A Study on the Changes of the Women's Uniform in England

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Abstract

A uniform is generated in the course of confirming a singular mode of dress that is adopted by a community for a specific purpose. In particular, women's uniform has a close relations to their position in the community they belong to. And women's uniform has closely been associated with finding ways into their communities over the centuries, and is part of women's development process.

Women's history of using organized uniforms has not been longer than men's. Their realm of activities began to be enlarged due to the World War, and women's uniform has gradually settled down and moved toward diversity. The origin of many uniforms worn by today's women can be traced back to the end of the last century, and this fact indicates that women started to find their ways into many new fields at that time. There has been a lot of changes until current women's uniforms come out. It's intended in this study to contribute to designing more creative and productive women's uniform, by taking a careful look at typical early uniforms for service personnels, nannies, nurses and soldiers that are an indication of their work and working environment.

Key words: domestic service, military uniform, nanny, nun, nurse uniform

I. Introduction

A uniform has traditionally represented the tastes or outlooks of community members who wear it. In general, that has been based on the contemporary tastes, but it has designed to serve a specific purpose at the same time. Fashion is first created by a ruling party in a community, and then embraced by people in general. It's driven by a strong social impulse to make oneself showoff. Accordingly, fashion is built on a standardized need to conform to community life. Dress and its ornaments are part of life to satisfy an ordinary and natural need, and a community tries to select a singular mode

of clothes for a specific purpose, and then it eventually develops into uniform. This shows that the history of women's uniform has close relations to their social status in a community they belong to. For centuries, women's wearing uniform has closely been associated with their growth process.

Human clothes is a silent visual language that unveils one's social standing, role, character, attitude, occupation and values. In today's diversified society, clothes are sometimes subject to social approval, and become significant means of smoother, more successful job performance.

The purpose of this study is to research the

generation and history of women's uniform in the United Kingdom, as modern women's uniform has long continued to change throughout the human history. For that purpose, the literatures concerned, including earlier studies and domestic or foreign technical books, are reviewed, and pictures and photographs are examined as well. And early typical uniforms for nurse, housekeeper, nanny and female soldier are stuæfled, since these uniforms are a measure of what role each of the occupation groups had to perform and in which environment they worked.

II. The Generation of Uniform

1. The concept and role of uniform

A uniform is a certain mode of dress that complies with a specific standard. This is a compound word that comes from unus and forma in Latin. Unlike plain clothes, it is designed to have a specific form and serve a particular purpose.¹⁾

In fast-expanding society, uniform allows people to guess the role and position of a person who wears it, and reveals his or her position and social status.

There are five primary elements in uniform. First, it is a symbol that one is a member of a particular group. Second, it just gives an explanation about what its wearer does at present, with no additional information about him or her. Third, it testifies its wearers as a member of a group. It makes them represent the group, and imposes a certain responsibility on them, and thereby it 'justifies' their role in a given circumstances. Fourth, it is a symbol that they are

not an individual but part of the group, and consequently restrain their individuality. Fifth, it deals with organizational matter. As uniform serves as a vehicle to form a standardized organization, it is characterized by symbolism, and this symbolism represents the original ideology and individuality of the organization it belongs to, and gives a lot of mental impact on people who wear it.²⁾

Therefore, uniform exists for a certain purpose, unlike everyday clothes. It should be organizational and unified, and at the same time, it should be useful, convenient to wear, and appropriate for working environment. People who wear a uniform of a specific group give up their right to behave freely. They should abide by the regulations set by the group, and the uniform they wear is a symbol of authority.³⁾ As plain clothes are practical and expressive, uniform also is expressive and functional.

2. The origin of uniform

It's said that in Africa, Alaska and New Zealand, a family or a tribe had its own singular symbol, and put the mark on the body of its members in the form of tattooing or picture to show that they belonged to the family or tribe. ⁴⁾ This can be said as the origin of group-marking clothes. After some time passed by, a specific pattern was inserted in clothes for the same purpose. ⁵⁾ Therefore, uniform could be said to be created by a need to indicate one's social standing or group.

The beginning of uniform is closely related to religious community. Monks and nuns had to dress in a plain and solemn fashion to dedicate themselves to prayer, charity and self-control, and that was the first uniform, whose origin is

traced back to the early Christian church era. In that era, Christian women were called female evangelists, but there was yet neither community nor uniform. In the 6th century, however, nuncommunities were formed, and their singular attire was the start of uniform.

The nun communities were founded by St. Jerome in the 4th century and by St. Augustine in the 5th century. The monks and nuns led a similar life, and their dress was long and big in size, generally based on that of the Anglo-Sexons (Figure 1).

Usually, religious houses for monksandnuns were run by the chief abbesses. The houses were first built in Gaul and Ireland, England, in the 4th century. The chief abbesses who came from the royal family or were of noble birth had a great deal of influence, and nuns who were well-educated and powerful enjoyed their best days in the 6th and 7th centuries. And as the first teachers who taught girls, they were in charge of



<Figure 1> Almost identical was the timeless dress of the Benedictine nun(Mourning Dress, p.13)

education for girls over centuries until the Reformation. But the nun's organization that was the center of education started to rapidly decline when universities and grammar schools were founded immediately before the Reformation. And as girl students were requested to lead a more elegant life, they were more engaged in teaching sewing and the arts. And this became a chance for nuns to rebel against strict dress regulations, standardized uniform and most of the religious life.

In 1200, the London Council didn't allow women and nun to wear a colored silken hood in church, and any kind of gorgeous clothes and veil-fixing silver or golden pin were banned. In 1237, a religious conference prohibited nuns from wearing colored, loose or wrinkled dresses, and colored fur or dress that was longer than their height also was forbidden. And nuns who used a ring with expensive jewelry, a golden ring, a silken veil or a silver pin were condemned. So the religious conference put a strict regulation on silken veils or long wrinkled attires.⁷⁾

As the seat of religion and education for women, the nunneries were gradually on the wane, but they continued to be primary sources of occupation for women. And the origin of uniform can be traced back to the very clothes of nuns.

III. The Changes of Uniform

1. Domestic Service and Nanny

1) Uniform for domestic service

It was first worn by men, among them artisans,

builders, general workers and cooks, but women also appear in it from the early fourteenth century. In most cases they are countrywomen or servants and the typical apron was large, bibless, tied round the waist and often trimmed with a band of embroidery below the waist.

Women servants usually wore a rougher version of current fashion, the materials being those of the rest of the lower orders, including homespun, frieze, kersey, kendal, russet, fustian and even sackcloth for outer garments and coarse linen for underwear. The universal ground-length skirts were worn even by labouring women, but were sometimes turned up into a waist-belt, leaving the petticoat to bear the brunt of dirt and damp. This became a feature of women household servants attire. The 'dark stuff gown' often mentioned in records as typical servants wear was probably the precursor of the universal black of the Victorian servants formal

uniform and, like it, thought suitable for the subdued lower orders.

Housemaids didn't dress themselves to show off or in a special fashion, as they had to take care of housework as employees. They had no uniform, particularly because their mistresses usually handed down their clothes to them and it's very tough to make clothes before sewing machines were invented in the mid-19th century. In the 13th century, a lot of expensive dresses were possessed by masters started to be given to their servants when they died.

Most maidens dressed well, being regarded as one of family members, and they were in fashion, like their mistresses. They wore ribbons, ruffles, necklaces and petticoats, and used folding fans. Sometimes they wore expensive clothes, and they usually kept using luxurious uniforms(Figure 2).8)

In the early 19th century, there were few



<Figure 2> They Lady's maid, 1841, too grand to wear uniform (Women In Uniform, p. 21)



<Figure 3> The Victorian parlourmaid in uniform (Women In Uniform, p. 56)



<Figure 4> Moving with the times; styles of the 1920s (Women In Uniform, p. 57)

notable things that drew a line between mistresses and maidens, but what marked maiden was hood, badge or colored band on the sleeve. In the 1890s, only elderly women and servants wore hoods on their head, but many women of noble birth used laced clothes and wore ribbons on the head to discriminate themselves from maidens, and this type of attire continued to be the fashion.⁹⁾

In the United Kingdom, housekeepers wore back clothes, white frizzled hats and aprons, and these was the typical type of uniform. In particular, servants who received guests used printed gowns and simple white hats in the morning, and in the afternoon, simple black clothes with a white collar, hats and laced aprons were in use(Figure 3).

But maidens who wore uniforms began to disappear in the 1930s, and there were few such maidens in the middle-class families when the Second World War occurred.

Such a uniform started to be found outside



<Figure 5> The perfect Nippy, 1925 (Women In Uniform, p. 57)

home in the 1920s and 1930s, when nippies appeared, the most famous group that was in black and white(Figure 4). They were waitresses that rendered discreet and nippy service to guests, and their work was to serve others promptly and efficiently. In 1925, their uniform was fixed(Figure 5), and a stiff uniform was adopted in large popular restaurants.

It can be said that the uniform of nippy was the beginning of women's uniform in the current service industry.

2) Nanny uniform

Women's uniform started to be popular in the mid-19th century. In the late 19th century, English nannies were regarded as same as nurses. For centuries, they were employed by the upper-class families as a substitute for mother, and their existence was associated with a custom in the Middle Ages that children from affluent families grew up in another family of noble birth. 10) At first, those who took care of children were not clearly



<Figure 6> Following fashion more closely in the 1930s, but also a link with hosptial uniforms, (Women In Uniform, p. 54)

distinguished from maidens, and their clothes were similar to those of other servants(Figure 6).

Nannies in later Victorian times wore caps indoors, with bonnets or straw boaters out of doors. Nannies had worn dresses made of pique or cotton in morning, and long skirts of grey alpaca in winter afternoon, and of white in summer. These had wide belts and were worn with white shirts blouses, sometimes with stiff collars and cuffs.

It's not until universities offered nanny training courses in the end of the 19th century that their attire became different from those of servants. In 1890, Norland Institute was established as the first school where students learned the way of taking care of children and psychology. Their uniform was long and in bright color, with a stiff collar and lace in the breast part(Figure 7).

As colleges offering this type of education sprouted up across different regions, nanny

uniforms were diversified in form, and a singular type of uniform that followed the nurse uniform style was created. But basically, they run after the fashion(Figure 8).

In Norland Institute, students wore a biscuitbrown dress, and a cardigan was added in winter. Besides, they wore a mid-brown nap overcoat and a blower-style hat. The college graduates were not large in number, but they opened a new chapter for nanny occupation. Every nanny wore a dress that was similar to the college uniform.¹¹⁾

The uniform of the nursery nurse, not always greatly favoured today either by the wearer or by the private employer, was, however, worn in new places where the nursery nurse functions. An expanding area of activity has developed with the growth of nursery schools, day nurseries, play groups and nurseries for handicapped children. Other post are as school matron and nurse on



<Figure 7> The hospital-link uniform of the early Norland nursery nurses, mid-1890s (Women In Uniform, p. 52)



<Figure 8> Today's nursery nurse in smart, fashion-rightuniform (Women In Uniform, p. 54)

board passenger liners. So though today's family nanny may wear jeans or a trouser suit, the uniformed British nursery nurse remains and the tradition survives in a new form.

2. Nurse

1) Nurse uniform

Taking care of weak and sick people was part of the Christian ideology, and monks and nuns were in charge of that relief work. The important role of women was to take care of sick people, and was closely associated with the development of hospitals.

St. Bartholomews or Barts Hospital was the first hospital in England that was founded in 1123. Like hospitals run by religious groups, monks and nuns worked as a nurse in these hospitals. In Bart hospital, a tawny frieze uniform was adopted first in 1551, but that was replaced by a bright blue one, and hood was worn in indoor space to cover the head.

In 1686, white linen 'night rales' and hood were utilized in the same hospital, and other hospitals also had nurses wore the 'night rales' till 1843(Figure 9). That uniform was short, and there were hundreds of variations of it that made minor modifications. ¹²⁾

Gradually, laymen began to handle nursing and hospital management, but the outbreak of war and social upheaval resulted in deteriorating nurses and hospitals, and uniform failed to make any further progress. In the mid-1870s, however, Nightingale renewed the image of nurse as one wearing a clean uniform.¹³⁾ She had a huge, absolute influence on uniform for women and nurse, and this was the first great step toward today's nurse uniform.

The nurse uniform began to make a notable development in the late 19th century. At that time, the uniform was long and black with long sleeves, and white stiff cuffs were always added. Afterwards, there was a little change. A white apron and a bonnet were additionally used in 1897.¹⁴⁾ In 1898, the London Hospital adopted a uniform that was a blue serge dress with white apron, white collar, detachable white lower sleeves and Sister Dora caos(Figure 10).

The nurse cap stemmed from the cap with lace frill that Nightingale wore at nursing school in 1860.¹⁵⁾ In the beginning, the cap was used to keep the hair tidy for sanitary purpose, but nowadays, it is a symbol of service for the human race. The most famous style was Sister Dora caos named after Dorothy Pattison why was a nurse, and this hat was most popular.

The Nightingale nurses, the first group that wore a uniform, worked in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, Germany and Sweden, and Nightingale Nurse School was established. And thereby the Nightingale uniform spread all over the world. ¹⁶⁾

There were few changes in nurse uniform till 1920. It consisted of a black dress withwhite collar and cuffs and slightly puffed sleeve, with the Maltese cross of the Order and the Ambulance Association badge on the right arm. This dress was covered with a large white bibbed apron with cross-over straps. For outdoor wear a long cloak with a small shoulder cape covered the indoor uniform, the badge again appearing on the right side.

A black bonnet was worn on the black of the head and tied under the chin. It was usually of straw, velvet-trimmed and with a white frill round the front (Figure 11).

In World War One St John allied itself closely



<Figure 9> The famous uniform cape of the army nurse, worn by a Sister (Women In Uniform, p. 42)



<Figure 10> London Hospital-style uniform (Women In Uniform, p. 89)



<Figure 11 > Nursing uniform of St John, 1900 (Women In Uniform, p. 50)

with Red Cross, the women members wearing a grey nurse-style dress with apron and cap. A coat replaced the cloak. By 1939 women officers wore a black tailored suit, with white shirts and black tie, approximating to today's uniform, which is smart and attractive and accompanied by a distinguishing black felt hat, trimmed with white and caught up at the side with a cockade and badge. The nursing dress is up-to-date, in grey, with the Maltese cross on the bib of the white apron.¹⁷⁾

In general, nurse uniform was designed to be easy to manage and convenient for work, being always in black or grey. Nurses were proud of wearing the school uniform they graduated from, and each school made a choice of pin and cap at their own option. A lot of nurse schools selected a white school uniform, perhaps because they were in pursuit of unity.

2) Military nurse uniform

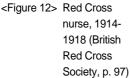
The nurse troops created by Nightingale consisted of 10 Catholic nuns from Bermondsey and Norwood, the Anglican Church nuns from the Miss Sellon's group, six nurses from St. John's House and 14 others from different hospitals. The nurses were the first uniformed women who served at war. Their uniform was composed of grey tweed wrappers, worsted jacket, short woolen cloaks, cap and holland mid-brown scarf.

The uniform was naturally necessary for sanitary purpose, but it more carefully aimed at protecting the nurses in the disorderly military units.

The uniform of the Red Cross nurses had a badge with a red cross in it(Figure 12).

This uniform came out first when they were sent to the France-Prussia war place to take care of wounded soldiers. Their uniform was similar to







<Figure 13> Sister A. R. R. <Figure 14> The Army Innes at the Boer War (Women In Uniform, p. 48)



nurse's uniforms (Women In Uniform, p.120)



<Figure 15> The original Sister's uniform of the QAIMNS, 1902 (Women In Uniform, p. 49)

that of other nurses, but one big difference was that they wore a hood that a piece of folded white linen square clothes was tied behind the neck. 18)

<Figure 13> is the nurse uniform at the Boer war, which was made up of grey dress, white apron and red cloak. <Figure 14> was the military nurse uniform during the Second World War. 19)

In 1902, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, or QAIMS, was founded, and its nurse uniform included grey dress, white veil, hat and scarlet shoulder cloak worn by nuns.

Currently, that is still in use with some modification(Figure 15).

3. Military

1) The First Aids Nursing Yeomanry's uniform.

The World War I highlighted the importance of women's military uniform. The dress worn by medical service corps at that war was the beginning of women's service uniform. In 1898, the First Aids Nursing Yeomanry, or FANY, was organized, which female nurses riding a horse treated wounded soldiers in field hospitals.²⁰⁾

The corps began to attract widespread attention and this was stimulated by its uniform, a dashing military-style affair of a close-fitting scarlet tunic with high collar and white Hussar loops and braid down the front, worn with a navy blue bell-shaped riding skirt with three rows of white braid round the hem, a hard-topped scarlet military cap with a black patent leather peak trimmed with silver braid, black patent leather riding boots, white gauntlet gloves and a white first-aid haversack and whistle.21)

By this time, too they wore more practical uniforms for the job, with officer-type khaki military jackets, khaki shirts, collars and ties, and abovethe-ankle walking skirts, completed by navy greatcoats piped with red(Figure 16).

2) Women's Army Auxiliary Corps uniform

The Women's Volunteer Reserve was established when the war occurred in 1914. The members wore a khaki military uniform, and this became the traditional service uniform for women. Although many talented women offered a helping hand to the military at war, their well-intentioned efforts were neglected at first. In December 1916 the first official entry of women into the services came with the formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps when it was estimated that 12.000 men serving in back areas but urgently needed at the front could be replaced by women.²²⁾

The first WAAC uniform in 1917 was a khaki frock that was popular at that time, but officers and drivers gradually began to wear a long skirt and a military-style khaki jacket. Soldiers wore a soft felt hat in the form of pudding basin, and officers used a peaked cap for men(Figure 17).

3) The Women's Royal Naval Service uniform

The Women's Royal Naval Service obtained an approval for the first time in 1917, and its members wore a uniform. The female soldiers chiefly served as a driver, a porter, a clerk or a housekeeper, and some of them were trained to be an officer or a cipher officer.²³⁾ They consisted of ankle-length dressing-gown style garments in thick, scratchy navy sergy, buttoned up the front, with miniature sailor collars at uncomfortably high neck.

The hat was the usual pudding basin, with a pleated crown. Heavy boots completed the outfit(Figure 18).

During the World War II, they sometimes wore a skirt, but the regular uniform was a white shirt and a tie. Today's velour felt tricorne hat for officer and noncommissioned officer was first used by the WRNS. In 1939, they wore the same uniform as the navy. The naval attire, a white shirtwaist



<Figure 16> The first women's military uniform FANY, 1909 (Womens at War, p. 82)



<Figure 17> WACC officer on a tour of inspection at Rouen, 1917 (Women In Uniform, p. 91)



<Figure 18> DameVera Laughton Mathews inspecting Chief and Petty WRNS officer (Women in uniform -Their Costume through the centuries, p. 111)

and a black tie gave them a new look(Figure 19).

The soft hat in the form of pudding basin was substituted by a sailor hat, and this hat is still put to use.²⁴⁾ A blue armband and a blue hatattached badge were adopted to show the rank, instead of the gold-colored ones used by the Navy. The WRNS uniform remains almost the same to date, although there were some minor modifications brought about by the changing fashion.

4) The Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service

After the World War II, female troops continued to exist, and the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service was founded in 1938. The members were engaged in woodworking, drawing design, electric engineering, machine handling, plate processing, telegram service, welding, etc. They held a formal position for the first time as part of the military. The uniform included a khaki jacket with belt and pocket, a skirt covering the calf of the leg, a khaki shirt with a tie, and a soft-peaked cap. Women's uniform became as diverse as men's, owing to the ATS uniform.

5) The Air Transport Auxiliary

The WAAF was refounded 25 years after the WRAF was disorganized. The WAAF members served as a driver, a liaison officer, a distributor, a telephone operator, a mechanic, an assembler, an acetylene welder, a radar operator, etc. They completed the same technical courses and like men, they wore various uniforms. Their uniform was composed of a black tie, a blue overall, a thick grey stocking, a beret and a badge(Figure 20).

The Air Transport Auxiliary, or ATA, was the first aviation unit for women. The ATA uniform was a navy blue tunic with four big pockets and a belt with a big bronze buckle. And black buttons that had a picture of crown and ATA letters on it were used(Figure 21). They worn a skirt or trousers and a blue shirt in the tunic. In addition, a winter



<Figure 19> The original uniform of WRNS officers and ratings (Women In Uniform, p. 92)



<Figure 20> The new WAFF uniform <Figure 21> Women pilots of the shown in arecruiting poster (Women In Uniform, p. 113)



ATA (Women in uniform -Their Costume through the centuries, p. 115)

overcoat, blue shoes, blue stocking and a blue tie were used.

Although women's military uniform has not long existed, a variety of uniforms have developed, like men's one, due to the World War.

IV. Conclusion

In England, uniform has been designed to function in a specific way, representing the power, wealth and authority. That has been an external and visual mark that shows where its wearer belongs to. The first uniform was initiated by the nunnery communities in the 6th century, and the first regular type of uniform aimed at discriminating masters from servants. The English maidens wore a black dress, a frizzled hat and an apron, and this was the origin of nippy uniform in the 1930s. Nannies who worked on behalf of mothers weren't clearly distinguished from maidens at first, but they used a uniform similar to that of nurse in the late Victorian era, which consisted of a long skirt, a white shirtwaist, a wide belt, a stiff collar and stiff sleeve. The nurse uniform has settled down since the late 19th century. At that time, nurses wore a black uniform that had a long skirt, long sleeves and white stiff cuffs. In 1890, various kinds of nurse uniform were produced, and most nurses used a blue cashmere dress. As many nurse schools leaned toward a white uniform, white became the dominant color for nurse uniforms, but they have still kept pursuing diversity to date.

The dress worn by the medical service corps at war was the beginning of women's military uniform. As women's military service was approved in 1907, they started to wear a standardized uniform. There were some

differences among units, but the dominant type was a khaki military jacket similar to that of male officers, a khaki shirts, a tie, a skirt covering the ankle or the calf of the leg, a blue overcoat for cold weather, a washbasin-shaped cap and boots.

Compared to men's uniform, women's ones have not long been used formally, but the World War contributed to enlarging women's scope of activities and producing more fixed and diversified forms of uniforms. Lots of current women's uniforms have their origin in what's usually worn in the end of the last century, and the fast changes of their styles paved the way for creating new concept for women's uniform. And this fact is an evidence that women find their ways into a lot of new fields.

As this study just attempted to make a partial review on uniform in a specific country, deeper and wider research efforts are called for in the future. But it's hoped that this study might contribute to producing more productive, better uniform design for women.

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