

An Aesthetic Exploration of Contemporary New Workwear Style from an Inclusive Perspective

Prof. Bingbing DU^{1*} AO CHENG²

¹School of Fashion, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Beijing, P.R. China.

²School of Fashion, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Beijing, P.R. China.

*Corresponding Author: Prof. Bingbing DU, School of Fashion, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Beijing, P.R. China.

This research is completed with the support by the Graduate Science and Technology Innovation Program of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology.

ABSTRACT

By tracing the history of the local workwear styles, and from an inclusive design perspective, this article collects and analyzes the elemental characteristics of the new workwear design, focusing on the aesthetic qualities and epoch connotation. It digs into the design expression of workwear styles from aspects like materials, colors and profiling, by which it discusses the embodiment of the beauty of orderliness in the modular design and adaptive cutting of workwear, and analyzes the practice of sustainable beauty in the application of eco-friendly materials and extending the life cycle of workwear. Ultimately, it imposes historical value and humanistic care into the workwear styles, creating a new aesthetic paradigm that is practical, inclusive and fashionable, and bringing along breakthrough in the aesthetics of the new workwear styles

Keywords: Workwear style, inclusive design, aesthetic exploration, sustainable design, Chinese tunic suit

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: 25 July 2025

Accepted: 12 August 2025

Published: 15 August 2025

Cite this article as:

Prof. Bingbing DU, AO CHENG, An Aesthetic Exploration of Contemporary New Workwear Style from an Inclusive Perspective. International Journal of Innovative Studies in Humanities and Social Studies, 2025: 1(5); 01-06.

<https://doi.org/10.71123/3067-7319.010501>

Copyright: © 2025. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

With the fast development of globalization and spread of internet, the aesthetic concepts of the mass are no longer limited by the framework of region, culture or tradition. The simple literary aesthetic standard in the past has been replaced by diversified aesthetics, which provides broad space for innovation in people's life and dress styles. Designers could draw inspiration from cultural elements around the world, incorporating ethnic features, modern art, natural scenery, and even technological elements into their design, to create dress works incorporating both international perspectives and local features. Functional garments like "workwear" fit right in.

Also, the transience in popular culture and the ever-changing fashion trends bring new challenges and opportunities to the

design of workwear styles. Fashion comes and goes wave after wave, yet consumers keep pursuing personalization and differentiation more, thus making the traditional design difficult to satisfy market demands. The street feel, the retro vintage feel, the strong fabricability and a bit sense of relaxation inherent to the workwear style make it popular from workplace into daily life, turning it into one of the trendy styles attracting much attention in the fashion world. In China, the "New Chinese style" dressing is quite popular in recent years. The addition of local clothing culture has elevated the connotation and aesthetic value of current dressing culture, and even motivated consumers' sense of identity with local culture. However, there is still a gap in exploring the traditional forms, historical characteristics and social aesthetics of Chinese local workwear, which is worthy of in-depth research.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Tunic Suit - History of Contemporary Workwear in China

As one of the most representative workwear in contemporary and modern China, Chinese tunic suit is a classic form that combines functionality with local clothing wisdom. Its birth and development have always revolved around the dressing needs of labor production and official activities. The origin of Chinese tunic suit is closely related to the industrial transformation of modern China. At the beginning of the 20th century, traditional long robes and jackets appeared to be inconvenient in scenarios like factory operations, official activities and other settings. Around 1912, Mr. Sun Yat-sen improved and invented the Chinese tunic suit by learning from the “Mandarin Collar Dress” of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia (a mandarin collar molding structure and a dress with a clear literato temperament), combined with the functional design of Japanese workwear uniforms and British workwear jackets ^[1]. This workwear featured a roll up collar, five buttons down the front and four patch pockets, as its core design. The overall design is made of stiff fabric and three-dimensional cutting, with a seamless structure on the back to ensure smoothness during movement. The design of five buttons on the front and three buttons on the cuffs is not only easy to put on and take off but also keeps the collar snug during work ^[2]. Not only the four symmetrically distributed patch pockets addressed the storage needs of documents and tools, but also the buckle design of the bag cover might prevent items from falling off. The hidden adjustment belt at the waist could adapt to different body types. All these details together form the Chinese tunic suit, which is suitable for both sitting and standing when working.

Chinese tunic suit was initially popular among overseas Chinese labors in Southeast Asia and Chinese employees

in Hong Kong foreign firm, and later it was accepted by more people due to its convenient movement and easy maintenance. In the 1920s, the Shanghai Garment Industry Association standardized the cutting of Chinese tunic suits, presented a series of version designs and further strengthened their adaptability as workwear. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chinese tunic suit became the preferred factory uniform in some regions due to its simple structure and low production cost. Most state-owned enterprises designated Chinese tunic suit as a work uniform, as its wear-resistant diagonal fabric, reinforced shoulder seams and other details could serve the production needs of the workshop totally.

Chinese tunic suit has profound significance from the contexts of clothing aesthetics and cultural value. As to the aesthetic context, it breaks the inherent pattern of flat cutting in traditional Chinese clothing and introduces draping cutting technology, creating a profile that fits the curves of the human body that gives a dignified and upright appearance, pioneering a new paradigm of clothing aesthetics that combines Chinese and Western paradigms; Its simple and symmetrical structure and steady low-key colors (mostly navy blue, gray and black) not only conform to the implicit and restrained aesthetic preference of Chinese people, but also highlight the modernity and sense of order (see Fig.1 for the whole profiling of Chinese tunic suit). As to the cultural context, Chinese tunic suit is a vivid miniature of the social transformation in modern China. It inherits the ideal of pursuing democracy and republicanism in the Xinhai Revolution (1911), turning abstract political concepts into concrete clothing symbols and symbolizing national independence and cultural confidence ^[3]. Even now, the Chinese tunic suit is still active in important national events, diplomatic occasions, and traditional etiquette. It has become a cultural bridge connecting tradition and modernity, national



Figure 1. Whole profiling of the modified Chinese tunic suit (Year of Product: Present time). Image source: Designer: Li Wei

and international, and continues to demonstrate its unique historical value and charm of the times.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Overview of Inclusive Design

The concept of inclusive design was first emerged at the International Society for Human Factors Engineering conference held in Canada in 1994. Thereafter, Coleman R.^[4], Langdon Morris^[5] et. al. presented their understanding of inclusive design. The widely accepted definition comes from BS 7000-6 standard published by the British Standards Institute in 2005, which defines “inclusive design” as: Design of mainstream products and/or services that are accessible to, and usable by, people with the widest range of abilities within the widest range of situations without the need for special adaptation or design^[6].

Inclusive design is a design paradigm with the concept of “diversity and integration” as the core, targeting to create products, environments, or services that can be widely used without special adaptation by actively considering the differentiated needs of different user groups. Its core lies in breaking the implicit assumption of “standard users” in traditional design, incorporating the needs of groups such as the elderly, the disabled, the culturally diverse, and the cognitively impaired into the initial design framework. By strategies of eliminating physical barriers (such as accessible channels and adjustable sizes), optimizing interaction channels (such as visual operations and multimodal feedback), and respecting cultural diversity, the design outcomes would be both usable, accessible, and emotionally resonant.

Inclusive design not only focuses on equal use at the functional level but also strives to build a sense of belonging at the psychological level, allowing people with different physical abilities, age groups, cultural backgrounds, and even technical familiarity to experience the design value naturally and comfortably without additional assistance or modification. In essence, it integrates “inclusivity” into the product gene through forward-looking design thinking, thereby creating more equitable usage scenarios, reflecting deep respect for human diversity and humanistic care, and ultimately achieving the ultimate goal of people oriented.

Extract of Workwear Design Elements from Inclusiveness Aspect

Applicable Materials of Workwear

The workwear materials construct a strong inclusive system based on their characteristics of wear resistance, high grammage, and functionality. By resisting physical friction and frequent use, the wear resistance not only extends the lifespan of the garments to adapt to high-intensity labor

scenarios, but also reduces replacement costs for different economic groups, achieving inclusiveness towards diverse spending power; Fabric of high grammage, with its thick texture and stable structure, not only provides workers with windproof and scratch resistant protection, but also adapts to different body types through a crisp and stiff fit, eliminating functional limitations caused by differences in body shape and reflecting tolerance for diverse body characteristics.

Low Saturated Colors of Workwear

The workwear adopts color schemes of gray, khaki, military green, and navy blue, which originated from the stain resistant color scheme chosen by the working class during the Industrial Revolution to cover up work stains. Unlike high saturated colors, the low saturated colors of workwear weaken the visual focus and dissolve the function of clothing as a symbol of class identity, allowing construction workers wearing khaki jumpsuits and urban elites wearing designer windbreakers of the same color scheme to have the possibility of equal dialogue in color language.

Universal Molding Structure of Workwear

The universal profile of workwear is characterized by looseness, fitness, and comfort. Through deep deconstruction of ergonomics and flexible adaptation to scene requirements, an inclusive design paradigm that spans body shape, gender, age, and usage scenarios is constructed. The loose silhouette breaks the strict limitations of traditional clothing on body shape with moderate looseness, achieving smooth high-frequency movements such as bending over and lifting arms through unconstrained shoulder sleeve cutting and freely stretching waist and hip circumference.

DISCUSSION

Aesthetic Design Exploration of Workwear Style

Currently, workwear design has evolved from meeting the needs of specific work environments to becoming an important carrier for personality expression, cultural heritage, and social exchange. The design of workwear is an important label that highlights the corporate image and the professional spirit of workers, while also reflecting the changes in social division of labor and career development. It is a product of the division of labor between class society and human society^[7]. However, in the new era of consumption, workwear is constantly innovating by using new materials, new processes, and improved clothing structures, forming a trendy style under the new social structure known as the “workwear style”^[8].

Aesthetic Exploration 1 - The Beauty of Functionality And Orderliness

From the perspective of social aesthetics, workwear is a cultural symbol of the working class, and workwear corresponding to different job identities has a label style

visual symbol meaning^[9]. As to the aesthetic ideology, workwear is characterized by orderliness and uniformity due to its historical evolution from military uniform structure and the need for social structural stability^[10]. As to the life aesthetics and cultural industry aesthetics, the diversified fabrics, colors, and neat formats of workwear are gradually permeating daily life while meeting basic work requirements, and workwear has gradually become a common daily wear on the streets.



Figure 2. Carhartt Detroit Jacket
(Image source: Baidu.com)

The concepts of “industrial beauty” and “practical beauty” that emerged during the Industrial Revolution further emphasized the close relationship between beauty and functionality. The USA sculptor Horatio Greenough first proposed the concept of “form follows function” in the mid-19th century. After more than a century of development, the famous American architect Louis Sullivan perfected the new concept of “form follows function”, providing clear guidance for the relationship between form and function^[11]. In functionalist design, in-depth study of the beauty of the functional structure of workwear and integration of contemporary aesthetic elements can provide fashionable innovative ideas for functional clothing design theory and lay the foundation for a unique cross era workwear style.

In the process of global dissemination, workwear styles have formed distinctive branches in different regions. Americano workwear retains its rough and practical characteristics, strengthens brand identity, while Japanese workwear draws on traditional clothing concepts, interpreting workwear with delicate craftsmanship and minimalist design, completing the transformation of workwear style from worker uniforms to fashion symbols^[12]. The active exploration of workwear style in the fashion market reflects the multi-faceted aesthetic expression of this style.

Aesthetic Exploration 2 - The Beauty of Science and Sustainable Design

In the 21st century, the development of technology has reshaped the workwear style. Technology not only promotes

The Detroit Jacket made of canvas (as shown in Fig.2) by the workwear brand Carhartt Duck Canvas features a multi pocket layout that reflects functionality and orderliness. The 874 Collection of Cargo Pants from Dickies brand, with its simple and practical design, has become a standard in industries such as construction and repairing, giving straight and loose profile that is convenient for workers to move around (as shown in Fig.3).



Figure 3. Dickies Brand - 874 Series of Cargo Pants
(Image source: Baidu.com)

the iterative upgrading of functional fabrics, but also deeply integrates the concept of sustainable development into the lifecycle of workwear. After the rise of sustainable development concepts worldwide, there have been changes in material selection and production methods for workwear. Brands have begun to use recycled polyester fibers, organic cotton, biodegradable materials, and other materials to produce workwear, reducing the consumption of natural resources and environmental pollution. In the production process, factories widely apply innovative methods such as zero waste cutting, circular regeneration technology, and low carbon dyeing technology, effectively reducing carbon emissions and waste generation in the production process. For example, the Patagonia brand is committed to developing renewable polyester materials and has developed new fibers such as nylon fabric Netplus made from recycled fishing nets, which helps promote resource recycling (see Figures 4 and 5).

At the workwear design level, the concept of sustainability enforces workwear to focus more on durability and repairability. Fashion brands attempt to extend the service life of workwear through detachable components, modular design, and other methods, reducing clothing waste caused by wear/tear and obsolescence. Some workwear products come along with repair services and replacement parts to encourage long-term use by consumers, thus establishing a sustainable consumption model of “reduction-reuse-repair”. This shift in design thinking breaks the logic of “one-time consumption” in fast fashion, making workwear a carrier

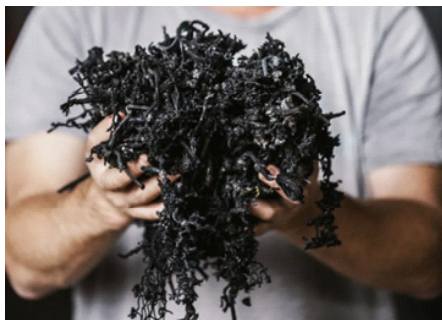


Figure 4. Patagonia products using 100% recycled nylon materials



Figure 5. Patagonia recyclable nylon products

Image source: Patagonia official website

for practicing a “long-term” lifestyle. The application of renewable materials in design reflects the humanistic care of modern workwear style and also embodies the good trend of integrating sustainable development and natural aesthetics ^[13], demonstrating the infinite vitality and social responsibility of workwear style in the context of the new era.

Take (di)-vision brand as an example, it is good at using recyclable and reusable fabrics mixed with unsold fabrics

as raw materials to bring new beauty to waste materials. In the 2025 Spring/Summer collection show release, the brand extensively leveraged design methods such as recycling clothing waste and patchwork of shredded fabrics to showcase its aesthetic tone. Another example, Dion Lee, an individual designer brand, has shown a trend in recent years that reflects the functional style of workwear. Based on the wide and simple colors of workwear, a large amount of deconstructive design has been carried out to achieve a futuristic technological aesthetic in the final presentation.



Figure 6. (di)-vision 2025ss show release
Image source: Official website of the brand



Figure 7. Dion Lee 2024ss show release
Image source: Official website of the brand

CONCLUSION

Design is a comprehensive entity that combines ideological, theoretical, and practical elements ^[14]. Driven by the development of workwear design, workwear style has undergone a complex evolution from being dominated by functionalism in the wave of industrialization, to a fashionable transformation and global dissemination in the exploration period of marketization, and then to pursuing a sense of the future and sustainable development. The functional characteristics of workwear style in terms of adaptability, adjustability, and disassembly help break down the boundaries between profession and daily life and further meet the needs of new user groups in the context of the new

era. The inclusive, diversified, and personalized fashion expression of the new workwear style has broadened the aesthetic channels of life, making workwear suitable for a wider range of application scenarios. Moreover, workwear will further implement the concept of circular economy, explore innovative applications of bio-based materials and fully biodegradable materials, elevate natural aesthetics, and make workwear a fashion symbol of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. In the future, with the development of virtual fashion and the metaverse, workwear styles may usher in new breakthroughs driven by digitalization and ecology, promoting the evolution of workwear design towards the integration of virtual and reality, and continuously conveying new aesthetic meanings.

ENDNOTES

1. Wei Pengju. Research on the application of Chinese tunic suit in modern fashion design [D]. Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, 2021.
2. Zhou Xuanzhu. Evolution of the pattern and design of Chinese tunic suit [J]. *West Leather*, 2023, 45 (07): 121-123.
3. Li Dangqi, Sun Suye. A brief discussion on “National Costume” - Chinese tunic suit [J]. *Art Observation*, 2006, (03):13-16.
4. Coleman R. The Case for inclusive design-an overview [C]. Proceedings of the 12th Triennial Congress, International Ergonomics Association and the Human Factors Association, 1994.
5. Langdon P, Clarkson P J, Robinson P. Designing inclusive futures [M]. Springer Science & Business Media, 2008.
6. Ni Jiapan, Li Jun. Research on the development and application of inclusive fashion [J]. *Fashion China*, 2024, (01):89-94.
7. Hu Liang. Design and development of occupational workwear [D]. Tiangong University, 2006
8. Zhai Yi. Exploration of fashionable workwear design in the new consumer era [D]. Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, 2020
9. Shi Dongqing. The symbolic expression of workwear elements in fashion design [D]. Nanjing University of the Arts, 2020
10. Chen Bin, Li Hang. Application research of military uniform style in modern workwear design [J]. *West Leather*, 2023, 45 (01): 103-105
11. Cheng Jiaxin. Analysing Functional, Scientific and Technical Beauty in Design [J]. *Shoes Technology Design*, 2024, 4 (05): 64-66
12. Li Hongxiao. Research on the design of men’s clothing style based on modular concept [D]. Donghua University, 2022
13. Song Defeng, Ye Yating. Research on green and sustainable fashion design under the concept of sustainable development [J]. *West Leather*, 2025,47(02):131-133
14. Shi Dongqing. The symbolic expression of workwear elements in fashion design [D]. Nanjing University of the Arts, 2020