Analysis of the Formation of Western Fashion Style in the 1980s

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Abstract: Clothing is an important factor that affects the beauty of women's form, and it is also an external manifestation of women's thinking. The popular women's clothing in the West in the 1980s had a very unique and significant style, to the extent that the aesthetic formed by women during this period has continued to the present day. Nowadays, many fashion designers often refer to the fashion elements of the time when creating. The formation of style is inseparable from the historical background. This study analyses the factors that influenced the style of women's clothing in the 1980s by consulting literature, websites, and books. That was an era when women began to gradually enter the workplace. Influenced by the background of this era, women's clothing broke away from the limitation of showcasing women's physical appearance and more developed towards a neutral and capable style. At the same time, due to the vigorous development of the economy, extravagance and exaggeration became the mainstream at that time. All of these have formed the unique trend of women's clothing in the 1980s. The significance of this study is to analyze the causes of Western women's clothing styles in the 1980s in detail, in order to gain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the fashion history of that period.

Keywords: women's clothing, 1980s, style and design

1. Introduction

Before the early 20th century, women's social status was relatively low in most countries. Due to subjective or objective reasons such as social history, social role, education level, physiological function, the female image in the traditional concept is in a relatively weak physiological and psychological state compared with men. In some cultural contexts, women do not have the right to vote politically, are not allowed to own personal property economically, and have a very narrow range of career choices in the workplace. However, the Bourgeois Revolution in France and the subsequent Enlightenment promoted the rise of women's social status, and women began to strive for the same rights as men. Under the influence of the above, International Women's Day was established on March 8th, thereby elevating the status of women in the form of a globally recognized holiday. The profession, income, education level, and social freedom of women have become the major factors contributing to the significant changes in their status.

The 1980s was an era of feminist globalization, with various women's movements and call for "women's liberation" rising one after another in various places, gradually increasing the proportion

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of women in the workplace and elevating their status. At the same time, the world economy has entered the development stage since the 1980s due to the economic recession and depression in the 1970s, especially the technological revolution at that time, people's material living standards have also been greatly improved. Therefore, in the 1980s, many modern conscious professional women emerged. In addition, the transformation of women's thinking is also reflected in the design and selection of clothing.

Clothing often blurs physiological gender characteristics while also reflecting social gender. The significance of gender lies in the appearance of clothing, which is transforming the social process. When the social history background has changed, the gender characteristics of men and women corresponding to clothing have also changed [1]. Both men's and women's clothing have historically relied on external objects to shape their bodies: men's clothing has wide shoulder pads, while women's clothing has exaggerated village skirts. Then, with the changes in history, men gradually abandoned this way of dressing, and the expression of men's sexual characteristics in men's clothing significantly weakened. Women continued to follow suit and borrowed from men, such as wide shoulder pads or exaggerated shoulder designs. This symbolizes the gradual advancement of women's status and the pursuit of gender equality [2].

The clothing style of the 1980s has unique characteristics. For the convenience of work, professional women's clothing is unsuitable for being designed too revealing and tight fitting. Instead, they are capable and stable masculinization uniforms. Therefore, professional women's clothing with rich colors, no accessories, and almost no gender characteristics was the overall expression of the 1980s. Under the masculinization trend of women's clothing, women's clothing design also started the gender ambiguity trend. The design of clothing structure, shape, color and detail all draw lessons from men's clothing structure, and the style shows the characteristics of masculinization. Not only that but in the 1980s, due to the improvement of people's economic level, their style also showed a luxurious side, specifically manifested in sparkling accessories, flashy smoky makeup, and exaggerated clothing styles. This is because the prevalence of material girls has imbued the fashion industry with a flamboyant color. This is also the main difference between the 1980s style and other styles.

Therefore, this study will focus on the characteristics of women's clothing styles in the 1980s and explore the impact of different factors on fashion. The research method adopted in this article is literature analysis. The research will revolve around the development and evolution of clothing in gender roles, focusing on the context, characteristics, and influences associated with the emergence of clothing styles in the 1980s.

2. The Development and Evolution of Clothing in Gender Roles

Before the Middle Ages, there was basically no gender distinction in clothing concepts, and the appearance of clothing presented a distinction between the natural body shapes of both genders. In the early stages of the development of Western clothing culture, the form, structure, and style of clothing were relatively simple and single, and there was no distinction between male and female clothing styles. In the long Middle Ages, religious ideas confined the natural light of human nature, causing clothing to exist alone without a close connection with the human body, like a "shell". At the same time, creating such "covers" is often not limited by individual factors, and their fabrics, colors, shapes, become independent constituent factors and receive attention [3].

The 18th century was a period of significant changes in European society. On the one hand, the Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas deeply influenced the political situation in European society. On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution also profoundly changed the face of the world and brought people into the era of capitalism. These historical events have caused significant changes in people's social consciousness. In the past Baroque era, men used excessive attire to showcase their

worth and show off their money and secular status. But in this era of change, men are responsible for advancing toward the great cause of politics, science, society, and nature. They need a simple way of combining clothing, and a dress that can be easily completed. In the 18th century, British men's clothing was the first to break free from the aristocratic affectation and complexity, emphasizing the embodiment of men's dignity, neatness, and rustic temperament, showcasing their unique spiritual charm and bravery. The design of men's clothing is also increasingly focused on drawing simple and capable features from military uniforms [4]. Afterward, the middle class's social circle led to that era's fashion style. Middle-class people wear simple work clothes to demonstrate a rigorous and hardworking work attitude. Black or dark became the main color scheme for men's clothing, and in the 1850s, the simple fitting casual clothing worn by British nobles was exactly what middle-class investors and democrats dressed up at that time. Later, this men's clothing style became a commercial spirit symbol, leading to the birth of suits.

By the 1880s, suits had become popular and evolved into office wear, symbolizing male masculinity. In addition to gender identification, clothing also defines the roles played by two genders [5]. However, women in the 19th century, influenced by traditional beliefs, were confined to their families, believing they could maintain their virtues as long as they stayed at home. But as time goes by, women's gender roles become increasingly complex. On the one hand, they need to follow popular trends, and on the other hand, they need to be virtuous and helpful. In the late 19th century, public comments about corsets began to shake the overall appearance characteristics of traditional women's clothing. The purpose of abdominal girdling is to change a woman's body shape to conform to a feminine image. But corsets can make breathing difficult for women and limit their participation in strenuous activities. Under the influence of public discussions on corsets and the advocacy of national health and sports, women began to relax their corsets, ride bicycles, and enter the male industry [6].

With the arrival of the 20th century, the male image that people praise includes entrepreneurs and sportsmen. Men's clothing is increasingly in line with the requirements of serious occasions. The traditional gender role is: 'Male leads the outside, female leads the inside'. Men emphasize personal achievement and are considered positive individuals in public. Conversely, women emphasize appearance management and are believed to exhibit beauty rather than ability. Therefore, the meaning attached to male clothing has become increasingly concise, while female clothing can continue to acquire various exquisite meanings and constantly innovate [7]. However, in the 1980s, there was a significant shift in women's clothing style. Due to the growth of professional women and successful female models, a new development direction emerged in women's clothing in the 1980s. Some elements that emphasize women's solemnity, authority, and even power is heavily integrated into clothing design. Shoulder pads are seen as an important tool for creating women's authority, and square shoulders look more powerful. At the same time, neutral clothing has become more popular, and many clothing styles are suitable for both men and women, including various styles of sweaters, wide-legged loose pants, and sportswear.

3. The Relevant Background of the Emergence of Western Women's Clothing Style in the 1980s

3.1. Historical Background

The 1960s was the "era of turbulence," and the 1970s was the "era of energy crisis". By the 1980s, all the turbulence, rebellion and challenges had returned to peace, and the global economy was developing rapidly. This is an era of "vitality, enthusiasm, optimism, and even a bit of blindness and arrogance" [8]. American writer Tom Humph referred to this era as "gimme decade", a new word that combines two English words "give" and "me". In this era, a large number of modern-

conscious professional women emerged. These young people who grew up after the war experienced the rebellious 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1980s, they enjoyed the changes brought about by the economic takeoff and abundant material life. Therefore, their values and lifestyle have also undergone significant changes. The growth of professional women and the emergence of successful female models led to a new development direction for women's clothing in the 1980s [9]. At the same time, the abundance of material means of production brought economic materialism and hedonism to society then. Most consumers have started to pursue famous brands, with trademarks being exposed first, fearing that no one will know because it symbolizes success, wealth, and social status. In the 1980s, the boundary between art and goods became increasingly blurred, and the general public began to pursue a more tasteful lifestyle. Fashion designers are no longer limited to the scope of male and female fashion design, but are involved in a comprehensive design of lifestyle [10].

However, the takeoff of the capitalist economy also implies extremely strong uncertainty. The economic recession has gradually become a nightmare for many developed countries. To save costs, the clothing processing industry has begun to relocate to the Asia Pacific region, where labor costs are low. The end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the drastic political changes in Eastern Europe have also had a huge impact on the world political landscape, and more and more people are paying attention to and reflecting on many social issues in reality. After experiencing the 'swaying 1960s' and' wild 1970s', people have returned to orthodoxy and women's clothing styles have become more formal. Some former youth groups, such as punks, have also abandoned their rebellious spirit and moved towards fashion and romance. The representative Gothic rock is still mainly black, but in terms of materials and decoration techniques, it is more novel and often has some romantic elements from the Middle Ages. In addition, rap hip-hop fashion has become popular among young people, and the combination of sportswear and exaggerated necklaces, accessories, or headscarves has become a classic style [11].

3.2. Phenomenon

3.2.1. The Emergence of Professional Women

The 1980s were full of fierce competition, and the image of strong women in clothing became the main trend. It manifests as wearing a suit with a men's suit style, sunglasses, and high heels. The color is gray-black, and the style is neutral [10].

In the 1980s, feminism dominated the world, and feminist movements rose and fell in various places, creating a group of strong female figures. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher regained British leadership from the Labour Party and became the first female Prime Minister, while female singer Madonna became a prominent figure in the feminist world. The emergence of professional women has made women no longer cling to the feminine image of past ladies. To facilitate work, women have to abandon the complicated fashion and change into the capable and stable masculinization uniform. Americans first proposed this concept in 1975 and quickly became popular among working women in the United States. It later spread to the UK and even the entire Europe. The increasing proportion of women in the company and the changing status have led to changes in their attire. Professional women's clothing with rich colors, no accessories, and almost no gender characteristics was the overall expression of the 1980s [12].

3.2.2. The Emerging "Yuppie" Clan

The most fashionable form in the 1980s was "yuppy". This term was coined in the 1980s and is often used to describe arrogant, wealthy, and repulsive young people. "Yuppie" is often associated with behaviors such as fashion attire and flaunting wealth. But now people have new insights into

the term "yuppie", which more often describes young professionals who live in big cities, possess knowledge and skills, and value a good quality of life.

The 1980s was the era of "yuppies". Yuppies have a superior social background, such as high social status and generous salaries. They may not necessarily be young, but their pursuit of luxury items and high-end enjoyment is still full of enthusiasm. Yuppies dress meticulously and are well-groomed, revealing their good living conditions. Yappies often wear double breasted, old-fashioned suits with thick shoulder pads, symbolizing their power. Many famous designers have strengthened the edges and corners of men's physiques through shoulder pads, making them more masculinization. However, the style of yuppies is not limited to male groups, and female yuppies are also not rare. Their formal attire is exquisitely cut, with wide shoulder pads and a tight short skirt paired with a well-crafted shirt. The design of shoulder pads is borrowed from men's clothing, symbolizing authority, strength, and seriousness. In addition to daily wear, the design of evening wear is also a challenge to tradition. Nevertheless, the opening design has received sufficient attention, with balloon skirts, bubble sleeves, bright colors, and shiny fabrics being trendy design elements of this era [8].

4. The Characteristics of Western Women's Clothing in the 1980s

4.1. Clothing Style

In the 1980s, women's clothing was designed with the characteristics of men's clothing, emphasizing the contour structure while neglecting the details of decoration. On the one hand, this style evolved into women's masculinization. On the other hand, it was replaced by minimalism and deconstruction in the late 1980s and developed into a neutral style in the 1990s [13].

At the same time, the clothing style shows exaggeration and extravagance. This is because the prevalence of material girls has imbued the fashion industry with flashy colors, such as sparkling colors and flashy smoky makeup. The overall characteristics of clothing are presented as large or even huge, with the outer contour shape, style details, and even clothing accessories taking on a wide form. This is also the main difference between the 1980s style and other styles [12].

4.2. Stylistic Feature

In the 1980s, women's clothing styles presented features of classic elegance and casual practicality, maintaining the silhouette and details of men's clothing in suits and coats. The design of women's clothing mainly focuses on the upper part, ignoring the lower body. Shoulders were the main manifestation of women's clothing in that era, as they borrowed from the craftsmanship and structure of men's clothing. Shoulder pads were installed inside the clothing to widen the shoulders, with edges, angles, and squareness, resulting in an exaggerated and spacious design. At the same time, due to body shape, women are born with a sunken collarbone, and the addition of shoulder pads can compensate for and lift the shoulder line, creating a unique sense of strength for women's clothing, which is very suitable for professional women to wear. In addition to using shoulder pads, the large sleeve shape of bubble sleeves can also achieve shoulder enlargement effect. Integrating the princess-style bubble sleeve design into the exquisite and capable suit adds a romantic touch to the personalized and bold women's clothing design. At the same time, exaggerated sleeve shapes, such as bat sleeves, were widely used in that era. In terms of collar design, it draws inspiration from the collar shape of men's clothing. It is neat and rigorous, like a lapel or standing collar in a suit. This exaggerated structure meets the overall clothing design requirements and conforms to the image characteristics of professional women. Pants, as exclusive items for men, have also become common for women. If YSL's cigarette pants in the 1960s were still in the upper class, then pants from the 1980s were widely popular among the general social class. With the popularity of pants,

the waist design of women's clothing in the 1980s gradually evolved into a high-waisted structure. Various matching shirts are stuffed into the waistband of high-waisted pants, paired with wide waistbands, waist decorations, etc., which can enhance women's lines and strengthen their handsome appearance. In the 1980s, women's clothing mostly had a loose waist structure, presenting the characteristics of men's clothing. There is also a skinny waistband that showcases masculine qualities while also exuding feminine sexiness [10].

4.3. Clothing Decoration

Bright and vibrant colors are the best embodiment of the 1980s style, popular with the popularity of disco. The colors of the 1980s were quite impetuous, resulting in a fluorescent and bright visual effect. At the same time, the organic lacquer leather that presented a flaunting and impetuous feeling was a typical material of the 1980s. It was originally a product of rock music, but it became popular with the brilliance of rock music and the promotion of singers such as Madonna and also brought patent leather underwear and high heels to the world. In addition, luxurious effects such as bright satin, fur, and decorative materials such as glitter and gemstones are commonly used.

Regarding accessories, dazzling large earrings are trendy among young men and women, and even earring-sized buttons are placed on clothing to attract attention. Diamonds, treasures, and gold necklaces are also paired with the protagonist. In addition, colorful plastic earrings and bracelets are popular, with enlarged shapes. Giant earrings can even hang down to the shoulders. With the support of new technology, electronic watches with metal straps have become popular, while plastic Swatch watches are full of youthful vitality. Cartier's Tank watch and Rolex have also become important props to showcase their identity. Raymond sunglasses have also become widely popular due to the movie "Miami Storm" and have become fashionable items due to the wearing of celebrities such as Jackson and Madonna. Transparent PVC plastic shoes are bright and shiny, earning the nickname of "jelly shoes", cheap and beautiful. The Martin boots that were popular in the 1970s were still popular, but their combinations were more diverse and fashionable. The handbag symbolizing power and authority became an important accessory, while the constantly developing Chanel 2.55 handbag became a dream item for women at that time [11].

5. Factors Influencing the Evolution of Western Women's Clothing Styles in the 1980s

5.1. Social Figures

The 1980s was an era where women were not inferior to men, and it was an era where women called for equality with men in social status. Women aspire to participate in social work like male citizens but are oppressed and discriminated against by male society in many fields. Therefore, in terms of appearance, women no longer want to be a symbol of weakness and petiteness. Women hope to have the same strength and wisdom as men through clothing to strive for equal opportunities for competition. At this point, the symbolic function of clothing becomes very important. The style of women's clothing began to trend towards straightness and grandeur, and the inverted triangle clothing full of male characteristics was popular at that time. The independent female image was highly praised, with clothing emphasizing the silhouette of the shoulder shape and the widened shoulders expressing women's pursuit of gender equality at that time. Masculinity is no longer exclusive to men; women can also express strong traits [14].

5.2. Economic Factors

In the 1980s, material products were extremely abundant, and economic materialism became the center of life. The clothing of the 1980s also adapted to this material tendency, wearing for

enjoyment and success. The prevalence of material girls has imbued the fashion industry with exaggerated colors, sparkling colors, and flashy smoky makeup, expressing women's pursuit of material things. These two changes in the aesthetic image caused the 1980s, which still impacts current trends. In this era, rationalism has been re-mentioned, Functionalism has been re-emphasized, and new modernist clothing began to develop. In the 1980s, there were no moral or ideological issues. The Cold War was ending, and Gorbachev's reforms, Poland's solidarity work, and China's reform and opening-up policies were all heralding the arrival of a relaxed era. The center of the entire world was economic growth and expansion. The young people of this generation have never experienced war or suffering. Even the economic recession is something in the textbooks for them. They have no object or ideological belief. Naked pragmatism is their creed. The economy is loose, the career is successful, and the material life is abundant, it is the goal they pursue [8].

5.3. Driving of Fashion Leaders

Firstly, it is Mrs. Thatcher. She was elected as Prime Minister of the UK in 1979 and became a model of successful women. Undoubtedly, she was the most dazzling political star of the 1980s and the most influential fashion star. Her determination and confidence on the political stage have earned her the nickname "Iron Lady", also reflected in her attire. Mrs. Thatcher is famous for her traditional suit dresses, often paired with various silk shirts. For her classic outfit, she is self-evident, "I always feel very safe wearing it. In terms of accessories, whether earrings, brooches, or necklaces, pearls are her top choice. In addition, various styles of handbags are also a must-have for her, symbolizing her resilient personality and negotiation style. Mrs. Thatcher's image and attire became a model of successful and professional women, and made outstanding contributions to the emergence and development of the "power suit" in the 1980s [11].

Secondly, it is Princess Diana. The 1981 British Royal Wedding caused a worldwide sensation, and the 25-meter-long wedding dress Princess Diana wore became a classic. Afterwards, the beautiful and fashionable Diana became the trendsetter of the 1980s. Since becoming Princess Charles in 1981, Diana has become another successful woman outside of Thatcher, with considerable influence and market effects. Although her marital life was unhappy, she appeared as strong as steel and actively participated in various public welfare and charitable causes. She became a celebrity in the 1980s with a compassionate heart and fashionable makeup [11]. Diana has her own style in dressing and dressing. Whether it's the dress design she wore during events, the matching of suits for formal occasions, or the casual attire she wears in daily life, they are all very fashionable, and even now they are not outdated. Looking at most of Diana's fashion styles, it can be seen that she knows a lot about color matching and uses clothing color matching to enhance her temperament.

Finally, there is the fashion star in the entertainment industry: Madonna. Singer Madonna was undoubtedly a highly anticipated idol in the 1980s. She not only created brilliant music, but also had unparalleled influence in the fashion industry. Her success was attributed to the expansion and development of popular culture in the 1980s, while also achieving a legendary period of that era. Madonna's music, hot dance, and clothing have always caused a stir in the fashion industry. Her style is very bold and exaggerated, with fluffy blonde hair, sexy and full flame red lips, and a wide jacket or leather jacket all becoming her signature. At the first MTV Music Video Awards in 1984, Madonna performed "Like a Virgin" on stage. During the singing process, she wore a revealing bra, provocative fishing net stockings under a mini skirt, and rolled on stage with her iconic "Boy Toy" belt, occasionally making some hot and suggestive movements. Since then, Madonna has become a synonym for sexiness, and this kind of bad girl like casual attire has unexpectedly become popular and caught the attention of the high-end fashion industry, attracting designer Jean Paul Gaultier to

customize her world-renowned tapered bra, transforming her into a timeless fashion idol. She leads not only fashion, but also an unrestrained and self-fulfilling attitude.

5.4. The Impact of the Development of Postmodern Feminism

Feminism refers to the exploration and attention to gender inequality, and is a movement for gender equality. The emergence of feminism originated in the 18th century with the rise of the Enlightenment movement. Although the thinkers of this period strongly criticized the feudal despotism, religious ignorance and privilege, they publicized the ideas of freedom, democracy and equality. But they ignored the inequality in social status between women and men. Therefore, those feminists began to question the idea that women were considered second-class citizens, which led to the emergence of feminist trends. Afterwards, feminism began to develop and continue to grow. In the 1920s to 1930s, the development of the Industrial Revolution in Britain allowed more women to participate in industrial labor and social activities, and the first movement for political rights was launched, demanding equal job opportunities and wages as men. Feminists in this period began to call for gender equality and women's independent socioeconomic status. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, women began to focus on obtaining equal rights with men in areas such as education and legislative power, but they were still in the practical stage. From the early 20th century to the 1960s, the liberation movement of middle-class women in the United States broke out. They expressed dissatisfaction with the social division of labor at that time and advocated for "eliminating gender differences". As a result, an increasing number of women are occupying leadership positions in social work, and the socialist and sexual freedom colors of feminism have become even stronger. Since the 1960s, we have entered the period of postmodern feminism. In 1980, the female group began to have a certain position in the professional field. With the development of the women's clothing market and the spread of feminist ideas, the female group was also more willing to try various styles of clothing for different social occasions. To cater to women's career development, women's clothing brands continue to incorporate feminist elements into their designs and develop towards neutrality. Armani Power Suit is a representative of this period. Women's clothing is gradually becoming "neutral"[15].

5.5. Improvement of Clothing Production System

The fashion industry's increasingly mature market operation mechanism in the 1980s provided new guarantees for clothing design the 1980s and created myths about clothing brand names—for example, Amani, Versace, Yohji Yamamoto, and Rei Kawakubo. The evening wear design of that era emphasized the shoulders equally, and the entire design was almost hysterical and even neurotic. Balloon skirts, bubble sleeves, and sparkling fabrics with vulgar colors were the costumes that made women willing to take risks at parties ecstatic.

Based on the characteristics of advocating environmental protection and paying attention to ecology in the 1980s, people tend to oppose the waste of resources, excessive consumption, and returning to nature under the influence of environmental awareness. In terms of clothing, it refers to the popularity of "natural color", "natural style", and "nostalgic style" clothing that advocates nature and is inspired by it [8].

6. Conclusion

This article provides a detailed analysis of the Western women's clothing styles of the 1980s from multiple perspectives, including historical, social, and economic perspectives. However, the research limitation of this article is that it only focuses on analyzing the daily and work clothing of

Western women in the 1980s and lacks descriptions of other types of women's clothing. Future research can focus more on analyzing styles other than these two.

The Western women's clothing style of the 1980s was unique. Even though that era has passed, it still remains popular, providing reference and inspiration for future fashion design. Therefore, women's clothing during this period has great research value. Nowadays, women's clothing in the 1980s has become a "retro style" in the eyes of many people and is loved by many people. It leads fashion in a unique form. Not only that, the analysis of Western women's clothing in the 1980s can also provide research ideas for scholars in other related fields.

In the end, excellent clothing culture is worth and needs to be inherited, and some styles can still be popular in the development and evolution of clothing for decades or even centuries, never disappearing from the public's perspective. In a sense, it plays a positive role in social development and cultural inheritance.

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