

Application Methods of Qing Dynasty Cloud Shoulders in Modern Women's Fashion

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Abstract: Traditional Chinese elements are the essence of China's traditional clothing culture, and the organic combination of traditional elements with modern design is a timeless topic. The cloud shoulder, as a unique garment style, features rich shapes and decorative patterns, along with profound cultural connotations. It provides inspiration for modern fashion design and serves as a valuable material that should not be overlooked. The cloud shoulder has a unique charm and acts as a medium where traditional culture and craftsmanship converge. In ancient Chinese clothing culture, the cloud shoulder from the Qing Dynasty can be seen as an important symbolic element that ingeniously integrates historical culture and folk art. By analyzing specific cases of contemporary women's fashion design, we can distill the design principles and application methods of cloud shoulder elements in women's clothing. This exploration seeks to identify suitable design methods that combine traditional elements with modern design, offering new ideas for the inheritance and development of traditional cloud shoulders.

Keywords: Cloud Shoulders, Women's Clothing Design, Innovative Application.

1. Introduction

As of May 2024, a total of 102 papers were retrieved on the theme of "cloud shoulders" and "clothing design," showing an overall upward trend in research interest. Gu Shuang, in the paper "Research on the Aesthetic Value and Innovative Design of Ming-Qing Cloud Shoulders," analyzed the aesthetic characteristics of Ming-Qing cloud shoulders based on Oriental aesthetics. The paper dissected the structure, patterns, and color combinations, and proposed a deconstructive design of cloud shoulder shapes based on the integration of Eastern and Western design concepts [1]. Sang Wanxia, in "Research on the Application of Cloud Shoulder Elements in Modern Clothing Design," studied the application of cloud shoulder elements in modern women's, men's, and children's clothing design. The research categorized the applications into direct use, combination use, homophonic use, and modified use of cloud shoulders in children's clothing and school uniforms. It proposed new design ideas for cloud shoulder elements in modern clothing design, aiming to universalize cloud shoulder elements by integrating the essence of cloud shoulder culture with modern clothing design. Through visual effects and new techniques, the paper suggested transforming cloud shoulders to meet modern people's aesthetic needs for fashion, allowing cloud shoulder elements to extend and truly enter everyday wear [2]. Yu Mingze's "Research on the Design Application of Sihetongrui Cloud Shoulders in Modern Women's Clothing" specifically analyzed the aesthetic characteristics of Sihetongrui-style cloud shoulders. The paper integrated Sihetongrui cloud shoulders into modern women's clothing design based on the development status and needs of contemporary women's clothing [3].

2. The Innovative Application of Cloud Shoulder Styling

In the process of integrating Qing Dynasty cloud shoulder elements with modern women's clothing, transforming the

style and design of the cloud shoulders is a commonly used method. By exploring the unique cutting, silhouette, and structure of Qing Dynasty cloud shoulders, clothing can be endowed with a rich visual effect. During the design transformation, it's important to rationalize the clothing structure and fully consider the practical functionality of the clothing. This involves creatively transforming the design from an ergonomic perspective, ensuring that it is both visually appealing and comfortable for the wearer.

2.1. Direct Application

The Qing Dynasty cloud shoulder style embodies the cultural background and aesthetic taste of a specific historical period during the integration of the Manchu and Han ethnicities. This style is directly applied in some period dramas, red carpet fashion, and daily life. Domestic designer brands such as Guo Pei and Tu Yue have also directly incorporated cloud shoulder elements into their clothing collections. By directly applying the cloud shoulder styling in designs, modifications and changes are made to its production techniques and material characteristics to align with modern aesthetics and meet the demands of contemporary consumers.

In the historical TV drama "The Story of Minglan," set in the late Qing Dynasty, the cloud shoulder style is extensively used, and there are significant differences in the styles of cloud shoulders worn by characters from different backgrounds in various scenes. For instance, Sun Li's character Zhou Rong, as the young mistress of the Wu family's weaving business, primarily wears single-layer Sihetongrui-style and single-layer diamond-shaped cloud shoulders, but with intricate designs to showcase her status. The Empress Dowager in the drama wears a layered cascade cloud shoulder (Figure 1), which is the most magnificent style seen in the series, emphasizing her noble status.

In Guo Pei's 2012 design of a traditional Chinese wedding dress with a cloud shoulder and a phoenix-tail skirt (Figure 2), the upper garment features a double-layered cascade cloud shoulder with a round structure, showcasing architectural eaves and ridges. The skirt is made of strips of colored silk

with golden thread embroidery of floral and bird patterns, creating a dreamy and festive atmosphere. In recent years, with the rise of Chinese style and Oriental aesthetics, many students have chosen to wear traditional cloud shoulders (Figure 3) with their graduation gowns, adding their own Eastern charm. These styles are often interlinked, layered, exquisitely designed, and paired with graduation gowns to create a beautiful and elegant look, showing creativity and uniqueness.



Figure 1. Layered Cascade Cloud Shoulder in the TV Drama 'The Story of Minglan'



Figure 2. Guo Pei's 2012 Collection of Traditional Chinese Wedding Dresses



Figure 3. Sihetongruyi-style Cloud Shoulders

2.2. Abstract Generalization

In order to align with contemporary aesthetics, facilitate everyday wear, and inject new vitality into traditional culture, abstracting and generalizing cloud shoulder designs is a common technique in design. This involves exploring the unique cutting, shape, silhouette, and details of cloud shoulders to give clothing a personalized visual effect. By

flexibly applying this design technique, it not only showcases the innovative vitality of cloud shoulder styling but also optimizes visual effects to create a fusion of contemporary aesthetics and classical elements [4]. Common techniques include stacking, partial exaggeration, deconstruction, and others.

The re-creation of this element is mainly reflected in the contour and curves, sense of layers and three-dimensionality, and emphasis on shoulders and upper body. The flowing shape of cloud shoulders is reshaped in contemporary clothing design, creating dynamic visual effects. The use of contour and curves mainly involves retaining the main external features of cloud shoulder styling, removing excess elements, and emphasizing the expression of certain core elements to showcase aesthetic emotions. Internally, curved lines are often used for segmentation, forming edge shapes composed of many styling symbols with curved and winding forms. The segmentation design often uses shared forms, which have strong plasticity.

Messential is committed to delving into Oriental aesthetics, and its series of designs effectively simplify and refine the complex cloud shoulder styling, creating a unique and minimalist Chinese style (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Messential's single-layer draped cloud shoulder

Cloud shoulders feature a layered structure that is cleverly utilized in contemporary designs. Through multiple layers of fabric, structured cuts, and overlapping designs, clothing presents a rich sense of depth. This layering not only gives depth to the clothing but also adds visual interest. Designers can create garments that are both modern and retain traditional beauty through this approach. Chanel's 2024 Spring/Summer haute couture collection extracts the outer contour of cloud shoulders (Figure 5), summarized as circular decorations on the collar and shoulders. Lightweight chiffon, interspersed feathers, pleats, layered thin chiffon, embroidery, and diagonal twill combine in craftsmanship. The classic elements of cloud shoulders merge with watercolor-like shades of pink and green, showcasing the feminine delicacy and strength. This emphasizes Chanel's independent yet soft feminine temperament, paying homage to elegance and practicality.

The design of cloud shoulders is often used to highlight the shoulder and upper body areas. In contemporary fashion design, this characteristic is magnified and reinterpreted. By emphasizing the upper body through exaggerated shoulder structures, three-dimensional cuts, and intricate patterns, a strong visual focus is created. These structural designs have a significant impact in modern fashion, showcasing personal style and creating unique visual appeal.

In Christian Dior's Spring/Summer 1998 show, overseen by John Galliano, Eastern and Western elements were combined with luxurious courtly feelings, named "DIORIENT EXPRESS." Elements representing the East such as brocade and fasteners were incorporated into a setting reminiscent of a glamorous salon dance party, including cloud shoulders. In this look (Figure 6), the single-piece Sihetongrui cloud shoulder is exaggerated, covering the upper body as an embellishment structure for the neckline. Embellishments like pearls, embroidery, and appliqué add to the opulence, blending Eastern craftsmanship into a Western courtly atmosphere. This fusion perfectly combines Dior's tradition with modernity, showcasing a fashionable attitude that is both avant-garde and classic.



Figure 5. Chanel's 2024 Spring/Summer Haute Couture Collection



Figure 6. Christian Dior's 1998 Spring/Summer Collection

Structure design is a key element in contemporary fashion design, and the styling of Qing Dynasty cloud shoulders provides designers with a rich source of inspiration. By drawing from the flowing shape, sense of layers, and graceful curves of cloud shoulders, designers can create unique and culturally meaningful clothing pieces. This fusion of traditional and modern structural design not only injects new vitality into fashion but also allows traditional culture to continue and develop in contemporary times.

3. Innovative Application of Pattern Designs

The application of Qing Dynasty cloud shoulder patterns in contemporary fashion design provides designers with extensive creative space. In the decoration process of modern clothing, the application of cloud shoulder decoration is not

done in the traditional flat layout. Instead, it adopts a clustered composition method, concentrating the patterns in a specific area. This use of large block application methods enhances visual impact, which is beneficial for the aesthetic enhancement of modern clothing's simple lines. Starting from the angles of "pattern refinement," "pattern structure restructuring," and "pattern semi-three-dimensionality," designers can modernize traditional patterns and create innovative designs.

3.1. Pattern Refinement

Refinement refers to extracting key elements from complex traditional patterns, simplifying and modernizing them. Designers use this method to preserve the core characteristics of cloud shoulders while giving them a modern touch. By simplifying cloud shoulder patterns and extracting key shapes or symbols, designers make them more suitable for modern clothing design. For example, transforming traditional patterns like cloud motifs or florals into geometric shapes, lines, or simple curves to achieve a more minimalist look. During the refinement process, designers can combine traditional patterns with modern elements to create a new style.

In the niche designer brand UNSPOKEN's 2023 Autumn/Winter collection (Figure 7), they extracted the cloud shoulder pattern at the neckline and created hollowed-out designs, using curved lines to form edge shapes and applying edge-stitching techniques. The white cloud shoulder design at the neckline breaks the monotony of the overall black outfit and adds a touch of Chinese style, bringing a sense of elegance.

3.2. Deconstruction and Recombination

Deconstruction and restructuring involve recombining traditional patterns to create new design layouts. By changing the arrangement and structure of patterns, designers can give traditional patterns new life. Symmetrical cloud shoulder patterns can be rearranged into asymmetrical structures or extended throughout the entire garment to create a cohesive design. By juxtaposing different cloud shoulder patterns, designers can create diverse clothing designs. Combining different traditional patterns or integrating them with other modern patterns results in a unique hybrid style.

In the Gaia Legend 2020 Spring/Summer collection, inspired by the Ballad of Mulan, many designs were derived from traditional Chinese clothing. One ensemble (Figure 8) combines cloud shoulders with a standing collar, creating a sleek and concise silhouette. The edge of the collar structure extracts botanical patterns from the cloud shoulder pattern, specifically the curling vine pattern, refining and extending it to create a simplified and streamlined look. This design reflects the loyalty, courage, and fearless spirit of Mulan defending her family and country. The shoulder structure combines materials like thick leather, bark satin, with rolled edges and embroidery, showcasing strength and grace.

3.3. Semi-three-dimensionality

Semi-three-dimensionality refers to giving traditional flat patterns a certain sense of three-dimensionality, making them more vivid visually. This technique enhances the layering and visual depth of clothing. Designers typically use embroidery and decorations along with three-dimensional structures at the neckline to achieve a semi-three-dimensional effect. Through techniques like embroidery, beading, lace, etc., designers can

transform flat cloud shoulder patterns into semi-three-dimensional ones. This method adds rich texture to clothing and strengthens the visual impact of traditional elements. Designers can use the shape of cloud shoulders to create three-dimensional structures. By layering, cutting, and designing multiple layers, they give cloud shoulder patterns a semi-three-dimensional feel, creating unique contours and layers on the garment.

Embroidery and decoration are common craftsmanship techniques on traditional cloud shoulders. Modern techniques have evolved to include machine embroidery, metal thread embroidery, bead embroidery, seed stitch embroidery, and others to create a semi-three-dimensional visual effect. In Burberry's 2017 collection (Figure 9), the visual focus is placed on the shoulder design through the use of semi-three-dimensional design techniques. The design extracts the shoulder structure of cloud shoulders and achieves a three-dimensional design effect by stacking thin traditional cloud shoulder pieces of fabric. Delicate lace materials are layered in a staggered manner to create levels, and lightweight netting is embellished with feathers and fur, arranged in different materials to create a fresh and playful look.

Through the perspectives of "pattern refinement," "pattern structure restructuring," and "pattern semi-three-dimensionality," designers can flexibly use Qing Dynasty cloud shoulder patterns in contemporary fashion design. These methods not only preserve the essence of traditional culture but also combine it with modern design to create unique and creative clothing pieces. This innovative approach injects new vitality into fashion design and brings more attention to Chinese traditional elements in the global fashion industry.



Figure 7. Unspoken 2023 current collection for sale



Figure 8. Gaia Legend 2020 Spring/Summer Collection



Figure 9. Burberry 2017 Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear Collection

4. Innovative Application of Color Matching

Color has a strong visual impact and expressive tension, making it the most direct factor influencing consumers' sensory perception of clothing. The color matching of traditional cloud shoulders is very meticulous, as mentioned in "Xian Qing Ou Ji," "(Cloud shoulders) must be of the same color as the garment, visible up close but almost invisible from a distance, which is appropriate." Cloud shoulders, as clothing accessories, serve to embellish and enhance the overall appearance, playing a role in the overall dressing process. In terms of individual cloud shoulders, their color matching follows strict standards and is directly linked to traditional Yin and Yang Five Elements colors. Following the basic rule of "Five Virtues Interdependence," in traditional societies that maintain hierarchical systems using colors, five colors are classified as "correct colors," while colors between two correct colors are classified as "intermediate colors." The strong and bold colors of cloud shoulders not only reflect traditional aesthetic concepts but also serve as an external expression of traditional culture and hierarchical systems [5].

In the innovative use of contemporary fashion design, utilizing the color matching of cloud shoulders well can create a unique design style. The innovative use of cloud shoulder colors mainly involves extracting and applying cloud shoulder color matching to the overall color scheme of clothing or combining traditional cloud shoulder styles with trendy colors to give them new vitality. In contemporary innovative designs, cloud shoulders are often used as a source of inspiration for creative fashion design due to their unique aesthetic value and cultural significance. In the fashion show of outstanding graduates from Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, students seamlessly integrated cloud shoulder colors into contemporary creative clothing (Figure 10). The overall color scheme is dominated by intermediate colors, with green as the main color and red as the secondary color. The combination of red and green is neither flashy nor vulgar but has a strong Chinese charm. In Mini BAZAAR March 2023 issue (Figure 11), the cover clothing highlights the effect of cloud shoulder colors as a visual focal point. The traditional cloud shoulder silhouette is exaggerated and enlarged, with purity adjustments to its original colors, making it more vibrant and eye-catching, creating a visual impact.



Figure 10. Zhejiang Sci-Tech University 2023 student graduation works



Figure 11. MiniBAZAAR March 2023 issue

5. Innovative Application of Craft Materials

The production of Qing Dynasty Yunjian is intricate, involving complex craftsmanship and requiring mastery of traditional embroidery techniques. Its manual crafting is based on embroidery, painting, inlaying, patching, pasting, and nailing, among other techniques. Due to its difficulty and time-consuming nature, traditional Yunjian production is mostly seen in high-end couture dressmaking. For instance, in the 2023 Lawrence Collection (Image 12) at Paris Fashion Week, the Gong Wang series of designs heavily employs Yunjian styling and its craftsmanship. The shoulder pattern in the image utilizes the representative embroidery technique of Yunjian, known as "dazise" embroidery, creating lifelike dragon motifs that are dynamic and vibrant. The edge of the Yunjian is creatively developed based on traditional edge embellishment techniques, reinforced and decorated using beadwork.

Given the complexity of traditional crafting procedures and the challenges involved, many designers innovate the crafting techniques when designing Yunjian to achieve different design effects. In the Burberry 2017 Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear Collection, Yunjian styling is extensively used, incorporating modern techniques in crafting materials (Image 13). The design employs a corded technique for the Yunjian surface, using Sunbrella yarn as the cord material, known for its exceptional weather resistance and durability, maintaining vibrant colors even in sunlight, making it more durable than traditional Yunjian made of silk or brocade. Besides embroidery, feathers, and lace, Burberry also experiments with unconventional materials like stone and metal. The Yunjian design in Image 14 is created by arranging numerous magnifying glasses, giving it an avant-garde experimental feel.

Furthermore, some brands and designers boldly experiment with crafting materials. The wedding Yunjian styling in the fantasy drama "Starfall Turns Into Sugar" is made using full 3D printing technology (Image 15), perfectly aligning with the show's character setting. With the rise of digital fashion, the "New Chinese Style" futuristic virtual clothing centered around Yunjian (Image 16) utilizes virtual technology and metallic textures to highlight the beauty of shoulder movements and natural flow, adorned with numerous silver diamonds to accentuate a sense of the future and fashion. This digitized approach pays homage to traditional culture while exploring the future of fashion, representing the soaring of female thought and traditional design, transforming Yunjian from a stain-covering decoration to a symbol of female empowerment.



Figure 12. Xulao Lawrence 2023 Haute Couture Collection



Figure 13. Burberry 2017 Spring/Summer Collection



Figure 14. Burberry 2017 Spring/Summer Collection



Figure 15. Still from the TV drama "Stars Falling Like Sugar"



Figure 16. Clo3D Virtual Cloud Shoulders

6. Conclusion

Clothing is an important external expression of contemporary era demands, and its changes and innovations

evolve with the changing times. The prevalence of Chinese style and the awakening of national consciousness have made the integration of traditional attire with modern aesthetics and practical value a long-standing topic of interest. By innovatively refining existing Qing Dynasty cloud shoulder techniques in clothing design, it is possible to systematically extract design methods, provide references for the innovative use of related traditional attire, and scientifically explore new forms of integrating cloud shoulders into modern clothing design.

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