

Women's Fashion in the 1940s.

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Abstract: The two world wars in the 20th century had a great impact on the European clothing industry, and to some extent, they also promoted the development of fashion industry. European designers have designed "wartime clothes" to meet the needs of women's work and life during the war. "Wartime clothing" is a breakthrough and development of traditional clothing, and its unique characteristics shine brilliantly in wartime. In order to liberate the people from the shadow of war after the war, Dior's "new look" was a booster for the fashion industry market facing the crisis at that time. The raging war still didn't interrupt the fashion industry, which also reflected people's yearning for a peaceful life and their helplessness to the cold life during wartime.

Keywords: Fashion, Rebirth from the fire, Dior, New look.

1. Background of the Times

According to common sense, war is devastating, and it destroys the country's economy, population, ecological environment and even human civilization. The war has brought trauma to people's hearts and the lack of living materials. Under the raging fire, do you still have to dress up? Not really. Judging from the development of fashion industry during the two world wars, the war did not stop the fashion industry and fashion derivatives. With the outbreak of the war, women began to work and became an indispensable force in the war. From clerks to engineers, from operators to intelligence agents, women's social status improved, and they were under the double pressure of family and society. In order to meet the needs of women's convenience in work, a series of "wartime clothes" were born, and their light, simple and comfortable clothes were deeply welcomed by wartime women. This has promoted the development of fashion industry to a certain extent, and provided style reference for later fashion designers.

2. Wartime Clothing Style Characteristics

The wartime pattern of World War I and the distribution after the war had a great impact on the clothing industry that had not yet fully developed. Women's participation in the war and production activities had a great impact on traditional clothing concepts, forms and tailoring. This period can be regarded as the beginning of modern clothing in the true sense. Influenced by many aspects such as decoration, Russian ballet and oriental style, the costumes during World War I are quite different from the traditional European costumes a few years ago. In Paris, some upper-class ladies wearing novel bottom-opening clothes and heavy make-up contend with conservatives, while in the design of clothes, influenced by the oriental style, colorful, cumbersome-cut clothes go hand in hand with light and comfortable casual clothes. Although the war destroyed the clothing industry, Europe did not interrupt its development.

After the outbreak of World War II, the invasion of France by Germany brought a heavy blow to the French nation. With the outbreak of the economic crisis, governments of various countries began to order restrictions on the use of personal clothing. In this harsh environment, French designers

overcame many difficulties and designed wartime clothes that met the needs of the war. Women affected by the war began to gradually abandon the traditional long skirt design and turn to more professional clothes, such as knee-length simple dresses. [1] In order to meet the principle of wartime frugality, the designers turned patches into wartime fashionable elements, or piled up decorations on hats, which was called a major feature at that time. The war prompted the French fashion industry to change from visual aesthetics to functional and light modern clothing.

2.1. Concise and functional

Before the First World War, European women had the custom of changing their clothes every day. They wore simple casual clothes for breakfast, changed into formal clothes after breakfast, and had more elegant evening dresses for dinner and social activities. [2] Because of the baptism of the war, even the upper class aristocrats didn't pay too much attention to their dressing. After 1914, the concept of "dressing for all occasions" prevailed, and suits for various occasions appeared on the historical stage. At the same time, women are more and more involved in sports activities. Traditional sports clothes can't meet the needs of women's sports. Narrow tops, heavy skirts that reach the feet undoubtedly hinder women's sports. At this time, French designer Gabrielle Chanel designed the first functional sportswear (Figure 1) to meet women's sports. The loose and simple cut and cotton fabric design, inspired by women's underwear, was called a major breakthrough in wartime clothing at that time.

During the Second World War, due to the limitation of cloth and the length of skirt, daytime suit skirts were short tops and narrow knee-length skirts, and the colors were all gray, which was very simple compared with the delicate and elegant women's clothing before the Second World War. (Figure 2) The excessive decoration of the hat is in sharp contrast to the simple suit uniform.



Figure 1. Chanel and her lover Duke of Westminster Abbey (1924)



Figure 2. Women who rode bicycles in Paris during World War II

2.2. Integration of military uniform style

In 1915, European fashion designers brought military uniform elements into fashion design, which made military khaki cloth with military colors become fashionable. Well-tailored military uniform style was popular with women at that time, with neutral style, clear waist, jacket pocket and comfortable fabric for easy cleaning. The choice of fabric has replaced the love of form. At that time, shirts and jackets called "sailor's clothes" were sought after by the majority of women for their softness, comfort and ease of matching. (Figure 3) During World War II, the military uniform style was more integrated into daytime clothes, with high shoulder pads, narrow waist, tough cut lines, without adding any excessive decoration, which was quite strict and disciplined in wartime. This was sought after by upper-class women at that time, and the tough coat profile made women more heroic. Givenchy showed his military uniform design in the fashion show at that time. (Figure 4)



Figure 3. Sailors' shirts during World War I



Figure 4. Givenchy's haute couture for that time.

2.3. The rise of trousers

The official rise of trousers was during the First World War. In wartime, the male population decreased sharply, and women began to go out to work and participate in social construction. Traditional long skirts caused inconvenience in work and life, so pants developed to replace long skirts as the first choice for women's daytime clothes. However, at this time, the society could not fully accept the status of pants, which only existed as women's overalls. By the second world war, the American fashion trend had influenced the whole of Europe, and the overalls and jeans of American workers had deeply influenced the French fashion industry. This dirt-resistant, wear-resistant, comfortable to wear and easy to clean feature was loved by Europeans in wartime. Even Marilyn Monroe recalled: When I was working in a factory, the uniform I gave was overalls, which was a must, because it was dirt-resistant and wear-resistant, so it was particularly popular in wartime. At first, it was just a kind of overalls, but later it became a sexy fashion. [3] (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Left: Schiaparelli's jumpsuit; Right: movie star Lillia Palmer wearing slacks.

3. The Rebirth of Fashion

After the First World War, short-sleeved clothes with bare ankles came into people's lives, and people hoped to forget the pain of war and great liberation. The short style was convenient for activities and released people's feelings suppressed by war. The fashion after World War II was created by Christian Dior in a new era.

A few years after the war, Paris's fashion was still in crisis,

and people longed for beautiful clothes to light up their gloomy life. On February 12th, 1947, French designer Christian Dior launched his new fashion design. "We are eager to escape from the war years, away from those military uniforms and female soldiers who look like boxers. I shaped women into flowers, soft shoulders, slender waist like vines, and a skirt like a corolla." [4] This narrow shoulder with shoulder pads removed, slim waist, and a raised skirt is only 20cm from the ground. The amount of materials used is jaw-dropping. This fashion caught people's attention instantly, and the editor of Harper's Bazaar at that time praised the design as "New Look". Since then, this skirt with "corolla lines" showing feminine femininity has been called "new look". (Figure 6)

The rise of the "new look" is a signal that Christian Dior is coming out of the shadows, and it is a great relief for the women who were rebuilt after the war and became insensitive by the war. It reflected people's helplessness to the social life at that time, and hoped that the human body could express its desire for beauty with the help of clothing, which reflected the social status of women at that time. [5]



Figure 6. In February, 1947, Dior introduced the new design of "New Look"

4. Conclusion

The spirit of war can always be reflected in people's costumes. [6] The psychological and physical damage caused by the two world wars to people is enormous. In the war, women are forced by the situation to participate in heavy labor and adapt to it. Clothing in the war is not only a design to meet the social form, but also a yearning for a better life from people's hearts. Despite the shortage of materials and fabrics, designers still make the best use of them, designing beautiful and practical clothes to the greatest extent, and always reminding women in the war to keep an elegant attitude despite their hardships. The development of war fashion is the attitude of people in war, strong and full of hope, and hope for peace and a better life.

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