

# ***Analysis of the Influence of School Uniforms on Students' Gender Cognition***

**Yang Yuan<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>School of Social Development, East China University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, 201600, China*

*a. 211127010155@ecupl.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Reposting the 100-year history of Chinese school uniforms, Chinese school uniforms have undergone great changes both in the style of clothing and the meaning conveyed to the growth of teenagers. In today's society, the main function of Chinese school uniforms is reflected in the convenience of the school's order and unity and the role identity of students. However, it has largely ignored the important influence of school uniforms on the gender cognition of students. By analyzing the current situation, function, and influence of school uniforms on teenagers' gender cognition, this study proposes that today's school uniforms in China lack the design of gender differentiation of students, which hinders the catalytic maturity of students' good gender consciousness, and indicates that the future development of school uniforms in China should adapt to social and cultural development. While improving the style and quality, we pay attention to the important influence of school uniforms on the gender cognition of students and show the gender characteristics in combination with the development of social cognition in today's China.

**Keywords:** school uniform, gender cognition, school uniform development

## **1. Introduction**

Looking back on the century-old history of Chinese school uniforms, Chinese school uniforms have undergone great changes in clothing style and the meaning conveyed to the growth of teenagers. Chinese school uniforms have changed from uniforms in the Xinhai Revolution to dresses and uniforms with gender characteristics that divided men and women in the Republic of China. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Chinese cheongsam with the characteristics of The Times; Followed by the 1960s and 1970s, under the influence of the social revolution background, green military uniforms became mainstream; Then there were the 1980s uniforms of white shirts and sky-blue trousers and suspenders that mimicked navy uniforms; Finally, since the 1990s, male and female students have unified comfortable and convenient sports uniforms. It can be found that with the continuous changes and development of society, School uniforms also reflect the social adaptation of the role of students and their own needs in different times. In today's society, the main function of Chinese school uniforms is reflected in the convenience of school order unity and students' self-role identity. This characteristic determines that school uniforms become indispensable to the student group's cognition and growth process.

The representative figure of studying uniform culture abroad is Paul Fussell (Paul). In his book “Why We Are What We Wear,” he defined Uniforms broadly as academic gowns, school uniforms, uniforms, and more, but most importantly made clear that uniforms had a symbolic function and carried a specific culture [1,2]. Moreover, Dr. Yamauchi Toshiomi of Japan talked about school uniforms from the historical research perspective. According to the Historical Data on the School System in Modern China, “After 1900, many schools were opened in China, and the school authorities of these schools issued unified clothes, hats, and boots to the students,” he inferred that China’s student uniforms began in 1900. Then the school uniform experienced the general course of evolution from the old style to the Western style and then to the sports uniform style [3].

Domestic scholar Yan Guangcai believes that school uniforms, like uniforms, have obvious “institutionalized” significance. “Uniform uniforms represent a norm, meaning discipline and order,” he said [4]. Scholars Chen Yuhua and Li Yanbing criticize school uniforms as non-educational. School uniforms, as a long-term education, turn external rules into internal habits, and school uniforms promote commonality at the same time but intentionally or unintentionally erase the personality of the student group [5]. Chen Lina argues from the perspective of moral review that school uniform is also the dress of a specific group of students, and its popularization should meet the requirements of ethics and morality [6]. According to the overall research volume, few scholars pay attention to the relationship between the gender cognition of students and school uniforms. Its style and function determine the gender characteristics that teenagers receive through clothing to a large extent, so it will also have a certain impact on the gender cognition of teenagers.

This study focuses on the influence of school uniforms on adolescents’ self-cognition and gender cognition. It analyzes the relationship between Chinese school uniforms and adolescents’ gender cognition from three perspectives: the gender characteristics expressed in the basic styles of school uniforms, the views and attitudes of Chinese teenagers towards school uniforms and how school uniforms affect teenagers’ gender cognition. Moreover, according to the current situation and the basic conclusions, as far as possible, the improvement of China’s contemporary school uniform suggestions.

## **2. The Main Forms and Functions of Today’s School Uniforms**

In today’s society, clothing, as a non-verbal symbol, plays an important role in interpersonal communication [7]. Moreover, school uniform, as a uniform representing the student group, has also become a non-verbal symbol representing the student group.

In the process of choosing school uniforms in China, due to the influence of economic factors and objective factors, students’ school uniforms must be suitable for a variety of occasions. To meet the needs of various school activities, such as sports meetings, competitions, and large-scale activities, but also to meet the needs of students in daily life, so sportswear has become the most suitable choice. Currently, most sports uniforms in style are designed with the same fabric splicing method of different colors, using yellow and navy blue, white and light blue, red and navy blue, white and green, and more. The design change mainly lies in the splicing part and is supplemented with inlay, inlay, and other decorations [8].

The function of uniform selection in our country can be divided into two levels: society and individual. First of all, at the social level, the identity of the student group is marked to the public. At the same time, uniform clothing is convenient for school management and reduces the comparison trend between the student groups. At the individual level, school uniforms enhance teenagers’ sense of self-identity as students, and unified clothing also helps to increase cohesion among student groups. Coupled with the choice of sports suits (usually shown as uniform jackets and pants), the school attaches great importance to students’ ability to conveniently and freely carry out some sports activities on campus. Paying attention to the development of students’ physical quality also reflects

the current educational policy of abandoning “merit-based” education [9]. According to the research of Chen Yuhua and Li Yanbing, the function of today’s school uniform is more inclined to the unity of the order of the school administration and in line with the objective attitude of the society towards the student group, but according to the existing investigation, it can be found that In terms of the degree of satisfaction with school uniforms, whether students should wear school uniforms or not, and the relationship between school uniforms and personality, the proportion of school authorities and teachers is much higher than that of parents and students [5].

### **3. The Meaning Expressed by School Uniforms**

School uniforms as the main clothing of the student group. The National Education Commission mentioned as early as 1993: “Wear student clothing (school uniforms) refers to all primary and secondary school students in a city unified wear student clothing, its clothing is not fashion, ceremonial clothing or sportswear, but daily wear student clothing.” Moreover, the school uniform design put forward the principle of ‘simple, generous, bright, practical’, fully reflecting teenagers’ physiological and personality characteristics” [10]. As a group of uniform clothing, its surface meaning is to facilitate the unified management of the school, and strengthen the student group’s sense of self-identity, while the simple and generous characteristics also point to the elimination of individual differences between students and reject the requirements of students’ comparison.

At present, China’s school uniform is the unified dress, simple and practical to do more in place: the vast majority of areas and schools are top-down mandatory uniform purchase sports uniforms, while sports uniforms also have the advantages of relaxed and convenient, more casual, in line with the big trend. However, with the development of society, the needs of the student group have become increasingly diversified, and this form has gradually caused problems: today’s uniforms are too loose style can not fully reflect the distinct personality and aesthetic development of the student group, which has led to the widely criticized national uniforms have no local characteristics, a single boring phenomenon [11].

What is more noteworthy is that the school uniform has also been given the deep meaning of reflecting the educator’s cultivation of the aesthetic ability of the student group. Generally speaking, at the psychological and spiritual level, clothing plays a role in beautifying appearance, expressing personality, and showing oneself. People often pursue a quality of life and express their yearning for a better life through the choice of clothing styles, colors, fabrics, and matching. Therefore, in the design choice of school uniforms, a good standard should be that it can promote the aesthetic development of students [11]. Taking Japan as an example, Japanese school uniform design fully takes into account different gender aesthetic tastes. Its success lies in the masculine and handsome school uniform style of boys, and the quiet and lovely school uniform style of girls, which to a large extent, helps Japanese middle school students establish a healthy gender aesthetic ability.

### **4. The Gender Characteristics of School Uniform Design in China**

“Gender division is the first characteristic of clothing. Clothing and distinctions of any social class carry a sexual label” [7]. As the article of specific clothing for students, the gender characteristics expressed by school uniforms cannot be ignored.

At present, to adapt more to the rapid growth of students’ bodies and meet the sports needs of students, China’s school uniforms have adopted almost a uniform loose-fitting sportswear style. According to the random interview results of the “Investigation and analysis of the aesthetic needs of primary school uniforms in Southern Henan Province”, parents and teachers generally believe that the existing school uniforms are usually differentiated between men and women by size and slightly better schools are differentiated between men and women by the change of a single color [12].

In the process of growing up, the student's age is an important period for the beginning of individual "sexual cognition", in which the student group realizes the difference between the sexes and the different aesthetics shown by different genders. School uniforms, as a uniform that students are required to wear daily, have a single style, regardless of men and women. The "face pocket" of uniform pants and the style of simply distinguishing gender by color not only hinder the catalytic maturity of students' good gender consciousness but also cause a vague sense of gender distinction among students. Moreover, it inhibits the opportunity for students to experience the difference between gender clothing in the future when entering society and the workplace. What the student community thinks about today's uniforms:

As one of the provincial capitals of China, Nanjing represents large and medium-sized cities in China to a certain extent. A study randomly selected 100 students from different middle schools and high schools in its jurisdiction to conduct a questionnaire survey. Judging from the percentage of the results, more than 80 per cent of the students are unsatisfied with their uniforms. According to the survey, the reasons for students' dissatisfaction with today's school uniforms are summarized as unbeautiful, single style and size, regardless of gender, regardless of season, and low-quality factors [13].

In contrast, Xinyang can be regarded as the representative of small and medium-sized cities. The study randomly selected 300 primary school students of different grades, 50 parents of students, and 50 primary school teachers to fill out questionnaires and random dialogue interviews. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 386 valid questionnaires were received, with a recovery rate of 96.5%. Among the students sampled, only 10% were satisfied with the existing school uniforms, and 75% believed that the existing school uniforms could not achieve satisfactory results. Of the students, parents, and teachers surveyed, 65% believe that uniform styles should be gender-specific [12].

It can be seen that whether it is a large city or a small city in our country, whether it is a junior high school or a primary school, the development degree of school uniforms is relatively close. Relatively speaking, its development status is not satisfactory. It can be seen that, on the whole, a large part of students and parents in the country have shown varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the quality, design, and non-gender differentiation of today's uniforms in China.

## **5. The Impact of School Uniforms on the Gender Cognition of Students**

"Research on the relationship between Physical Self-cognition and shyness Level of Junior High School students" mentioned: "Individual self-cognition is often generated in interpersonal communication, so other people and objective factors in individual living environment often have a huge impact on us." Therefore, school uniform, the objective factor determining students' self-cognition, is of great significance to the correct evaluation and perception of students' self-body and gender [14].

As a special stage of growth and development, the student group at this stage also has a special performance for its clothing needs: many psychological problems in adolescence are caused by the development of physical secondary sexual characteristics. Middle school students are caught off guard by the change of secondary sex characteristics and are not ready to deal with it so they will worry excessively. The process of initially resisting this physical change and then accepting it is a difficult psychological process for adolescence. In addition, the difference in individual physical development's starting time leads to early and late maturity. Early and late maturity are more likely to cause psychological stress. Therefore, it is necessary to care for the physical development of adolescent middle school students simultaneously to guide their gender cognition and help them through this difficult period [15].

Therefore, school uniforms, as the main daily clothing of the student group in adolescence, must take into account the needs of gender expression of the student group in this special period to help

them, especially for the female group that is more sensitive to the second sexual characteristics, through the different design of men, to reduce their psychological pressure on the second sexual characteristics. However, according to the above survey results, today's uniforms in China usually use size to distinguish between men and women or the change of a single color to distinguish between men and women. Moreover, this form is difficult to meet the growth needs of the student group. In the research survey, many scholars mentioned that students and parents hope that uniforms should be differentiated in gender styles. The simple and sloppy division of today's school uniforms in China is difficult to reflect the different gender characteristics of men and women, which is easy to make the student group in the process of gender cognition. At the same time, for the adolescent student group, there is no clear gender distinction of school uniforms, which may make them form a serious sense of frustration for the second sexual characteristics of themselves, and frustrate their inner motivation for positive self-development.

Therefore, the design of today's school uniforms has been unable to meet the different needs of students of different genders for the gender characteristics of clothing with the growth of age and is not conducive to the further development of students' self-gender characteristics and corresponding aesthetics.

## **6. Future Development Prospects and Suggestions for School Uniforms**

According to the above research results and analysis, the future development of school uniforms in China should pay special attention to the differentiation of gender styles and the personalized development of students. At this point, the success of Japanese school uniform design is obvious to all and is also very influential internationally. Generally speaking, the main styles of Japanese school uniform girls' clothing are sweaters, coats, Western-style shirts, dresses, and skirts. The main styles of boys' clothing are: standing collar student clothes, Western shirts, trousers, white shirts, and shorts. Boys wear tie shoes, and girls wear bow-tie shoes [16].

Such a "men and women have other" form has a good reference significance for the future development trend of our school uniform. However, it should be noted that in our traditional concept, parents do not want to distinguish between men and women simultaneously and do not want the secondary sexual characteristics as the main focus of distinguishing male and female uniform styles; more hope that children still focus on school. Therefore, in the design of school uniforms, appropriate design should be adopted to weaken the student group's attention to secondary sexual characteristics.

In short, the future development of Chinese school uniforms should be adapted to China's social and cultural development. While considering unity and convenience, it is reasonable to show gender characteristics in combination with the current social cognitive development in China to help students form a clearer gender cognition. At the same time, male and female uniforms can also be used as the experience stage for the student group to enter society and enter the workplace in the future, and help the comprehensive growth of the student group from all levels.

## **7. Conclusion**

According to the above research, the lack of design for gender differentiation of students in today's school uniforms in China has hindered the catalytic maturation of students' good gender consciousness to a large extent, resulting in a vague sense of gender differentiation among students. It may cause them to form a serious sense of frustration about their secondary sexual characteristics and inhibit the opportunity for students to experience the difference between gender clothing in the future in society and the workplace.

By analyzing and studying the development history, expression significance, and current gender characteristic design of school uniforms in China, this study combined with the views of students on



today's school uniforms, analyzed how school uniforms affect the gender development of students, and proposed that the future design of school uniforms in China should adapt to the social and cultural development of our country. While improving the style and quality, it is necessary to pay attention to the important influence of school uniforms on the gender cognition of the student group and show the gender characteristics in combination with the development of social cognition in China today, to help students have a positive and beautiful yearning for the future life through school uniforms in the process of growing up, and help the development direction of the overall growth of the student group from all levels.

However, due to the limitations of objective factors, this study failed to carry out empirical research and adopted the existing investigation results of domestic scholars to analyze the empirical investigation. At the same time, due to the limitation of space, there was also a lack of empirical investigation on the intention of students and parents for gender differentiation in terms of the prospect of the future development of domestic school uniforms, to hope for further research in the future.

## References

- [1] Dawson, D., Liu, H., & Liu, J. (2017). *The century-old Changes of Chinese school uniforms*. *The World of Chinese*, 03, 8-11+4.
- [2] Paul Fussell. (2005). *Taste of Uniforms IM* (Translated by Wang Jianhua). Beijing: Life - Reading - Xinzhi Sanlian Bookstore.
- [3] Zhu, Y., & Wang, X. (1989). *Historical Records of the School System in Modern China (Part 1)*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.
- [4] Yan, G. (2005). A Cultural Interpretation of school uniforms. *Educational Science Research*, 03, 14-16.
- [5] Chen, Y., & Li, Y. (2009). School uniform: a habituated non-educational element. *Shanghai Education and Research*, 03, 16-19.
- [6] Chen, L. (2009). A moral review of school uniforms. *Educational Science Research*, 07, 65-68.
- [7] Xu, C. (2004). On the relationship between clothing and gender characteristics. *Art of Design*, 01, 78-79.
- [8] Guo, X., & Feng, W. (2009). Urgent reform and development of school uniforms for middle school students. *Consumer Guide*, 03, 244-245.
- [9] Lu, L. (2015). A Review of merit-based Justice: the Perspective of "moral deserve". *Research in Educational Sciences*, 08, 70-72+80.
- [10] State Board of Education. (1993). Notice on the issuance of "Opinions on Strengthening the Management of Urban Primary and Secondary School Students Wearing school clothes (school uniforms)". *Kyobi* [1993]138, 13 April 1993.
- [11] Fan, N., & Yuan, J. (2017). An important educational issue that has been neglected: the multiple educational functions of school uniforms. *Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Science Edition)*, 06, 64-70+155. doi:10.16382/j.cnki.1000-5560.2017.06.008.
- [12] Zhou, Z. Y. (2016). Investigation and analysis of school uniform aesthetic demand in southern Henan Province. *Art Technology*, 11, 407+391+393.
- [13] Wang, S. (2006). From the current situation of Nanjing area take a fancy to students school uniform design (Master's thesis, Nanjing College of Art). Retrieved from <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD2008&filename=2006194312.nh>
- [14] Xu, W. (2019). A middle school student physical self cognition and study on the relationship between the level of shyness (Master's thesis, Beijing University of Technology). Retrieved from <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202001&filename=1020712745.nh>
- [15] Gu, Y. (2012). Based on adolescent psychological analysis of middle school students school uniform design studies (Master's thesis, Zhongyuan Institute of Technology). Retrieved from <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201301&filename=1013169379.nh>
- [16] Li, X., & Sun, B. (2016). Cultural Research on Japanese school uniforms. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, 09, 185-187. doi:10.15907/j.cnki.23-1450.2016.09.061.