

THE FEATURES OF FASHION INDUSTRY IN THE SOVIET UNION

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The article contains the review and analysis of problems in Soviet fashion industry. The particular attention is paid to the development in quality system and diversification in light industry achieved as a result of measures taken to improve the Soviet people's well-being. The study was conducted within the framework of social history. In this case, not only the way of thinking of individual persons or groups, patterns of social behavior, but all the changes in the environment, structures and processes which direct the conditions of human activity and define the entire organization of social life were considered.

Keywords: fashion industry, apparel industry, assortment, fashionable clothes, quality assessment system, population needs

Modern Russia is going through a difficult period in its history; it is seeking for a new way of life. It applies to fashion, which takes a special place in the society. At present there is an urgent need for a comprehensive study of the Soviet fashion, as a multi-level system consisting of a specific set of elements which are connected with each other. Fashion industry is one of elements in this system. The problem of studying the process of creation and modernization of the fashion industry in the Soviet Union during the period of the "thaw" to "stagnation" and public policy analysis on the development of light industry and services together with the task of improving the well-being of the Soviet people were not sufficiently studied and developed.

The purpose of research is to reveal the specifics of the fashion industry enterprises in the Soviet Union and the implementing features of fashion designs into production during the period of the "thaw" to "stagnation".

Every epoch creates its own aesthetic ideal of a man, its own standards of beauty, which are expressed through costume design, its proportions, details, materials, color, hairstyles, and make-up. A cultural and aesthetic model, which is then translated into society, appears this way. Large and small events in the world and in the country influence on fashion. We usually understand fashion as a set of dress senses and attitudes prevailing in a particular social environment during certain and usually short period of time. The fashion industry as the term includes the process of designing, production and distribution of fashion products.

Beginning the analysis of the Soviet fashion industry, we assumed that the implementation of long-term strategy, which foundations were laid down by the government after the revolution, turned the USSR into an industrial power, helped it to win

World War II and to strengthen its geopolitical position. But all was made by enormous losses. However, the implementation of this strategy led to the formation of economic development priorities and stereotypes of economic thinking, which became to stifle the economic growth of the USSR further. First of all, the lack of resources touched industries that produce consumer goods, including light industry and services. The lag in the development of the consumer sector in the economy from 1950–1960 was of deformation in nature, it slowed down the economic development of the country [1, p. 34–35].

The development of Soviet culture is considered in connection with the politics, economics, and ideology within the social cultural history. The specifics of the Soviet system did this relationship particularly hard. Therefore, the formation of fashion was not determined by creative consciousness of artists (although it should be clear that creativity cannot be canceled while creating any work), but the ideological order. Ideology penetrated the culture, and culture, in its turn, promoted ideology in the society with the help of professional tools. At the same time great importance was given to cultural and educational role of fashion.

Considering the social processes in the Soviet society, one should take into account the implementation of the modernization in the society as the transition from one socio-economic and political development stage to another. In the period modernization had affected all spheres of social life; its influence was obvious in Soviet everyday life, including costume and fashion.

Getting down to the study of the Soviet fashion industry during the period of the "thaw" to "stagnation" it is necessary to consider the characteristics of clothes production for the population.

In the postwar period the fashion industry was just aimed to saturate the market with consumer goods, furthermore the clothes for Soviet citizens should be adapted to the conditions of their lives. A new stage begins after Khrushchev came to power. Improving the welfare of the people was announced as one of the central tasks of the government.

Consumer demand began to focus not on amount only, but on the structure of supply; the requirements of people to the quality and range of products raised. Requirements for products of light industry were also changed. Thus the fashion industry should satisfy the needs of the Soviet people in the consumer goods. More than that, examples of the Soviet fashion had to confirm their advantage over the West ones. The matters of quality and range of products appear in the fashion industry for the first time. At the same time the government tries to include the fashion production into the system of planned economy.

The ways to accomplish the task included the organization of production growth in the sphere of consumer goods and improving their quality, modernization of light industry enterprises. The differentiation of sewing and textile production was made by the country authorities, as well as the methods of work organization and evaluation system of product quality were improved; scientific research and development in the field of modeling and designing clothes was also conducted.

On the one hand, the results of modernization contributed to the development of mass production; on the other hand, the intended goals were not always reached. Fashion did not fit into the system of planned economy. It is not coincidence that economists came into the discussion on fashion and style, that was organized by the magazine "Decorative Arts of the USSR" in 1963–1964; they said: "Fashion is expensive. <...> It brings a lot of trouble in industry". [2, p. 12].

The main problem the economists concerned was material needs. From this point of view, fashion acted as a negative and alien factor of socialist economy that interfered the planned production, distribution and consumption of clothing [2, p. 13]. By measuring the needs of the population, the economists at the State Planning Commission calculated the rate of rational consumption. In compliance with their calculations, all Soviet citizens had to consume the same

amount of clothes and shoes to their full wear out, that is, without the influence of fashion.

Fashion designers determined the basic function of fashion as education of dress sense among consumers. However, they believed that sensationalism and extravagance were not character features of the socialist fashion, but it should be convenient, practical, functional, and hygienic.

The function of fashion popularization was put on trade. "It is trade that should be the most aware of the modern fashion nature" [3, p. 53–54]. Sales workers were accounting movement of goods in the shops. But by ordering goods which were of high demand last season, representatives of trade formed a culture of consumption, which contradicted the fashion dynamics.

To avoid failures in the implementation of the plan and to be able to surpass it, textile and clothing makers preferred to stick to well established factory models, selecting a model for mass production.

As a result, at the time when everybody were taken care of the population needs, it was not easy to buy fashionable clothes in the stores: "Outwardly, it seems that there is an abundance in the shops, but in fact, consumers are with needs for many things, including those which have already been produced under the plan, but lie motionless because of their poor quality, old-fashioned and unfashionable shapes and colors" [4, p. 12].

The role of the service sector is increasing with the society development. Many families suffered from the constant need in sewing and repairing of clothes and shoes. Limited range or lack of these goods in the shops forced people to look for ways to realize their needs. In turn, the service sector was not able to satisfy the needs of the population as well. In the 1950s the weak development of the network of state and co-operative dress-making establishments, tailoring shops and repair centers was clearly demonstrated. It was expressed in poor service and excessive prices. The population needs in this kind of service contributed to the expansion of the "private" sector, which carried out orders fast and relatively cheap.

The state encouraged tailoring at home. There was a special regulation related to this self-service. It expressed in active offer of patterns, developed by Soviet designers, in annexes to the women's magazines and textbooks of cut and sew, and active selling of sewing machines.

A retrospective study of Light Industry functioning in the USSR shows the negative trends in the industry: the growth of disparities, lack of dynamics in the assortment structure of production and its quality. The existing economic system and measures for the development of industrial manufacture in light industry were extremely inefficient.

At the beginning of the study period the enterprises, producing consumer goods, were aimed to increase production. In the early 1960s, it transformed into the task of satisfying the needs of Soviet citizens in the clothing and footwear that meets the requirements of product quality and compliance with fashion trends. At the same time production of fashion industry enterprises had to meet the requirements of the political and ideological leadership of the country.

Big problems occurred with the implementation of fashion production. The program of reforms aimed at improving the material well-being of Soviet citizens was declared by the Soviet government. Solving the problem of population's unsatisfied demand, the main forces were concentrated on the development of large-scale factory production. Small-scale and pilot production was described as "hopeless". The selection of models for implementation in production was carried by arts councils, which mainly consisted of representatives of manufacturers and managers at various levels.

First of all, enterprises tried to produce the goods, which were beneficial to the plan, and poorly orientated on diverse needs of consumers. Models that were interesting, but difficult in producing, selection of materials, finishes, and accessories were rejected. As a result, the unpopular goods and the products of poor quality were available in the shops abundantly. Although the party and the government was constantly trying to effectively coordinate the activities of various parts of the production and distribution of clothing, the range of goods in the Soviet stores did not meet consumers' demand during the study period.

Low quality of products was due to the general economic-technical condition of the industry. Industrial policy was based on the priorities that have developed under the influence of the Bolshevik doctrine. In the late 1960s and early 1970s it no longer met the needs of economic development of the country, although it was a kind of update. It is reflected in the fact that in the early 1970s the party and the Soviet Union state

leadership announced its intention to rapidly develop industrial production of "B" group, including light industry, but indeed, the alternative policy was held. The share of investments directed to the development of consumer goods production, including light industry, diminished even more. The lack of investment had a negative impact on the development of this industry, which needed modernization emergently. The critical state of the industry was delayed because of the re-engineering slow pace. It was not conducted in complex that did not allow effective use of modern equipment [5].

The problems of quality garments were solved due to the development of new standards for assessing the cost of processing, the introduction of new standards and pricelists, the introduction of a new system of assessing the quality of products, production specialization, modernization of the textile industry, the system of staff training and retraining, the introduction of various mechanisms of material and moral incentives. These actions had positive results at the particular period. But, despite the expansion of state control over product quality, enterprises continued to produce the goods which quality did not meet the demands.

Manifestation of the crisis in the light industry became a problem of products marketing. In the first half of the 1970s, based on the priority of policy planning, the party and state leadership of the Soviet Union adopted a number of decisions, directly or indirectly aimed at narrowing the scope of economic reforms, marked the 1965 reform. As a result, the rights the enterprises acquired during the reforms have been limited. Their dependence on the ministries and agencies had increased. It had particularly negative consequences for the light industry. They lost any possibility to reconstruct production in accordance with market conditions of the consumer market. In terms of preservation and development of the consumer market, the attempts of the party and the USSR government to provide light industry enterprises with such opportunities by strengthening the system of state central planning testified about the isolation of the state policy from the real economic situation.

Throughout the study period the total number of service enterprises increased, the volume of household services grew rapidly. But along with the new trends in the development of services enterprises, the changes in their work were slow. The problems of quality and service culture were sharply on

the agenda the entire Soviet period of the industry. Intensive development of enterprises, integration and specialization, modernization of equipment were not able to save the population from the queues in the tailoring establishments. As a result, the growth of welfare, cultural level, and the needs of workers changed the structure of household services. But the number of orders for tailoring increased, that indicated the unsatisfied demand in fashionable clothes.

Thus, the light industry of the period was not able to fully implement its tasks to meet the needs of the population in beautiful and fashionable clothes. Inertia of mass tailoring prevented systematic penetration of fashionable clothes on the shelves of the state stores. Products of clothes factories were marked by conservatism; it ignored the dynamics of fashion. Soviet consumers, who watched the fashion, were forced to sew clothes at home, at individual tailors or in tailoring establishments.

Fashion industry establishments could not provide the Soviet stores with qual-

ity products, as the party and government policy had a huge influence on the development of the crisis era of “stagnation”, including the light industry. In particular, it expressed in failed attempts to reform the current economic system during the Soviet era. Negative trends in the industry continued to deepen in the 1970s and 1980s, holding back economic growth of some regions and the country as a whole.

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