernization of modern women's clothing, and constructs a system of changes in modern women's clothing. At the same time, introducing the perspective of body liberation and applying the theory of female body to study the interactive relationship between clothing, body, and self, serving the needs of harmonious development between women's clothing and body in the new era.

2 Women'S Apparel Under the Impact Of Movement Against Foot-Binding

2.1 Movement Against Foot-Binding

The vulgar custom of women binding their feet has formed a traditional habitual force, hindering the progress and development of Chinese society. On the eve of the Reform Movement of 1898, the custom of binding feet was still rampant. The movement of not binding feet originated during the period of the Taiping Kingdom of Heaven. On the one hand, the Taiping Army adopted the measure of not binding feet, and anyone who violated it was executed. On the other hand, it has a close relationship with the propaganda and promotion of Western missionaries in China. Although the scope was limited at this time, the promotion of against foot binding and the practice of prohibiting foot binding began from here. The period of the reform was the developmental stage of this movement. The reformists linked the goal of preventing foot binding with the goal of saving the nation from extinction, and promoted and carried out this movement from the perspective of maintaining national

dignity and strengthening the country's military. Its impact and effect are much broader and more profound than before. In the early 20th century. With the rise of the Revolution of 1911, there was an expansion stage of the modern non foot binding movement, which exhibited many new characteristics in terms of scale, scope, and influence. Firstly, many women's and vernacular publications were established as a public opinion platform for the against foot binding movement. Secondly, there is an increasing number of educated women with consciousness, and they are consciously involved in the movement, starting to expand from cities to rural areas [3]. Subsequently, through the impact of the New Culture Movement, the foot binding custom tended to be eradicated in China, and by the establishment of the People's Republic of China, it had completely disappeared from the land of China. This is the first level of liberation for women's physical and mental well-being in modern China. In 1912, the interim President of the Republic of China, Sun Yat sen, issued an order to "persuade all provinces to ban it as a whole. Those who violate the ban for any reason will be punished equally by their families." Since then, the bad custom of women binding their feet has gradually been abolished. The complete implementation of Tianfu by Chinese women was a matter after the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

2.2 Changes of Women's Apparel Under the Impact of Movement Against Foot-Binding

Since ancient times, women's clothing has strict form standards, forming a stable matching system. This also explains why women attach great importance to the issue of shoe styling. During the process of against foot binding, women experienced a period of clothing image confusion. Not binding feet will pay more attention to the aspect of releasing shoes in women's clothing, and it is recommended to follow the old style for other aspects. However, the old clothing style and footrest shoes are no longer systematic, and the combination is not aesthetically pleasing. During this chaotic period, women gained freedom of movement and finally entered the public space outside of their homes. The transformation of modern women's clothing images began with the release of their feet, but the chaos of clothing images occurred after women liberated their feet and entered society. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, with the opening of trading ports, the development of capitalist industry and commerce, and the vigorous promotion of advanced Western values and ideological culture by knowledgeable people, it was a turning point for China from tradition to modernity. A group of awakened new women also began to participate in social activities at this time, and the traditional "wide sleeved" clothing image is not easy to walk, and it also appears out of place in the new social space, which no longer meets the needs of the times. However, during this period of confusion in women's clothing image, there is still no consensus on women's dress code. The advancement of foot release movement allows women's feet to grow naturally, allowing them to wear more diverse shoes. This change not only improves women's health status, but also gives them more freedom in clothing choices. With the advancement of against foot binding sports, women have begun to

pursue more comfortable and practical clothing. From the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic of China, clothing styles gradually shifted from complexity to simplicity, decoration tended to simplify, and styles gradually narrowed, appearing fitted and simple. Figure 1 compares the differences in clothing between women's bound feet and released feet during the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period.



Fig. 1. Difference in clothing between binding feet and releasing feet

(Figure credit: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/DMQTQNGQ0523H59J.html>)

3 Women's Apparel Under the Impact of Hair Cutting Movement

3.1 Hair Cutting Movement

The history of female hair cutting can still be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. With the opening of the country by Western powers, a revolutionary trend emerged in society. The earliest advocate for female hair cutting was Jin Tianhe, the author of "Women's Boundary Bell" in 1903. In his article "Women's Conduct", he mainly advocated for female hair cutting based on hygiene reasons. In 1912, with the downfall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the

Republic of China, Sun Yat sen issued a hair cutting order, requiring men to cut off their braids. Under the promotion of such policies, some women were also influenced and began to follow the example of men in haircuts [4]. Since 1919, hair cutting has been a new movement for women's liberation, participating in the wave of the New Culture Movement. Inspired by the ideas of women's liberation and gender equality, some educated women have followed the example of men and cut their hair short. After a brief rise, the initiative and movement of women's hair cutting were intervened and stifled by a group of feudal guardians, causing the women's pursuit of liberation and freedom to come to a standstill. Sometimes long hair cannot be taken care of by oneself, so it is necessary to hire a dedicated person to comb it, and hiring someone requires a certain amount of money. At the same time, long hair needs various headwear decorations and perfume. Buying headwear and perfume is also a big expense. If you cut short hair, these expenses can be avoided. Since men can have their hair cut, men and women are equal, and women should also have the right to have their hair cut. Especially after the First World War, there was a phenomenon of assimilation in clothing between men and women. Some people felt that both men and women had the right to choose clothing, and haircuts were conducive to the replacement of various clothing. Cutting hair indicates a break from tradition, a negation of the feudal system, and a criticism of the idea that women are bound to the family. With the deepening of the ideological liberation movement, haircuts, which have strong physical resistance characteristics, have gradually become an important symbol of women's liberation.

3.2 Changes Of Women's Apparel Under The Impact Of Hair Cutting Movement

With the rise of the hair cutting movement, women began to abandon traditional long hair and waist hairstyles, and instead chose shorter or medium length hair that was more concise and easier to maintain. This change not only facilitates women's daily life and work, but also makes their clothing styles more modern and fashionable. The hair cutting movement, as a microcosm of the social transformation in modern China, profoundly influenced the evolution of women's clothing [5]. As women start cutting off their long hair, their clothing becomes more modern and diverse. The traditional qipao has been improved to include new styles such as short sleeved and sleeveless, while Western clothing elements such as shirts, skirts, and coats have also been introduced, bringing unprecedented colours and styles to women's clothing. The use of clothing colours has become bolder and more diverse, with bright colours such as red, green, and blue being widely adopted, reflecting women's pursuit of beauty and expression of personality. At the same time, the innovation of clothing materials, such as the use of new materials such as artificial silk and nylon, not only improves the comfort of clothing, but also reduces costs, making fashion more popular. In addition, clothing accessories tend to be minimalist, with cumbersome headgear and jewellery replaced by simple and fashionable earrings and necklaces, which not only conforms to modern aesthetics but also reflects women's yearning for a simple lifestyle. The transformation of clothing during this period is not only a change in the clothing

itself, but also an important symbol of women's social status improvement and self-identity construction [6]. It marks the beginning of women's pursuit of freedom, equality, and individuality, showcasing their increased participation in education, career, and other fields, as well as their ability to showcase their own style and personal taste in clothing choices. The transformation of women's clothing under the background of the hair cutting movement is also a way for women to identify and express themselves. By choosing and matching clothing, women can showcase their personality, taste, and aesthetics, thereby achieving affirmation of self-worth and shaping their own style. Figure 2 is a photo showcasing the haircuts of women in the Republic of China in 1927.



Fig. 2. The graduation photo of Jinghai Women's Normal School in 1927

(Figure credit: <https://weibo.com/6429214222/IvSiGsog6?type=repot>)

4 Women's Apparel Under the Impact of Natural Breast Movement

4.1 Natural Breast Movement

In feudal society in our country, political corruption not only led to ideological corruption, but also deeply rooted the concept of "male superiority and female inferiority". More seriously, this concept not only exists among men, but even among some women, there is a deep-rooted belief that women have a lower status than men.

In the primitive society of our country, giving birth to offspring has always been the main task of society, leading most people to generally believe that a woman's full figure is a symbol of good fertility. Therefore, in ancient society, a full woman was regarded as a deity. However, with the rise of feudal society, men's aesthetic concepts have changed, gradually tending to favour flat chested women, and viewing women's exposed clothing as a symbol of not following women's morals. In order to cater to male attitudes, women began to voluntarily cover up their bodies [7]. With the outbreak of the Revolution of 1911, China broke free from more than two thousand years of feudal rule, and the Republic of China era ushered in a new chapter in history. However, after the end of isolationism, the country received many new ideas, but feudal ideas were still deeply rooted, causing collisions between new and old ideas, leading to endless social problems. In this context, women began to awaken, and a movement aimed at improving the status of women quietly emerged. During the period of the Republic of China, cultural exchanges between China and the West deepened, and the emergence of many international students promoted the spread of Western culture in China, gradually liberating the minds of Chinese people and freeing them from feudal constraints, named "Natural Breast Movement". At the same time, the rise of the revolutionary liberation movement made the idea of "male superiority and female inferiority" no longer accepted, and the women's liberation movement became a focus of social attention. People began to call for the abolition of the feudal custom of binding feet [8]. After the problem of foot binding was solved, experts influenced by Western knowledge paid attention to the prevalent issue of chest binding at that time. In order to encourage women influenced by feudal ideology to stop wearing bras, experts have promoted and criticized the harm of bras to women's bodies through various newspapers and magazines.

4.2 Changes of Women's Apparel Under the Impact of Natural Breast Movement

In the early 1920s, the Nationalist government issued a ban prohibiting women from wearing revealing clothing, such as bare arms and legs, and imposing heavy penalties upon discovery. Even when sleeping normally, women must wear long vests that are knee high to reduce skin exposure, and when going out, they must also add a vest or chest strap inside a qipao or top. Early corset underwear was also very popular, known as "mini vests", which were very tight and could tightly fasten the chest without leaving any gaps. These are all layers of constraints on women's bodies in conservative parties, but for those new women who pursue openness, tight fitting vests can also showcase the charm of women. On the one hand, the government at that time began to align with the West, believing that breast liberation was a symbol of modernization [9]. On the other hand, the concept of breast liberation has gradually become popular in society, believing that women have the right to choose their own way of dressing and should not be forcibly constrained. In this case, bras began to gradually become popular. At first, bras were handcrafted from gauze, without standard sizes and not very suitable for sports [10]. But over time, the types and materials of bras have gradually become more diverse. From the initial "shell" style

bras to today's sporty, rimless, and traceless styles, they are all suitable for different occasions and needs. Modern bras not only provide comfort and support for women, but also become one of the symbols of fashion. The function of a qipao is nothing more than faithfully bending and hooking the contours of the human body to support the clouds and moon. Around the 1930s, the image of women's clothing gradually developed towards revealing body curves and body parts, especially after the curvy cheongsam became the daily attire of the general public, women's anxiety about body exposure has transformed into their confidence and admiration for revealing their bodies. Overall, the history of Chinese women wearing bras can be traced back to the Republic of China period 100 years ago. Through a historical review, we can see that society's constraints on women's bodies have evolved from initial chest tightening to later liberation, and now to diversification and personalization. Figure 3 shows the cheongsam of the Republic of China era, which highlights the graceful figure of women.



Fig. 3. Republican women wearing cheongsam

(Figure credit: https://www.sohu.com/a/250624053_99925789)

5 Conclusions

In the process of modern women's body liberation movement, their bodies gradually moved from confinement to liberation, and the reshaping of women's body images

was the result of the collusion of multiple forces in modern times. In the complex historical background, women strive to gain the dominance of their own bodies, and in the changes of clothing culture, they also present the complex and tortuous historical imprint of women's body liberation. Under the influence of the against foot binding movement, women have gone from confusion about the image of releasing their feet to being brave enough to shape their own image. Their clothing combinations have broken through gender differences, Manchu Han differences, and hierarchical differences, and there has also been a phenomenon of mixing Chinese and Western styles; Under the influence of the Hair Cutting Movement, revolutionary women expressed their desire for gender equality through short hair images, and then new women, with students as the main body, shaped their fashionable and progressive image through hair cutting; Under the influence of the Natural Breast Movement, new women began to change their flat chest image, and then began to shape and showcase their curved image. Ultimately, women achieved a process of image reshaping from obscurity to manifestation and then to curved display.

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