

MA Fashion Histories and Cultures

#DisgustOfficeOutfit

Give-Up-Beauty at the workplace

by Young Chinese Female Corporate workers

Jiangwen Liu

18th September 2025

Acknowledge:

感谢谁呢

Abstract

This research investigates an ongoing Chinese digital phenomenon #DisgustOfficeOutfit began in 2022, where post-2000s female office workers wear comfort driven outfits in the workplace. It utilize phenomenology from fashion studies, and conducts a gender affective study on everyday female office outfit. This paper is situated in twentieth century Chinese cultural-historical background and contemporary social disciplinary structures which explores post-2000 women's ideology behind the unconventional office dressing phenomenon. This paper applies archival research and visual analysis methods to newspapers, magazine articles and personal archive from late twentieth onwards in order to unpack Chinese historical-cultural value inheritance. Digital ethnography was applied to compare gendered differences in social media content. This research highlights how negative emotions impact the dressing, deriving from fashion affective study, embodied ethnography and autoethnographic sources.

Key words

Chinese Society, Chinese contemporary fashion, everyday fashion, female's professional dressing, affective study.

Content

1 Introduction	7
2 Literature Review	13
2.1 What is phenomenology?.....	14
2.1.1 Entwistle's application of sociological theories to workplace dressing....	15
2.2 Affective Expression: Disgust.....	21
2.3 Cultural and Historical Background.....	24
2.3.1 During the War (1911-1949).....	24
2.3.2 The Early Years of Establishment (1949-1966)	
2.3.3 The Cultural Revolution and After (1966-1976)	
2.3.4 Defrost from the Culture Revolution (1976-~)	
2.4 Where to express: Digital Platform	
3 Research Method and Methodology	
3.1 Introduction of all Ethnography methods	
3.1.1 Digital Ethnography	
3.1.2 Embodied Ethnography	
3.1.3 Autoethnography	
3.2.1 Archival Research	
3.2.2 Visual Analysis	
3.3 Conclusion	
4 Chinese Office Outfit	
4.1 Historical factors of 'Office Outfit' various from generation	
4.1.1 From policies to social norms	

4.1.2 Micro-Tactics towards social regulations

4.2 Values of 'Office Outfit' inheritance or resistance

4.2.1 Bottom line of avoiding excessive exposure: “庄重, zhuàngzhòng”

4.2.2 Unspoken value of functionality: “朴素, púsù”

4.2.3 Concessional value of collectivism: “集体, jí tǐ”

5 Why Female?

5.1 Where are men?

5.2 Comfort Protest : Deviate from Pressure

5.2.1 Anxieties: from work

5.2.2 Anxieties: From Aesthetic through Digital platform

5.3 Protest of Comfort through Digital Platform

6 An Expression of Ugly feelings

6.1 Personal Experience

6.1.1 Objective Reality: Stage I

6.1.2 Objective Reality: Stage IV

6.1.3 Objective Reality: Stage VI

6.2 Decipher the Feeling

6.2.1 Powerless feelings : Stage I

6.2.2 Powerful Border: Stage IV

6.2.3 Numb Border: Stage VI

6.3 Findings

7 Conclusion

Introduction

“Wearing the right clothes is so very important We enter into the realm of feelings

‘prudential, ethical and aesthetic, and the workings of what one might call sartorial conscience’. (Enstwislte, 2001, p36)” Appreciating beauty is part of everyday life (Comfort and Freitas, 2022), yet “Beauty is, in some ways, boring.” (Henderson, 2015, p.10) Fashion often carry emotional, cultural, and political significance, offering richer material for understanding social dynamics, which “plays a central role in this process, constructing identity at the intersection of individual agency and social expectations” (Woodward, 2007, p.30).

Against this backdrop, a striking online phenomenon has emerged in mainland China since 2022 that disrupts conventional workplace dressing expectations: #上班恶心穿搭, which I personally participated (Fig.1) and would prefer to translate as #DisgustOfficeOutfit (#DOO in the following contents). While in some authorised reports were “Gross Outfit”(Tan, 2024), but the term 恶心 carries a richer connotation than “gross”. In other words ‘disgust’ contains more internalised feelings as well as deeper theoretical affective approaches, is one of the keys to resolve the phenomenon.



Figure 1: Loosen T-shirt and sports shorts office look .
(Liu, 2023)

The #DOO began in late 2022, when young women posted images of their mismatched, comfort-driven office outfits ,pajama pants under long coats, fluffy slippers, worn sneakers, fleece leggings, on Douyin (Chinese TikTok), accompanied by captions expressing exhaustion and resistance toward workplace norms. The first viral post (Fig.2) included the text: “My female boss scolded me for dressing too ‘gross’... I quit the job.” Thousands of users commented in solidarity: “Brushing my teeth is my biggest respect for work,” or “4,000-yuan salary doesn’t deserve me dressing well.” Others reflected on generational frugality and

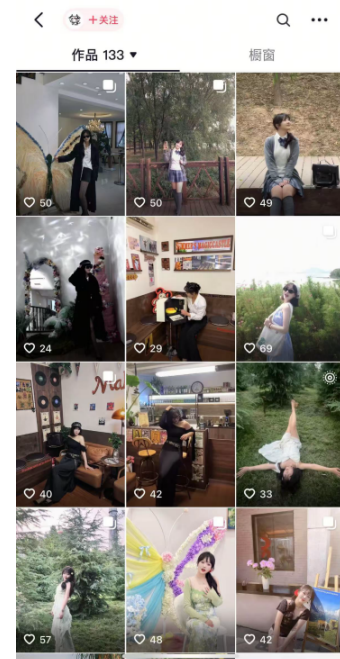


Figure 3: sharp contrast between fashionable life and ‘disgust’ work

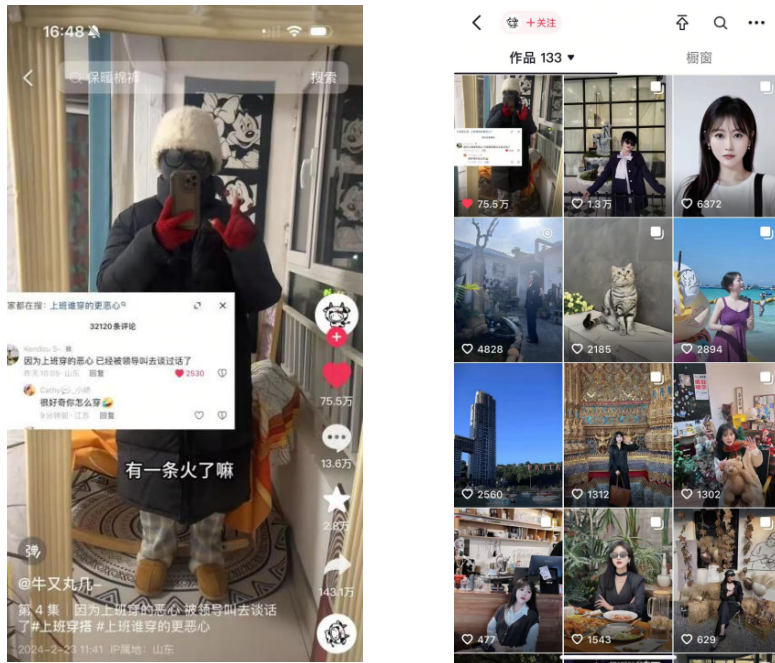


Fig. 2: Disgust Office Outfit
(牛又丸几- , 2024)

sustainability values, saying: "Now I understand why my parents kept old clothes for work."

A second viral hashtag read: "*#DOO has nothing to do with how I dress outside work,*" accompanied by images of the individual dressed up in decent fashion taste out of work. These posts revealed a sharp contrast between fashionable life and 'disgust' work(Fig.3).

The #DOO officially went into a buzz word in February 2024, thanks to the media, not only social media influencers, but also journal articles in Chinese CCTV, People's Daily, The New York Times, The New York Post, Business Insider ... all extent the coverage. However, the domestic and international press reveals conflicting perspectives. In the article from Business Insider *Gen Z workers in China are picking 'gross outfits' over corporate glam because they don't get paid enough to look fly*, Tan (2024) framed the

phenomenon as “the most comfortable form of corporate rebellion yet.” Alternatively, Shanghai Observer (2024) titled their article of “*Competing in Ugliness at Work? Gross Outfits? Not that far!*” While Extreme News (2024) suggested the phenomenon may stem as “helplessness and personal struggles,” rather than “deliberate rejection of workplace norms,” As the headlines indicate, media have used the phenomenon as a vehicle to advance their own arguments. Speaking as an insider, I argue that none of these accounts sufficiently address the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the phenomenon.

So, why do the participants of the #DisgustOfficeOutfit phenomenon engage in this “give-up-beauty” dressing practice? In terms of answering this question, the study break down into three more targeted sub-questions: Why in China? Why in this generation? Why female? And in all, what are they trying to express? And alternatively, what does this phenomenon contribute to affective fashion study?

Fashion theoretical approaches is the framework of answering the questions, the workplace dress has been examined extensively in relation to professionalism, organisational norms, and gendered expectations by Entwistle (2000, 2001, 2015), but only through the lens of the Western. *Fashion and Anxiety* (Clarke and Miller, 2002) raised negative affective do towards fashion, but affective dressing is still theoretical challenging in research. Even less is known about these dynamics in contemporary China, where everyday professional fashion has been strongly

influenced by Western aesthetics since the late 20th century, yet continues to be shaped by cultural values.

This absence of scholarship opens a critical window: studying #DOO offers a way to build up a Chinese contemporary workplace scene in order to understand how young women negotiate with power, identities, and emotions in the workplace through clothing. In this topic, my insider experience provides primarily embodied understanding of how everyday office outfit is, reflects and negotiates the complex entanglements between cultural values, political and social forces, feelings and perceptions within today's Chinese society. Also, if it may come, an approach for self-redemption and growth.

This study originated on the Chinese internet and embedded in a Chinese-language context, several localised terms require clarification. First, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the country's sole ruling party and dominates public discourse. Second, rather than 'baby boomer' or 'Gen-Z,' Chinese usage labels cohorts as 'post-60s,' 'post-70s,' etc., denoting those born within each decade; in this article, '#DOOer' generally refers online to the 'post-00s' (people born after 2000). Third, discussions in the Chinese context still focus primarily on binary gender; accordingly, this article does not address LGBTQ influences. Finally, all Chinese sources are translated by the author.

In order to fill in the gap, this study integrates multi-methods. Archival research combining visual analysis on local paper media during 1978–2010 and personal

archive from late twentieth century onwards, for exploring the historical and policy-driven construction of office attire, revealing long-standing cultural and political value inheritances. Digital ethnography is used to observe, collect, and analyse posts, comments, and discursive exchanges on Douyin, and Red Notes, dissolving why is this phenomenon female oriented. Positing as an insider, using autoethnography and embodiment ethnography to engage in visual or verbal recorded of living experiences, tracing emotional dynamics and analyzing through theory lens. I translated all primarily sources since the phenomenon origins in China. Altogether, provide a multi-layered perspective, connecting digital expressions, historical-cultural context, personal experience, and bodily sensation to unpack #DOO from the fashion study.

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows: Chapter Two reviews literature on fashion theory from phenomenology towards affective study, emphasizing framework on the negative feeling 'disgust', Chinese cultural-historical background from 1911 to 1978, social media digital platforms provide the discussion site; Chapter Three outlines design research methods and methodology in detail. Chapter Four analyses the cultural distinctions China and the West in professional dress, highlighting the cultural-historical value shaping of "appropriate" workwear in Chinese contexts from archival research and visual analysis. Chapter Five examines the gendered nature of professional dress, contrasting #DOO with Western casual business norms, through digital ethnography comparison. Chapter Five explores how

fashion anxiety and negative emotions arise in relation to workplace expectations, included personal embodied experiences of disgust. Chapter Six reflects on the implications of #DOO as a subtle yet potent act of resistance and its contribution to understanding the intersections of dress, emotion, and power in contemporary China.

2. Literature Review

Fashion is not only aesthetic but also a social practice shaped by power, culture, and identity (Entwistle, 2000). However, studies of professional attire remain largely Western-centric, rooted in Euro-American contexts shaped by capitalism and liberal feminism (Entwistle, 2015). In contrast, contemporary Chinese office wear, especially for women, has been shaped by a very different set of forces.

Yet, from any perspective, the phenomenon of 'giving up beauty' must be seen as an anomaly. This section adopts a phenomenological approach and employs an integrated theoretical framework to advance the study of affective fashion. Using feelings of 'disgust' as material, modern Chinese history as a trajectory, and digital platforms as a medium, it seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the causes of #DOO and to interpret its modes of expression.

2.1 What is phenomenology?

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2012) *Phenomenology of Perception* supplemented to phenomenology by emphasizing that, beyond consciousness as a mental activity

located in the brain, it is our bodily sensations and embodied experiences that hold primacy in shaping how we perceive and engage with the world. Merleau-Ponty argued perception is prior than consciousness, in the sense that our primary way of engaging with the world is not through detached, reflective thought, but through pre-reflective, embodied experience.

Llewellyn Nergrin's (2025) chapter in *Thinking through Fashion*, explained how Merleau-Ponty's work fills a conceptual gap in fashion theory by emphasizing not just the visuality of dress but also the bodily comportment in space. "The body is not merely an object among others, but the very subject through which the world becomes intelligible: a 'lived body' forms the points of view on the world(p.116). "

As so, phenomenology even in the fashion studies, reveals that unpacking a phenomenon involves a wide range of dimensions. These include the specific time and site, historical and contextual background, the involved individual, individual's physical and psychological states, perceptions, and responses. Moreover, the analysis of these bodily and mental states must take into account both conscious and unconscious experiences, as well as shifting psychological dynamics. While such analysis could draw from multiple disciplines, may including philosophy, sociology, psychology, humanity, literature neuroscience... ..

2.1.1 Entwistle's application of sociological theories to workplace dressing

Many of the theories later applied to fashion studies have, to a significant extent, been influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Among these, the most relevant to the present research are those developed by Joanne Entwistle (2000, 2001, 2015), whose theoretical framework builds upon, and extends, Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, and others.

Understanding why the phenomenon occurred, by Joanne Entwistle's (2001) *Body Dressing* in which structures the contemporary female workplace outfit, use the sociological framework to analyze body dressing as communication. She discussed how dressed body in the workplace, can serve as identity construction and social resistance both as social practice and individual expression. Entwistle (2001, p35) regards dress is an embodied practice, a situated bodily practice which is embedded within the social world and fundamental to micro social order. She emphasizes individuals are active in their engagement with the social through dressing.

Power and Discipline

Michel Foucault's notion of bio-politics can be defined as: an evolution of micro-level discipline which offers a macro perspective on how clothing participates in managing populations through ideals of productivity, beauty, and hygiene (in Tynan, 2015). Entwistle (2001) points out the contradiction from Foucault's: "on the one hand, his bio-politics would appear to construct the body as a concrete, material entity,

manipulated by institutions and practices; on the other hand, his focus on discourse seems to produce a notion of the body which has no materiality outside of the representation(p42).” This is a useful contradiction to explore because it is reflective of society's complex relationship with dress directly align with the Chinese history in the late 40 years.

Foucault’s theories of discipline, discourse, and biopolitics developed how systems of power govern the way people dress provide a critical lens. As Jane Tynan (2015, p186) notes, discourse shapes the organization of knowledge, determining what is deemed acceptable or deviant in clothing. Fashion operates not only as a system of symbolic meaning but also as a disciplinary tool that regulates the body through norms, comportment, and self-surveillance. Tynan illustrates this with military dress and uniforms, which produce “docile bodies” aligned with social and national expectations. This notion of discourse offers a valuable starting point for examining the relationship between Chinese political discourses on dress and perceptions of gender difference, as these are constituted in fashion texts, organizational management strategies, and suggest particular forms of bodily discipline (p41).

Performance

In the same article, Entwistle(2001) paraphrases Erving Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical model, conceptualize fashion as a mode of performance, is fruitfully connected with Merleau-Ponty. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman(1956) noted that

individual's body is both belong to the individual and the society. Thus the individual feels a social and moral imperative to perform their identity in learning the appropriate ways of dressing (p47), which leads to the performance distinction into two system: "frontstage" and "backstage" behavior, this informs my reading of #DOO, builds up an argument of #DOO is a backstage rehearsal or not and the reason behind it.

Entwistle (2001) argued that Goffman's work addressed 'performance' in formal and informal contexts, but overlooked the notion of 'everyday performance.' She further drew on Crossley's (1995) argument that dress forms part of the micro-social order of most social spaces, and that in dressing, we attend to the norms specific to particular settings.(p49).

To back up her argument, Michel de Certeau's (1984) theory of tactics and "making do" offers a powerful perspective, helps to examine the negotiation between individual agency and institutional constraint more closely. As de Certeau (2011, p. xv) writes, these marginal practices can function as forms of anti-discipline—small, creative deviations that allow wearers to reclaim agency over their embodied identities. #DOO can be interpreted as a tactical response to corporate dress codes, in which post-00s female office workers creatively work within constraints while pushing the boundaries of what is considered "appropriate."

Class

Entwistle(2015) notes that “Veblen(1953) and Simmel(1971) are the most famous proponents of the theory of fashion as emulation”. As Michael Carter (2003, p. 59-81) explains, Simmel views fashion as a tool through social groups assert class identity: “The fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former, when the latter begin to appropriate them” (p.68) thus “trickle down”. Simmel argues (in Entwistle 2015, p62) fashion expresses a tension between uniformity and differentiation. This fundamental argument underpins the understanding of fashion as intrinsically linked to social hierarchy and mobility.

In the Chinese context, this class-function of fashion was profoundly interrupted during the early communism phase in the Chinese contemporary history, highlighted by the Cultural Revolution, when the state actively suppressed aesthetic distinction, leading to what Obukhova (2014) describe as a period in which “politics froze fashion” and influenced the generation. My study builds on this historical rupture to examine how, from the late 1980s to the 1990s, when fashion was "defrosting" and evolving, resulting in contemporary distinctions in how office wear is culturally interpreted in China.

Women’s Dressing Social Pressures imposed by fashion system

In *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*, Entwistle (2015) further develops the discussion of how women’s workplace attire can shape the way individuals are perceived in professional settings. She observes that, social pressures encourage conformity to the boundaries of what is defined as appropriate or acceptable

dress in specific contexts, individuals unconsciously internalize the micro-social order of social spaces and reproduce it without awareness. Choices of dress are made in relation to particular situations, with different occasions demanding different dress codes and forms of bodily comportment. On one hand, dressing may involve deliberate thought, careful consideration, or meticulous preparation. On the other hand, the global fashion system defines current aesthetics, shapes trends and taste, and constructs the everyday sartorial experiences of individuals.

For women, bodily sensibilities toward clothing and adornment tend to be more pronounced than for men. The workplace, constitutes a particularly distinctive social setting, while suits worn by men function to de-sexualize the body, emphasizing professionalism and neutrality, which operates differently for women, whose bodies are culturally coded with a 'feminine' sexual quality. As so, women have developed specific clothing strategies to better navigate workplace interactions. Entwistle explores women in professional spaces use dress either to minimize their sexuality or to affirm femininity, strategies of embodiment that aim to command respect or assert identity.

Like Entwistle, Iris Marion Young (1997, 2005) argues that women are more closely associated with their bodies than men. In her essay *Women Recovering Our Clothes*, Young (1997) highlights the sensuous pleasure that clothing can provide for women, pleasures not structured around the male gaze but located in the tactility of garments

themselves. The experience of wearing, she suggests, can offer the delight of touch without the mediation of a male spectator (in Negrin, 2025, p119).

Young's(2005) finding provide partial reasons for why young Chinese female wearing comfortable clothes to workplace. While Entwistle's(2015) findings remain deeply rooted in the discursive framework of the Western world. Owing to different historical and cultural factors, the fashion pressures experienced by young women in the contemporary Chinese workplace, is not completely align from the former.

Supplement Affective Embodied Theory of Dressing

Lucia Ruggerone(2016) builds upon Entwistle (2000, 2001, 2015), and critiques her boundedness, particularly the lack of engagement with the affective and practical experience of the clothed body in space. Ruggerone draws on Spinoza (1993) and Deleuze (2007) to distinguish between affect and emotion, affect refers to “the continuous variation of someone’s force of existing” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 3), or “bodily intensity or the concentration of bodily forces” (Massumi, 2002, p. 27) which is pre-subjective, unqualified intensities. Emotions, are defined as “the socio-linguistic fixing” of such intensities (Massumi, 2002, p. 28), which is a subjective and qualified experience that is recognized, narrativized, and made intelligible to others.

Ruggerone's(2016) affective framework offers a vital point of entry into understanding the embodied dimension of everyday dress, by descending into a more mundane register, attention to shifts in affect and bodily encounters reveals the extra-cognitive elements involved in the practice of dressing and living in clothes in daily life. In the particular #DOO phenomenon, provide a way to fill the gap between the challenges earlier claim by Woodward's (2007) assertion of women's dressing toward who they aspire to be, and Entwistle's binary of the "powerful" or "feminine" look.

2.2 Affective Expression: Disgust

Sara Ahmed (2013), who theorizes disgust as a performative affect: a boundary-making emotion that enacts social exclusion through bodily responses; Sianne Ngai(2007), who identifies disgust as one of the most extreme forms of ugly feelings: a category of low-intensity negative emotions that reflect powerlessness, ambivalence, and constrained agency in late-capitalist everyday life.

Sianne Ngai, Ugly Feelings

Sianne Ngai (2005), in *Ugly Feelings*, extends this framework by placing disgust at the far end of a spectrum of low-intensity, negative emotions that she terms "ugly feelings." She argues that disgust, as the most extreme of tone, animateness, envy, irritation, anxiety, stuplimity, paranoia, is deeply tied to social exclusion and aesthetic judgment, signals

inhibition, paralysis, and powerlessness. In Ngai's schema, ugly feelings marked by ambivalence and constrained agency rather than direct resistance.

Among above, anxiety is an inevitable emotion when making fashion choices for different social spaces (Clarke & Miller, 2002). Disgust on the other hand though have never proved otherwise, as a quiet signal of discomfort more extreme than anxiety within everyday life, in environments saturated with institutional and cultural pressure. Ngai's theory offers a lens to interpret everyday affective experiences, such as the embodied discomfort of workplace dressing where become silently inscribed in what one wears. The #DOO can thus be read as a minor, meaningful articulation of these affective undercurrents: a withdrawal from the normative fashion codes of the professional sphere that marks the body with a kind of aesthetic refusal.

Sara Ahmed, Disgust as a Performative Affect

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2013) frames disgust as a performative affect. Building on the layered taxonomy of emotions developed by Paul Rozin (2000), she references the distinction between biological disgust and moral disgust, which the latter described as "protecting not just the body, but the soul, defending against moral contamination" (Rozin et al., 2000, p.637–653). Ahmed derives the social functionality of disgust as a form of active rejection. In which disgust operates as a boundary-making

mechanism, establishing a clear separation between self and other. Through its performativity, disgust attaches the label of “abjection” or “impurity” to the non-self, marking others as outsiders to secure the purity of the subject. Her structural analysis of disgust is threefold:

- First, disgust as Stickiness: an affective glue that attaches itself to certain bodies or objects, rendering them socially contagious. This stickiness facilitates inclusion and exclusion, helping to sustain collective identities by drawing affective borders.
- Second, disgust operates through a spatial imaginary: where the imagined proximity of the offending object can provoke rejection. Crucially, this response also functions moral-psychologically, helping individuals construct an internal sense of personal moral hierarchy.
- Third, disgust as repetitive border-maintenance: The impact of disgust lying under internalized performance, where social norms are reinforced through habitual affective responses.

While these affective borders can be instrumentalized in religious or political ideologies, Ahmed also notes that disgust often operates at the level of personal and internalized boundary-making, particularly outside explicitly moral or political discourse.

Unpacking the #DOO with this theoretical equation with authentic personal experience as resource. The research is aiming of connecting changes in dress with the performative

dynamics of disgust, and to explore the intersections between affect and quotidian fashion practice.

2.3 Cultural and Historical Background

Antonia Finnane's(2007) *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* provides comprehensive historical account of how clothing in China has been entangled with politics, class, and modernity, helps deconstruct and understand this phenomenon, and address the research questions.

2.3.1 During War (1911-1949)

In the early stage of 20th century, peace is hard to seek in China, wars between political parties domestically and defend the motherland from foreign forces. The last feudal dynasty Qing collapsed and the Republic of China was founded in 1911, its ruling party the Nationalist was established in 1919. In 1921, the now the Chinese governing party, the Communist, was quietly founded, following which the anti-Communist campaign (1929-1933), the anti-Japanese war (1931-1945), and the civil war (1946-1949), meaning people were extensively exposed to military dress, and dress is severely influenced by the political force.

The Republic of China was proclaimed on January 1st of 1911, the civilian leader, Sun Yat-sen's (孫中山) with his *Three People's Principles* (nationalism, democracy, and livelihood) as the founding

ideology (Britannica ,1998), claimed to be the leader of the brand new nation. Chinese began to replace their Manchu-style dress with the modern styles. During when, the Sun Yatsen suit (中山装) emerged as a highly symbolic professional garment for male officials and intellectuals. By Sun's personal implement, "The jacket was close-fitting and buttoned down the centre, with square pockets at the breast and waist, and was worn over trousers cut in the Western style. (p.83)" All the buttons, pockets was designed with political meanings, the three buttons on each sleeves refers to the Three People's Principles.



Fig. 5 Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong wearing the Yatsen suit (2007)

The suit had a profound impact in political circles during the war period, the photograph (Fig.5) of Mao and Chiang, paramount leaders of the two parties: the Communist and the Nationalists, negotiating about cooperate action of anti-Japanese war in Chongqin 1945.

At the same time, during 1930s-1940s women's wear varies from their political stand and social character, on one hand there can be no difference than man's, if they belong to the communist and join the war either for anti-Japan or the domestic battle between the two parties. The photograph (Fig.6) of Mao's third wife He Zizhen and Marshal Zhu De's wife Ke Keqing at Yanan in 1937.



Fig. 6 He Zizhen and Ke Keqing at Yanan in 1937 (Finnane, 2007)



Fig. 7 Yu Fengshi and Pei Hui-lan wearing elegant qipao (Finnane, 2007)

On the other hand, members of the Nationalist, took Shanghai as the starting point for promoting the aesthetics of qipao fashion, stepping onto the international stage as leaders' wives. The photograph (Fig.7) shows Yu Fengshi and Pei Hui-lan wearing elegant qipao at a diplomatic function in 1932.

2.3.2 Job Requirement of The Early Years of Establishment(1949-1966)

The People's Republic of China was officially proclaimed on October 1st, 1949, after the

Communist won the war, Mao Zedong as the Chairman insisted of using the Yatsen suit as the national custom for boosting the promise of victory and showing the national pride of modernity. The military trousers were worn by soldiers, peasantry, by cadres managed them and was adopted by man and women.

National Bureau of Statistics (1999) shows that in the first decade of China, the economy displayed the clear characteristics of an agrarian country: the value of agricultural output accounted for 58.5% of the total social product, no office job required. Meanwhile, Women's Emancipation Movement was in full swing, granting women equal rights in law and encouraging them enter the workforce. Both propaganda and policy were grounded in the idea that men and women, workers and peasants, should join forces to promote national development.

Fashion for women was changing with the women's liberation, though no formal regulation were restricting them, "the sudden abandonment of qipao for pants and shirts in Shanghai by the city's streets girls" women were all in plain colours as the fashion style for them (in Finnane, 2007, p.201). The poster (Fig. 8) are the working women used on the front of the official women's magazine working in different range of categories, all appeared to be focused, cheerful, and positive. Although women were not working in offices at the time, it was during this period that the foundation was laid for women's entry into the workplace.



Fig. 8 Front page of working woman in 1950s (2007)

2.3.3 The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

The Cultural Revolution was presented as a campaign to ‘overthrow the evil bourgeoisie’ and ‘resolutely uphold Chairman Mao’s directives.’ During this period, military-style attire once again became ubiquitous in everyday dress and frost all other forms of Fashion.

The whistleblower incident of the ten-year ‘Cultural Revolution’ occurred in 1967, when Wang Guangmei, the wife of President Liu Shaoqi, was accused of being a member of the “reactionary bourgeoisie” after appearing in a documentary, *Chairman Liu Shaoqi Visits Indonesia*, wearing a refined and elegant qipao.

The Cultural Revolution was a mass movement, which forced everyone in the country to join. Teenagers, self-identifying as Mao’s Red Guards, unilaterally targeted individuals they perceived to be associated with or engaged in capitalist activities. Regardless of gender, wearing the military uniform of the Yanan period, holding the red *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, and sporting a red armband was the most fashionable attire among young people at the time(Fig. 9).



Fig. 9 A young Mao's Red Guards, Hao Zhihong (2007)

People who didn't follow the collective dressing code are the target, would be humiliated by the Red Guards, according to Nien Cheng (in Fannane, p228), a girl who wore a narrow cut pants with a fashionable shoes was seized by the Red Guards who forcibly removed her shoes or trousers in front of the jeering crowd.



Fig. 10 A troop of female Mao's Red Guards (2007)

During this ten-year period, everything associated with Mao was upheld and celebrated; the dresses worn by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, were copied and worn by everyone. Conversely, anything to which Mao expressed disapproval was regarded as a grave offense, and any action taken to punish the so-called offenders was deemed acceptable, including beating, smashing, looting, rape, public humiliation and so on.

2.3.4 Defrost from the Culture Revolution (1976-~)

Not until after Mao's death in 1976, the immediate successor, Hua Guofeng declared the Cultural Revolution is over, and another year later in 1978, the long-term successor, Deng Xiaoping called for modernisation in all field of a country's development, in 1992, when China established the socialist market economy system and further opened its coastal port cities to foreign trade and investment, that large-scale foreign trade activities and the influx of foreign enterprises truly accelerated the formation of an urban white-collar class (Chinese Communist Party Member, 1992).

Of particular note is that it was not until 1983, private property rights had been guaranteed that the Chinese people were free to purchase clothing, which indicated the clothing purchase policy involving "cloth coupons" was gradually abolished (Davis, 2000, P30).

2.4 Express Affective on Digital Platform

The core of the research topic, the post-00s, digital natives. As discussed in *Digital Youth Subcultures: Performing 'Transgressive' Identities in Digital Social (2022)*, young adults navigate a dual existence between online and offline worlds. The digital realm serves as a crucial space for identity exploration and self-expression, particularly for those who struggle to authentically express their beliefs and identities in physical social contexts. Compelled by a profound need for validation and existential significance, they turn to online platforms to voice their personal convictions and life philosophies, acts of self-affirmation that are often constrained in their offline environments.

Myles Ethan Lascity (2021) highlights how social media enables fashion communication as a process of collective meaning-making, where comments, humour, and memes reshape sartorial codes in *Communicating Fashion: Clothing, Culture and Media*. In the case of #DOO, what begins as an individual's emotional response to workplace pressure, embodied in "unprofessional" dressing, becomes a shared cultural narrative online. Through hashtags, vlogs, and communal discussions, feelings of disgust, exhaustion, and reluctance towards officewear gain visibility, building solidarity among young female workers who experience similar constraints. The rapid exchange of ideas and communication on platforms makes it easier for

unconventional fashion choices to gain visibility and become widely acceptable. Social media platforms empower self-expression and have enabled a more inclusive and fluid definition of beauty and fashion.

Conclusion on Literature Review

Overall these strands highlight a key research gap: while Western scholarship has theorised professional dress as a site of identity negotiation and social regulation, little understanding of how these dynamics play out in post-socialist China, where imported Western offewear collides with enduring collectivist values and new feminist discourses. This study positions the #DOO within this under explored intersection, contributing a perspective that combines cultural history, gender analysis, aesthetic emotion theory, and sociological approaches to fashion.

3. Research Design, Method and Methodology

This research employs a comprehensive set of methods: archival research and visual analysis, digital ethnography, embodied ethnography, and autoethnography. Archival research is combined with visual analysis of local print media and personal photo albums from the 1980s to 2000s, allowing me to trace and follow the threads of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) regarding how Chinese women who entered the corporate world after the 1978 Reform and Opening-Up dressed, and the unique value systems they followed or challenged (Ma Wenhua, 2023). Digital ethnography provides up-to-date insights into the ongoing phenomenon, and is particularly

valuable for exploring both the deep structures and visible manifestations of gender difference. Embodied ethnography is intertwined with autoethnography to vividly relive and reflect upon my personal experiences of engaging in #DisgustOfficeOutfit—examining emotional states, visual and verbal outputs, and their indicators in digital social spaces. Through this multi-method approach, my goal is to comprehensively reconstruct the antecedents, dynamics, and implications of young Chinese women's participation in #DisgustOfficeOutfit at work, thereby answering the research questions and advancing scholarship in affective fashion studies.

3.1 Introduction of all Ethnography methods

Embodied ethnography, autoethnography and digital ethnography are my threefold chosen methods within the broader ethnographic category. As Kaur-Gill and Jyoti Dutta (2017) note, ethnographers aim to make sense of individuals' lived experiences by examining and interpreting the meanings that emerge from their everyday realities. Ethnography forms the methodological foundation of this research, focusing particularly on the experiences, feelings, and emotions expressed through dress. As Sara Chong Kwan (2019) suggests, this approach facilitates the qualitative exploration of how individuals experience and understand the world through embodied engagement and action—capturing the sensory, emotional, and social dynamics inherent in clothing practices. Joanne Entwistle (2000) argues that clothing is fundamentally a bodily experience, and her discussion of anti-conventional wear indicates that “bodies do not conform, bodies that flout the conventions of their culture and go without the appropriate clothes are subversive of the most basic social codes, and risk exclusion, scorn or ridicule” (p. 324).

3.1.1 Digital Ethnography

To develop a clear and nuanced understanding of the digitally rooted phenomenon #DOO, digital ethnography is the most appropriate methodological choice. As Underberg & Zorn (2013, p.10) describe, digital ethnography “represents real-life cultures by combining the characteristic features of digital media with elements of narrative and storytelling.” The practice of #DOO has evolved since late 2022, and like other post-pandemic social phenomena, it has been shaped and amplified through interactions on digital platforms (Forberg & Schilt, 2023). While the digital field is often described as "messy" (Postill & Pink, 2012) and subject to ambiguity regarding boundaries and identities, my study focuses exclusively on Chinese social media sites, allowing for in-depth investigation with greater contextual consistency—though notable geographic and developmental disparities persist within China itself.

When conducting digital ethnography, it is crucial to carefully negotiate the boundaries between public and private spheres online (Klaus, Bruhn & Jensen, 2013). Ethical research standards require vigilant attention to privacy: no personal, company, or location information of users is disclosed, and behaviors that may infringe upon privacy laws are strictly avoided. I born in mind that remain subjective when translating and choosing all the captures while preserve one’s position, aims, and possible impact in the digital field is essential to prevent "getting lost" in the multiplicity of digital traces and narratives.

In this research, digital ethnography was primarily used to compare gendered factors among

young corporate workers, as well as to analyze the differing representations and discourses of #DOO and more normative forms of office dress on social platforms. Given the immense influence digital media has on the fashion sensibilities of young men and women today, my analysis compared how both male and female office attire is promoted, discussed, and evaluated online. This comparative approach enables me to uncover how gendered behavioral norms and expectations regarding appearance are generated, reinforced, or contested in professional contexts, highlighting, in particular, that young female tend to face higher and more explicit expectations around visual presentation. Further, by closely examining the highly praised and promoted styles for women, and the resulting anxieties they evoke online, I am able to tease out the underlying threads leading some women to adopt the “give-up-beauty” approach embodied in #DOO as a strategy for emotional self-protection and low-key resistance.

3.1.2 Embodied Ethnography

Embodied ethnography, as Kwan (2019) explains, employs the body—whether of the researcher or of participants—as a research tool to access nonverbal experiences and forms of knowledge. This direct, corporeal engagement moves beyond purely verbal or textual accounts, enabling deeper empathy and a more nuanced understanding of how participants make meaning through their bodies and clothing. For this study, investigating the #DisgustOfficeOutfit phenomenon through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (as outlined in the literature review) is crucial, since embodiment is a defining feature of everyday fashion practice.

As O’Reilly (2014) observes in *Insider Ethnographies*, “insider” researchers—those who are

already natives to the field—may gain rapport more easily and participate more fully, but can also become too deeply involved to maintain critical distance. Recognizing these potential pitfalls, I drew on Kirsten Hastrup's (1987) "mirror of fieldwork" framework. Hastrup suggests that the ethnographer should oscillate between the roles of observer, participant, and, crucially, a reflective third-person perspective—one who not only lives and feels the field, but steps outside it to critically interpret experience. Throughout my research, I engaged with #DOO both as an insider and analyst, striving to combine empathic participation with detached observation in order to generate embodied, reflexive knowledge about office dress as lived resistance.

I seek to evoke personal feelings through embodied experience; however, in the process, I found it impossible to 'hold up a mirror' to clearly recall old memories and focus solely on the feelings, even when wearing those outfits again. As a result, this process became intertwined with reading my personal writings on social media and revisiting locked-away photo albums, which together constitute my autoethnographic materials. Yet, I have no direct observation of myself engaging in this phenomenon to its extreme extent—only its most indelible traces remain carved in my memory.

3.1.3 Autoethnography

Autoethnography, one of my fundamental research methods, rooted in poststructuralist and feminist theories that position the self as a culturally embedded site of knowledge. As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe, autoethnography is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to

understand cultural experience.” They also note that, as a method, it combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography, resulting in a fusion of the “epiphanies” autobiographers write about and the experiences ethnographers collect from social practice, I should be aware that it requires a willingness on the author's part to become vulnerable and give up a certain amount of personal safety. Sara Ahmed's (2013) concept of emotions as social forces in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, which stick to bodies and spaces, alongside Sianne Ngai's (2005) exploration of ambivalent emotions such as anxiety and irritation in *Ugly Feelings*, provide a vital theoretical lens for understanding affect.

In *Why women wear what they wear*, Woodward (2007) applies embodiment ethnographic on the participants' personal biography through wardrobe, referred on Woodward's cases, she describes what she discovers from observing the wardrobes, talking to the participants, and even trying to be a part of the participants' lives. Using the theoretical framework of *Disgust as performativity* (in Ahmed, 2013), I translated my own words and analyzed the developmental trajectory of disgust emotions differentiated across stages in my personal journal, using personal photos for support evidence. I explored how disgust leads to an 'isolation' seeking comfort through the practice of #DisgustOfficeOutfit, which gradually manifests as a culturally shaped emotional labor—a bodily expression entangled with collective memory, gendered discipline, and respectability politics as revealed by all my research methods.

To understand these layers of meaning, it was necessary to examine the cultural-historical background and underlying value systems through archival research and visual analysis.

3.2.1 Archival Research

To deepen the cultural-historical grounding of my embodied experiences, I supplement my fieldwork with archival research and digital ethnography. Hill (1993) observes that “social scientists who use archives enter a new world of information,” highlighting the potential richness and depth archives offer. Archival research in this study draws upon personal archives, academic papers accessed through databases, and other historical materials. This approach was inspired by Joanne Entwistle’s (2015) methodology outlined in her chapter *Fashion, Dress and Social Change*, where she identifies recurring themes within fashion literature while tracing the relationship between fashion and social change (p.79).

By integrating Chinese print media materials from the 1980s, I aim to situate the #DisgustOfficeOutfit phenomenon within China’s evolving socio-political and cultural contexts, thereby revealing the unique value systems that influenced, shaped, or were contested by professional women's dress following the Reform and Opening-Up. However, the print media of that period in China provided less support than I had anticipated, and I was unable to locate sufficient reliable news or magazine articles specifically addressing female professional attire. Consequently, I turned to personal archives, particularly my mother’s photo album from that era, as a valuable alternative source for examining dress practices during that time.

3.2.2 Visual Analysis

Gillian Rose’s (2016) *Visual Methodologies* provides a solid theoretical foundation and framework

for the visual analysis conducted in this research. Since the development of Cultural Studies in the 1970s, the concept of representation has been recognized as complex and multifaceted. Visual content in all its forms has become a central focus of cultural studies, making visual analysis one of the primary methodologies used in this field (Rose, 2016). Applying visual analysis not only complements gaps in the cultural-historical research but also makes me aware of the necessity to incorporate image analysis when conducting digital ethnography and autoethnography—especially when analyzing digital platform captures and personal photos serving as emotional evidence.

Rose (2016) outlines three essential criteria of critical visual methodology that must be kept in mind throughout the research: (1) taking images seriously; (2) considering the social conditions, effects, and distribution modes of images; and (3) reflecting on one's own way of seeing images. Additionally, this study follows Rose's four-step approach to content analysis within semiological study: (1) selecting the images carefully, focusing on those that are most representative, fair, and objective; (2) devising categories for coding images based on their signifiers and signifieds; (3) coding the images using these categories to describe visual characteristics; and (4) analyzing the results by interpreting their social meanings.

In practice, when analyzing personal archival photographs, I strictly adhered to the four-step content analysis framework proposed by Gillian Rose, presenting the analysis in a three-step format within the text. First, I describe in detail the photos' time and place of capture, the poses, expressions, and clothing of the individuals photographed. Second, I infer and establish coding

categories based on these observations, including hypotheses about the photos' intended purpose. Finally, I situate the analysis within broader theoretical and historical-political contexts. When employing images as supporting evidence in other research methods, I ensure the objectivity of the analysis by adhering to this four-step framework outlined in Rose's visual methodology.

3.3 Methods Conclusion

This research integrates five methodological approaches, strategically combined to investigate culture, gender, and affective dimensions. It is anchored within a robust academic framework encompassing embodied perception and memory , cultural and historical analysis, and contemporary phenomena.

Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to answer key research questions: Why do participants of the #DOO phenomenon engage in this 'give-up-beauty' dressing practice? Why does this phenomenon occur in China, and why are young women born after 2000 particularly involved? What are they expressing through this practice? Finally, from an extreme emotional perspective, how can the interplay between affect and everyday fashion practice be interpreted within fashion theory?

4. Chinese Office Outfit

This chapter examines how "office attire" became thinkable and doable in the reform-era China and how women negotiates their demands and values in everyday fashion practice. It builds an

explanatory bridge from macro policy shifts to meso-level workplace scripts and micro-level dressing tactics, drawing on press discourse and personal archives.

Powerful positions in the workplace continue dominant by the post-60s and post-70s, who experienced the era of “everyone wearing the same clothes and watching the same films” (Gu & Wang, 1995, p. 38). The post-80s, who came of age during the Reform and Opening-Up(1978), are in the process of taking over this baton of influence. The post-90s, who experienced this societal shift during their formative years, have largely assimilated into the mainstream after roughly a decade of working. By contrast, the post-00s grew up in an environment where self-expression was already established and widely accepted; entering the workplace, they occupy a marginal position when lacking a deep understanding of earlier workplace norms yet feeling the pressure to conform to them.

The pronounced generational divides reflect equally profound differences in understandings of ‘office outfit’, values, and ideology. To understand the workplace environment encountered by those at the margins, I analyze generational differences in Chinese through newspapers, magazines, private archival photographs.

4.1 Historical factors of ‘Office Outfit’ various from generation

As noted in the literature review, in China, the rise of office-based white-collar professions in the modern sense has occurred for roughly four decades. This rapid development over such a short period has intensified generational gaps in the understanding of professional dress. Younger

generations must navigate the demands of aligning with global fashion trends while remaining mindful of the values and perceptions held by their predecessors. So what's the earlier generations' general understanding of 'office outfits' and was that evolving?

Between 1978 and 1998, three traits of society industry are (1) purchasing power and supply constrained sartorial options; (2) state-workplace discourses institutionalised 'appropriateness' as simplicity and solemnity; and (3) non-uniform workplaces cultivated collective scripts of "sameness within range." These are the reasons which softened the boundary between 'professional' and 'casual,' creating the room in which later protective and resistant tactics would become legible as office dress. However, norms were not abolished but softened, enabling later comfort-first or low-maintenance choices to appear "within bounds" rather than deviant.

4.1.1 From policies to social norms: Enhance of purchasing power

After 1978, rapid shifts in economic policy brought about swift changes in workplace dress standards for the post-60s and post-70s. Nevertheless, at the start of their careers, they had all experienced a period in which workplace attire was expected to embody the ideals of 'simplicity and frugality' as well as 'solemnity and formality.'

From 1978 to 1992, China's workplace culture and dress norms evolved in tandem with major economic reforms. According to Chinese National Government (2009), the tertiary share of the economy was 28.2% in 1952, fell to 23.9% in 1978 due to the prioritization of industrial development, and rose to 40.1% by 2008. Following the Reform and Opening-Up(1978), the

state-owned economy expanded the tertiary sector (services), and office-based work began to spread nationwide. State-owned enterprises, public institutions, and Sino-foreign joint ventures dominated the job market, with dress codes emphasizing thrift, simplicity, and formality (CCP Member, 1992). Which means the purchasing power for clothing was limited, boundaries between office attire to leisure wear was blurred (Textile, 1997).

Two times points of year 1983 and 1992 have transformed the historical landscape, when in 1983, abolition of the “cloth coupon” policy enhanced purchasing power, yet the definition of professional attire remained largely unchanged (Davis, 2000). In 1992, as state-owned assets shifted toward private enterprises and foreign trade expanded exponentially, dress regulations on workplace dress began to loosen.

Coupons distributed by the state were allocated according to what was deemed to meet each individual’s needs, covering all necessities (Davis, 2000). In late 1983, “Cloth coupon” policy was gradually abolished, allowing citizens purchase clothing freely without governmental control, the increased purchasing power, leads to professional women took further tactics to navigate to original workplace dress norms.

Year 1992 marked a turning point. Following Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 Southern Tour speeches, which enabled the shift of state-owned assets toward private enterprise and saw foreign trade expand exponentially, boosting the tertiary sector and also accelerating economic development, which diverse the female workplace outfit.

A review of local paper press confirms that, although public interest in fashion aesthetics was becoming increasingly vibrant in the 1980s, there was no clear distinction in everyday wear between 'professional' attire and 'leisure' dress. *Shanghai Fashion* (Fig. 10), a trend-leading magazine founded in 1985, served as a barometer of fashion tastes and helped shape the aesthetic sensibilities of women in Shanghai and, by extension, all over China. The magazine appears to focus more on Western cultural aesthetics: the latest releases from Western brands, news about fashion shows, and guidance on how to make contemporary fashion garments. But the founding of the magazine shows the public demand for fashion aesthetics.



Fig. 10 Covers of *Shanghai Fashion* (2025)

Yet, a search of the archives of *People's Daily* (China's most authoritative newspaper) yielded only two articles describing women's professional attire in the 1980s. The first, published on May 4, 1983, entitled *Female Workers' Dress Should Reflect the Spirit of the Times*, emphasized that

professional women should dress simply and avoid flamboyance. While no photograph survives in the newspaper's digital archive, the text indicates that the accompanying image depicted female office staff wearing white shirts paired with dark trousers. Three years later, an article entitled *The Image of the Professional Woman in the New Era* updated this stance, noting that women working in foreign-related enterprises could wear tailored suit sets or skirt suits but they should remain "dignified and appropriate." (People's Daily, 1983,1986)

In 1992, Deng, the prime minister, who previously noted for in advancing the Reform and Opening-Up, encouraged civil servants and teachers to resign from public posts to engage in business. Policy reforms further opened major cities and special economic zones, allowing foreign retailers to enter the Chinese market. The rise of private enterprises gradually relaxed the degree of formality required in professional dress. Even in formal settings, employees often employed personal "tactics" to navigate the unspoken social codes that prescribed workplace attire to be "formal, dignified, and frugal," echoing what mentioned before the 'everyday tactics' by de Certeau's (1984).

4.1.2 Micro-Tactics on norms

Visual analysis of my mother's personal photo archive substantiates these observations and, together with contemporary magazine articles, bridges temporal gaps. A member of the post-1960s generation, my mother entered the workforce in 1988 as a high-school geography teacher and served as the school's CCP Youth League Committee coordinator. I analyze six workplace photographs, two taken before 1992 and two after, and two from this year alongside

period print media.

Before 1992



Fig. 11 my mother in the khaki suit in 1988 (2025)

In Fig. 11, my mother is dressed in a khaki suit jacket paired with black trousers, leaning against a handrail and looking directly at the camera. The campus behind her appears tranquil. The direct gaze, composed posture, and choice of formal attire suggest a conscious image construction for the photograph, indicating that this combination of garments was not part of her everyday workwear but was instead chosen for its more formal, socially compliant appearance. Given that, at that time, formal photographs were taken to mark personal milestones, it can be inferred that this was an image commemorating her promotion during that period. This image thus captures a moment when formal professional dress functioned as a visible marker of achievement within the workplace culture. The muted colour palette, the plain yet slightly oversized cut, and the lack of precise tailoring are all consistent with the characteristics described earlier for the late 1980s:

limited purchasing power and professional attire that was expected to embody the ideals of 'simplicity and frugality' as well as 'solemnity and formality.'



Fig. 12 my mother in denim jacket in 1989 (2025)

Fig. 12, taken around the same time, is telling a different story. She was seating in her office, wearing a denim jacket while doing paperwork. The scene appears unposed, capturing her in the midst of daily administrative tasks. The candid nature of the photograph, combined with the casual garment choice, suggests that the image was not intended to present a carefully curated professional appearance, but documenting routine work.

By the time, China had not yet fully opened to trading market, yet denim jackets had already entered everyday life. Although denim's casual connotations did not fully align with the prevailing ideals of "formality and dignity", considering photography is for special moments at the time,

suggests that denim had come to be regarded as a sufficiently modest and acceptable option.

The presence in an office setting indicates a loosen workplace dress norms, which supports the earlier summary of professional women at the time had relatively low sensitivity to 'office outfit,' reflecting a broader societal tolerance towards sartorial variation in the workplace.

After 1992

By the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, China's enterprise reforms and the rapid expansion of the tertiary sector transformed the service industry into the primary driver of GDP growth, providing the majority of employment opportunities. The entry of television, media, and advertising into the market further catalyzed this shift, reshaping the discourse around professional attire. Increasingly, public promotion emphasized the idea of "expressing one's individuality" in workplace dress.

职业装
What to wear?

对职业女性而言，职业装的搭配是一门学问。比如职业女性的上班装必须十分考究，既要显得职业又不能显得过于死板。但职业女性在选择什么样的上班装呢？以下是对几位职业女性的访谈记录。

问题1：出什么理由，你穿职业装上班的这套服装？

李丽：我现在穿的是最典型的职业装：黑色西装，米色衬衫，茶绿色裙子。从去年开始，我一直用这种黑色手提包，黑色与任何衣服都可以搭配，而且它能装下我所有要用的物品。这个款式跟牌子是在办公室也还算正式。

安娜：我的上班装比较随意自由，今天我穿的是半休闲式的，花长裙，黑短衫，牛仔夹克穿在外面。我一直戴大的实用型手表，因为我这个人好动。

陈：今天下午我参加了一个会议，所以穿得比较正式：黑色西服连衣裙配红色外套。

问题2：你们当中有两人戴手表，是职业装过时的了？

安娜：如今好像没有人每天戴手表了。手表已经变成了一种配饰。手表对我来说已经过时了。手表一直是我最爱的配饰，但大的款式耳环和长耳筒的耳环我都不再戴了，我现在只戴小耳环。

安娜：我一直戴着耳环。

问题3：你的上班装是否还体现了性别、年龄？

李丽：的确如此。几年前我在另一家公司工作，必须穿得非常讲究，但后来换了工作，当地区销售经理，我的公司在海外，只有我和我的秘书住在国内，所以我的穿着可以相对随便一些，但让自己穿得舒服一些。

安娜：6年前，我刚开始工作时喜欢穿红色、粉色、浅绿色、黄色的金边制服裙。现在我选择的主要是黑色、米色和白色。

安娜：我穿衣一直不怎么讲究。我穿衣服偏向化一些的面料和素净的鞋子。衣服颜色也基本上是米色、白色和黑色。不过现在我开始大胆尝试穿其他颜色。

陈：当教师的时候，我的打扮不是太刻意讲究，但现在我的工作要和许多人打交道，我必须穿得得体大方，所以我很注重衣服、鞋、首饰和用品的搭配。

问题4：你们会放弃职业装吗？

四位女士一致表示这决不可能。安娜补充道：“但职业装穿什么我作了些改变，T恤衫显得太随便，我一般穿透视网或紧身衣。”



Fig. 13 Magazine article *What to Wear?* in 1995 (2025)

In *China's Foreign Service* magazine, (Fig.13) article named *What to wear?* in which Liu (1995) translated an interview with three professional women from Singapore, offering guidance on how to dress appropriately and attractively at workplace. Comparing to *Shanghai Fashion*, the article promoted more diverse norms of professional attire.

These developments were evident in print media amid the rapidly expanding media environment of the 1990s. Public aesthetic sensibilities became widespread, awareness of professional attire improved, and purchasing power rose, driven by marketization and GDP growth. These trends are

supported by my mother's photographs from 1997 and 1998, when she worked as an educational researcher.



Fig. 15 After attending a formal conference (1997)

Fig.15 was taken during an outing with colleagues after attending a formal conference. Women in the photograph are seated together on an open riverside, smiling politely at the camera. Four of them are wearing formal outfits, but the cut, patterns, and inner layers vary. My mother (second from the left) is dressed in a long-sleeved, knee-length olive-green knit dress, accessorizing with a large printed silk scarf, which drapes elegantly around her collar. The variety in tailoring, colour, and garment coordination suggests that by the late 1990s, professional attire for women in China had diversified beyond the rigid uniformity of earlier decades. My mother's choice of a knit dress and patterned scarf conveys a distinctive personal style while still fitting into a highly formal setting.



Fig. 16 Organised trip(1998)

In comparison, a group photo with colleagues further reflects a shift toward a more casual professional aesthetic. Fig.16, taken during an institute-organized trip, contrasts with the formality of Fig.15: it retains elements of professional presentation while incorporating more comfortable, diverse styles. Floral blouses, jeans, shirt-dresses, and mid-length shorts signal distinctive personal style and refined taste yet remain understated and practical for travel; formality persists through subtle cues such as collars and leather shoes.

Nowadays

Since then, office attire among the post-60s and post-70s cohorts has changed little, whereas younger workers have embraced more casual and diverse styles. This trend is evident in Figs.

17 – 18 from my personal archive, documented at the corporation where I previously worked.



Fig. 17 Group photo of 2025 (Xuhui, 2025)

Fig.17 is a group photograph documenting a conference in 2025. In the front row, two female leaders are wearing ankle-length floral chiffon dresses, paired with white knit cardigans, while women in the back row are dressed more casually, T-shirts with jeans and sun-protective jackets. All face the camera before a backdrop bearing the meeting theme. The first-row leaders are from the post-60s and post-70s cohorts, indicating continuity with the dressing script observed in Fig.16.



Fig. 18 documents a 2025 outing organized by the employees' union for staff under 35. Participants are similar in age to those in Fig. 15, and the shooting context is comparable. However, poses are freer and more playful; aesthetic preferences are more diverse; and acceptable attire spans a broader range, from formal to relaxed and casual. Notably, no participant adopts the #DOO.

The photographic evidence presents non-uniform office cases of what counted 'appropriate' women's dress in China from the 1980s to onwards and records subsequent shifts; however, interpretations of these adjectives vary across cultural backgrounds and workplace contexts. Also highlights differences between the discourse-dominant post-60s/post-70s and the post-00s. On what basis, is the appropriateness of post-00s dressing defined?

4.2 Values of 'Office Outfit' inheritance or resistance

The articles reviewed above show that non-uniformed corporations require employees to dress ‘appropriately’, yet seldom specify a standard. From a Foucauldian perspective of discipline, ‘appropriateness’ is embedded in a social value regime that produces normalizing judgment and panoptic self-regulation. The ‘freedom’ to dress remains conditional and is policed along three dimensions: (1) the nonnegotiable baseline, (2) the unspoken ideological constraint, and (3) what can be negotiated through tactics. Overall, answers that does the #DOO inherit or resist these demands?

First, avoiding excessive exposure constitutes the basic rule; this aligns with the longstanding ideal of “庄重, zhuàngzhòng” (mentioned in the news articles, means: solemnity/propriety); Second, the unspoken shackle is “朴素, púsù”(also in the news articles), which came from the subsequent period of austere economic development. Beyond “simple,” “朴素 púsù” denotes a utility-first ethic: dressing for durability and practicality, rather than aesthetics. Third, “集体” jíǐ, (collectivism), which can tacitly negotiate and vividly shows in the post-1995s’ photos, this coexisted with modernist campaigns for měi (“美,” beauty) and “being yourself.” All three dimensions are subject to diffuse social surveillance and layered scrutiny across the organisational hierarchy. The analysis that follows reads the images above through these three dimensions.

4.2.1 Bottom line of avoiding excessive exposure: “庄重, zhuàngzhòng ”

Although zhuàngzhòng (庄重) encompasses more, but non-exposure is indeed the most important and basic it. Upon re-examining all photos presented, no individual, in any context, is

shown with bare shoulders; even when V-necklines are open, not low to the cleavage. Midriff exposure appears only in Fig.1 when I deliberately posed by bending sideways, which would not appear in natural posture. For the lower body, the shortest hemline observed rises no higher than mid-thigh. As shown, participants in #DOO likewise inherit this rule; from a discourse-theoretical perspective, it reflects the internalization of normative scripts governing the legibility of women's bodies in professional settings.

As discourse theory suggests, within China's historical context, Chinese believe exposure of the upper body has consistently been read as closer to 'sexual provocation' the lower. Reflecting this, from 2015 Chinese state media regulator tightened content review for television and film, requiring cuts or pixelation in cases of female upper-body exposure. Though no regulation was released, but the hit series *The Empress of China* (2014~2015), was suspended mid-broadcast and re-edited, came as the evidence: all scenes showing actresses' cleavage were removed. While the series is set in the Tang dynasty and depicting the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, featured many female leads wearing ruqun (襦裙, a blouse-and-skirt ensemble), numerous full-body shots were replaced with face close-ups. Growing up within this discursive environment, the post-00 generation entered the workplace having already internalized these norms.

Zhuàngzhòng also connotes saturated or weighty colours, simple prints, conservative cuts, and firm, structured fabrics. Yet apart from the baseline rule of non-exposure, the other "requirements" proved negotiable in practice, women were "made do with" under the subsequent discourse of "being yourself." For example, Fig. 14, a casual denim jacket could

appear inside a serious CCP office; in Fig. 15, the paired a fitted, soft knit dress with a flamboyant silk scarf for a formal occasion; and Fig. 16, a T-shirt no longer read as merely casual, while floral blouses and long printed skirts coexisted harmoniously within the frame.

4.2.2 Unspoken value of functionality: “朴素, púsù”

Unlike *zhuàngzhòng*, which sets a relatively physical baseline, *púsù* (朴素) operates as an internalised value regime which is intrinsically ambivalent. On one side, communist ideology and decades of material austerity elevated *púsù* into a mainstream aesthetic. On the other hand, the longer and deeper current of Confucian respectability persists: higher-quality dress as a classed sign can command deference. Chinese white-collar workers, especially the non-managerial, are drawn to a ‘decent office outfit’ as a route to respectability and recognition as ‘good citizens.’ (Lu, 2008)

Whichever strand, one emphasises, an invariant of *púsù* is utility-first. Consistent with this, office dress in the period was often oriented to durability and functionality rather than aesthetic appeal or class distinction (Lun, 2002). Importantly, utility-first is less a prescriptive dress code than a de-prioritisation of aesthetic labour, meaning as long as the work gets done, the dress does not matter. In everyday practice, functional adequacy, ease of care, comfort, task-fit, forms the prerequisite, while the display of taste or purchasing power is an add-on contingent on that baseline.

Utility-first

This utility-first orientation is deeply sedimented. Despite liberalised aesthetics and the influx of global fashion, school dress regulations remain stringent. For example, in *The regulations for appearance of high schools in Quanzhou (2025)*, a compiled set of appearance rules for 43 high schools in Quanzhou specifies: no makeup, no jewellery, no nail polish, no hair perming or dyeing; in twenty five of the schools, girls must not wear hair longer than ear length, while others require hair beyond the shoulders to be tied back and kept off the face. Uniforms, or a white T-shirt with dark trousers are mandatory. Schools state that study need to be prioritized, any behaviour deemed to 'interfere study' is strictly restricted. Slogans such as "If studying haven't killed you, study then yourself to death" is well spread which encapsulate the ethos. Although all these rules relax after getting into universities, twelve years of such socialisation leave a durable habitus, when entering the workplace, employees again encounter the organisational cultures that reward utility-first. Utility becomes the baseline of value by which workers are judged; all other values: aesthetic refinement, brand display are supplementary.

#DOOers' outfits also remain utility-first. (Fig. 1) An ultra-thick padded coat and a fleece hat do not impede measurable work performance. What is foregrounded is a deliberate under-performance of aesthetic labour, an intentional hyper-utility that overemphasises the function. Read as a low-intensity, affective resistance, this tactic addresses the "surveilling" gaze of the seniors, corporate culture, and the púsù ethos itself. Crucially, the response is mute and non-disruptive: it neither hampers routine operations nor violates the utility baseline. This is precisely why #DOO can persist as a plausible, tolerated practice, it registers dissent without breaking corporate essential needs.

4.2.3 Concessional value of Collectivism: “集体, jí tǐ”

As noted above, strict school uniforms in China not only inculcate *pú sù*, but also collectivism, a value indispensable to socialist pedagogy. “Collectivism, is a cultural pattern where individuals see themselves as part of a larger group and are motivated by group goals, norms, and obligations rather than individual desires (Triandis, 1995).”

Within such a pattern, distinctive personalities or unconventional appearance are read as potential sources of instability, especially during formative educational phases, and therefore require control. Since early twenty-first century the imported ethos of ‘being yourself’ has softened the visible expression of collectivism in dress. Figs.15~18 demonstrated this transiting. Is collectivism fading away? Does #DOO resist collectivism?

Building on the rapid attitudinal shifts among the post-60s to 80s cohorts, 2022 marked the first wave of post-00s entrants into white-collar work. Post-00s, digital natives, exposed to relentless aesthetic content and their displays of showing ‘refined aesthetics’ were, relative to predecessors. Consequently, ‘individuality,’ ‘characteristic,’ and ‘refined aesthetics’ became entangled labels for the post-2000s margin, alongside some negative like ‘unruly’.

Yet despite such labels, the margins operate through compromise. As reported by Extreme News (2024), “office elegance shame” pushed some young workers—initially eager to wear full makeup and striking outfits—into feeling mocked by colleagues and managers for being “too conspicuous,”

producing shame; in response, they adopted bare-faced looks and toned-down dress. Accordingly, although the post-00 cohort is more individualistic, #DOO reads less as outright noncompliance than as a compromise strategy to blend into the mainstream—a muted response marked reluctance. Caught between lack of recognition and the difficulty of self-coherence, #DOO becomes a low-intensity cry of resignation that relinquishes individualism.

Conclusion

Since the People's Republic of China has a relatively short national history, its rapid development over the past seventy years and the continual shifts in its sociopolitical landscape have produced correspondingly rapid reorientations of mainstream values. This has generated profound intergenerational differences and thick generational boundaries. These dynamics are reflected in the dress of office-working women and have contributed to the emergence of #DOO.

For the post-60s cohort, entering the workplace during an era when the state controlled the economy, office jobs in the tertiary sector were scarce, personal finances were constrained, purchasing power was weak, and a value system extolling austerity prevailed; their understanding of professional attire remained limited. The post-70s, experiencing the transition from a state to a mixed economy, gradually acquired greater purchasing power, inherited the values of austerity and modesty, and began to adopt Western notions of professional dress. The post-80s, educated during the state-economy era, entered the early twenty-first century workplace with more plural perspectives yet still integrated into structures dominated by their predecessors. The post-90s, who also witnessed the state economy, entered the workforce in the 2010s, a period when public and private economies grew rapidly in tandem, producing abundant opportunities and masking

persistent social problems with continuous macroeconomic growth (Brühl, 2024). By contrast, the post-00s, as digital natives raised amid discourses of individuality in the 2010s, entered the workplace during the social and economic disruptions of the pandemic. They reject and resist earlier generational value systems, yet under structural pressures are compelled into reluctant compromise: they inherit certain norms while simultaneously signaling dissent through unconventional modes of dress.

5. Why Women

Shifts in society, political policy, and economic influence the entire population. Why do male member of the post-00, who face these same conditions not visibly participated in #DOO?

Are they policer in the discussion, silent participants, or merely bystanders?

As noted before, women's adoption of #DOO functions as a voiceless resistance to prevailing values, ideology, aesthetic pressure, and social scrutiny; yet it is a non-aggressive, moderate practice that though it invites negative commentary does not transgress established social norms. Its primary aim is simply to dress more comfortably, or, put differently, to use comfort to alleviate negative affect. So is it that male employees do not experience the same pressures? Do they have alternative ways of relieving them? Or, given today's patriarchal order, do they possess greater discursive authority and thus remain comparatively insulated from such pressures?

5.1 Where are the men?

In the phenomenon, male participants are indeed rare. They neither have not paid attention

to, few participated in, nor evaluated this matter, who witnesses it but selectively ignore it.

Douyin and Red Note are the two primary digital platforms generate sustained discussion. Douyin, the Chinese counterpart of TikTok, primarily serves as a platform for entertainment-oriented video content. Red Note functions as a hybrid platform, like Instagram, originally established for middle-class female sharing lifestyle. Based on overall user demographics, Douyin serves roughly 48% male and 52% female, and Red Note about 30% male and 70% female (Orangepage, 2025a, 2025b).

The tag #DOO“上班恶心穿搭”was searched on both platforms. On Douyin, in a scroll of the first thirty posts, only two were uploaded by male content creators, under one-fifteenth. In the remaining videos' comment thread, identifiable male-user comments were almost absent. Nearly all comments are supportive or encouraged, with many even attaching photos of their own looks. Among the only negative comments, (Fig,19)stating “Why torture yourself like this instead of quitting?”, has large potential to be a male user. While on Red Notes, the proportion was considerably lower, with only a single male instance identified. Moreover, in comments, no male participants has found.

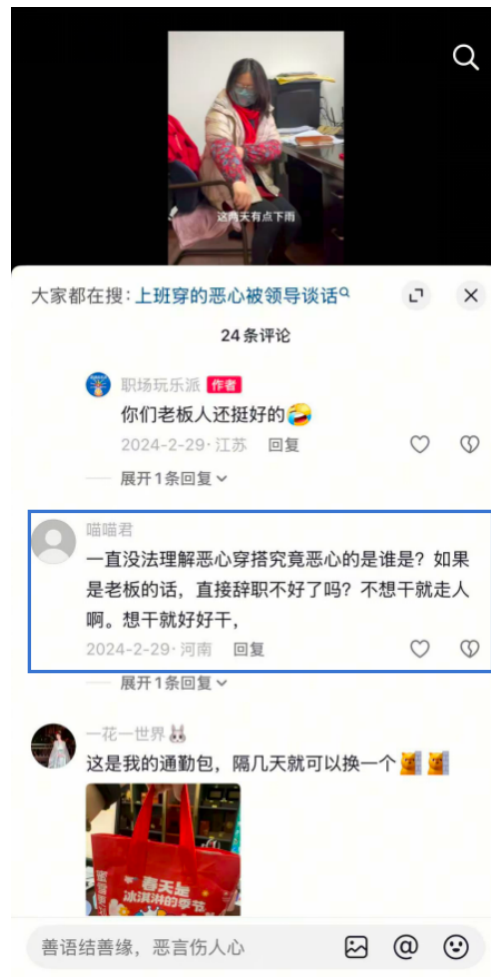


Fig. 19 Negative comments on #DOO in the blue frame, Liu (2025)

Taken together, these observations suggest that men are not entirely absent, few participants and a subset of critics, but the majority appear to be indifferent bystanders.

5.2 Comfort Protest : Deviate from Pressure

Clothing is a powerful medium that shapes how individuals are perceived (Cole, 1999).

Compared to business casual attire, employees under work pressure often seek greater comfort. In many Western contexts, the protagonists and main beneficiaries of business casual are men. Why, under similar pressures, do young women and men register different

responses through dress?

I argue 'comfort' is the driven answer, which operates on two registers: (1) bodily and functional ease at work, and (2) affective relief gained by refusing fashion labour and mitigating anxiety. Since Shri and Nair (2010) find no conclusive evidence that productivity increases in organizations, a performance-based explanation is insufficient. A fashion-theoretical, affect-centred account, drawing on discipline, performance, and affect, shows why #DOO emerges as comfort-as-protest among women, rather than comfort-as-status.

Men's appearance pressure is lower than women's. In *Gender differences in business casual attire* (Charu Shri and Rajesh Nair, 2010), noting that the shift to business casual began in the early 1990s in white-collar workplaces in Western countries, Replacing suits and neckties with pressed khaki trousers and polo or golf shirts, the study concludes that encouraging corporate applying casual looks, since both men and women felt more productive when dressed casually, but no evidence of increased productivity. While the journal highlights gender differences in the trend, as Tootelian (in Shri and Nair, 2010) observed, "Unfortunately, business casual may not help women as much as it does men," when women's professional attire is already less comfortable than men's, with high heels serving as the most immediate example. Men's workplace attire had already become more comfortable at the time, while women's remained unchanged.

High heels, body-hugging skirt, fitted suit, stockings, all elements with unsuitable air conditioned temperature at the office. Female seems used to give up comfort for appearance. Following Ahmed(2004), who claim women are not inherently 'more affective' to fashion than man do. Rather, affect is socially distributed where women are more often tasked with maintaining others' comfort via appearance. Under intensified scrutiny, dress becomes a convenient technology of affective management, which make #DOO a comfort-as-protest.

Protesting of pressure and anxiety young professional women facing, is it more intense than men's? I argue yes. They are navigating beyond gender, pre-setting expectations of visual 'polish' in dress which underwritten by the value regime outlined above, reinforced by inter-generational, intra-gender policing, and amplified by online peer-aesthetic pressure but also heightened work-and-life strains.

5.2.1 Anxieties against Comfort: from work

Young Chinese women indeed face greater pressure than men. Including but not only: work-family conflicts, discrimination from traditional mindset and even potential of maternity leave.

Working Culture

Working culture is toxic in China. Overwork is endemic across many Asian countries (Zheng

et al., 2023). Although China's Labor Law stipulates 8 hours per day and no more than 44 hours per week, organizations continue to normalize the '996' schedule, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week (Liu, 2021; Wang, Ma, & Guo, 2020). Even official statistics points the elevated hours, the national average weekly working time for enterprise employees was 48.6 hours (Zhou, 2024). Non-official surveys suggest even greater intensity. Guo's(2023) questionnaire (n = 2,168) reported that 95.7% of respondents had recently worked overtime; 64% characterized their overtime as 'frequent' (daily or 3 to 4 days per week); 51.2% said a typical overtime stint exceeded 3 hours, and 13.4% exceeded 8 hours.

Domestic Care

Taking care of the family is considered a duty of women in traditional Chinese values. Although women's liberation in 1950s granted women equal status with men in the workplace(Finnane, 2007), domestic care has continued to be regarded as primarily a female responsibility (Wang, Ma, & Guo, 2020). Combining these two lead female in a disadvantaged position in the job market.

Personal Pursuit

Wang(2020) and his colleagues point out that work-related pressure arises both internally, from women's own ambitions for promotion and higher salaries and externally, from the current employment situation and corporate structures. "It has become very difficult to find a job in recent years"(Yu, Yang, & Xie, 2023) is a nationwide issue. In terms of current employment patterns, 50% of women are unable or unwilling to continue their previous

work after childbirth. While Chinese educational attainment has risen, number of graduates is 1.179 million for 2024 comparing to 614 thousand in 1990, the value of degrees has depreciated (Zhu, 2023). Naturally, companies prefer to hire younger candidates who perceived to possess more physical and mental energy. However, young women currently aged 22 – 25, live in constant anxiety about current situation and the future.

But in fact, the immediate pressures are even more severe. The Chinese government stopped publishing the youth unemployment rate (ages 16 – 24) after August 2023, since the data is growing substantially. However, the rate had already exceeded 20% in April (National Statistics Bureau, 2025). This figure directly reflects the employment and unemployment situation of university graduates. For all young women in the workforce, it means that they must demonstrate performance, endure excessively long working hours, looking for promotion in order to strive not being replaced and to secure the future.

In comparison, men experience the pressures brought about by economic forces. However, the absence of traditional social expectations such as the need to ‘spend time caring for the family,’ combined with the advantage of physical strength, not taking the three-month maternity leave, places them in a relatively favorable position.

5.2.2 Anxieties against Comfort: From Aesthetic through Digital platforms

Beyond macro-level social pressures, society also articulates aesthetic expectations for women to embody. First, female clothing consumption far exceeds men’s. Second,

overwhelming aesthetic discourses circulating on social media. Such evidence consistently demonstrates the extent to which women's experiences of dress are marked by anxiety.

From a broader perspective of purchasing power, "Ultra-fast fashion has emerged as a disruptive force in the global apparel industry, accelerating the traditional fast fashion model by leveraging real-time consumer data, agile supply chains, and digital marketing (Briefing, 2025)." Womenswear sales rate are significantly higher than menswear, a trend equally observable in China's fast fashion market. For instance, Taobao, the domestic parent platform of Shein, serves over 400 million apparel consumers. During the Season II for 2025 '618' (mid-year promotional festival), Sohu News (2025), citing a report from *Zhiyi Data*, noted that the leading womenswear segment achieved total sales of 423 million items with a sales value of 70.304 billion RMB, alongside 3.766 million newly released products. The average price per item was 166 RMB, and womenswear accounted for 62.87% of total apparel sales revenue and 62.79% of total sales volume in the e-commerce clothing category.

The purchasing power gap stems from intensified surveillance of women's taste of aesthetic. Digital platforms strongly influence the aesthetics of the female, especially on the post-00s, aesthetic anxieties are produced and accelerated. A horizontal comparison was conducted by searching 'DisgustOfficeOutfit' and 'OfficeOutfit' on the Red Note. The results for 'OfficeOutfit' revealed an overwhelming presence of influencer-generated posts, often tagged with phrases such as (Fig.20-23) #elegant commuting outfit, #slim fit, or #longer legs, #yellow dark skin tone, #confident and so on. These posts follow recognizable templates and

marketing strategies; many are connected to fashion retail services, while others take the form of ‘aesthetic tutorials.’ Some posts also disseminate Western-influenced ideas, such as ‘your clothing demonstrates your capability,’ which, according to Shri and Nair (2010), reflects a particularly American mindset.

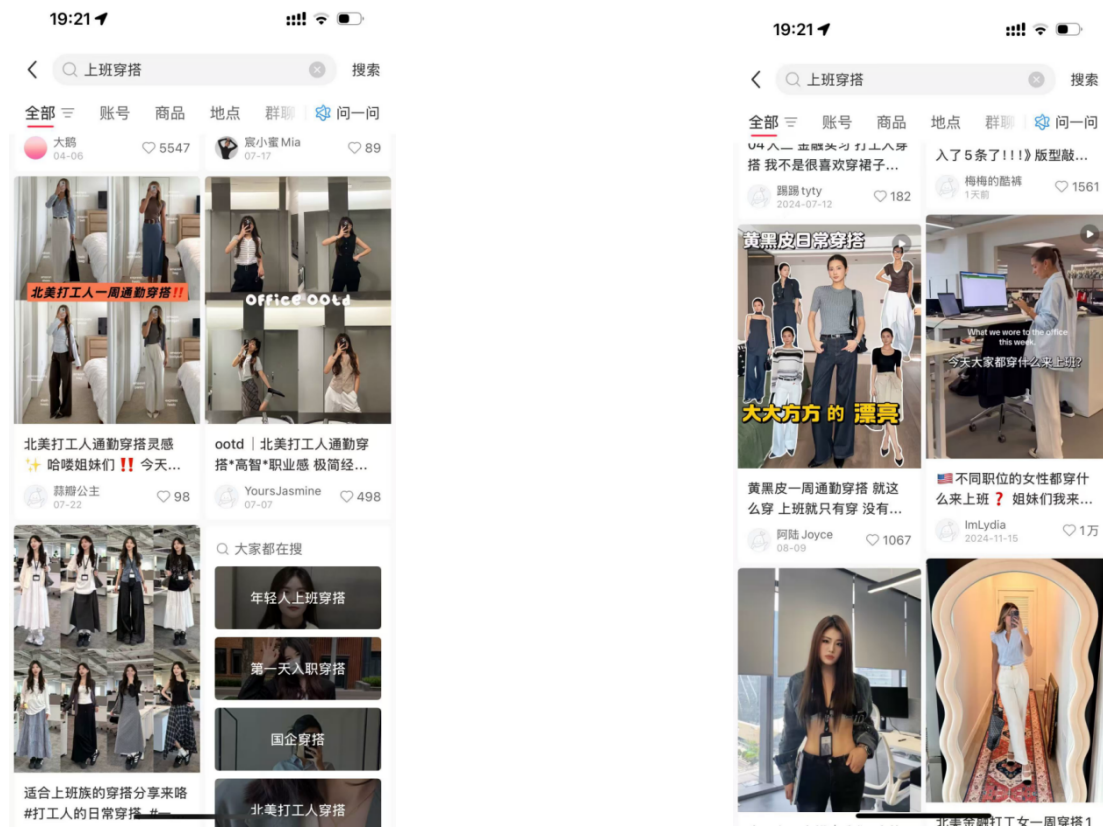
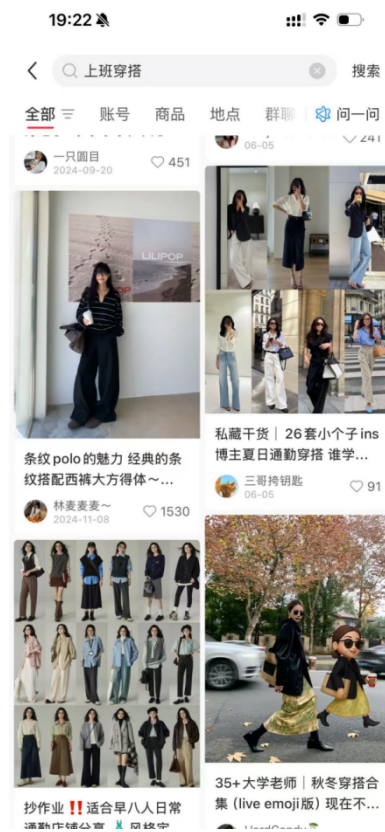


Fig. 20-23. ‘office outfit’ search.
Liu (2025)



These posts originate from influencers and are often produced in collaboration with online stores. The layouts are visually distinctive and eye-catching, accompanied by countless positive comments. For example, in the first post retrieved from the search (Fig. 24), upon entering the post one can immediately observe a carefully structured layout (Fig. 25). The title reads “One-week office outfit collection: high-intelligence commuting style”, accompanied by a caption such as “a comfortable yet stylish day in the office” and numerous fashion-related hashtags, for instance: “#less is more,” “#sustainable outfit,” and “#a week of commuting looks”. In the comments section (Fig. 26), the first comment, posted by the influencer, provides a detailed list of each item’s brand. Audiences simply need to input the brand names in Taobao to purchase identical pieces. The post received 5581 likes, 2531 collects and 89 comments. Visiting the influencer’s profile page reveals clear personal information (Fig. 27), including her height and

weight, a business contact email, and she is an 42,000 followers influencer .



Fig. 24 the first post of the 'office outfit' search.
Liu (2025)



Fig. 25 the post contents.
Liu (2025)



Fig. 26 the comments of the post.

Liu (2025)

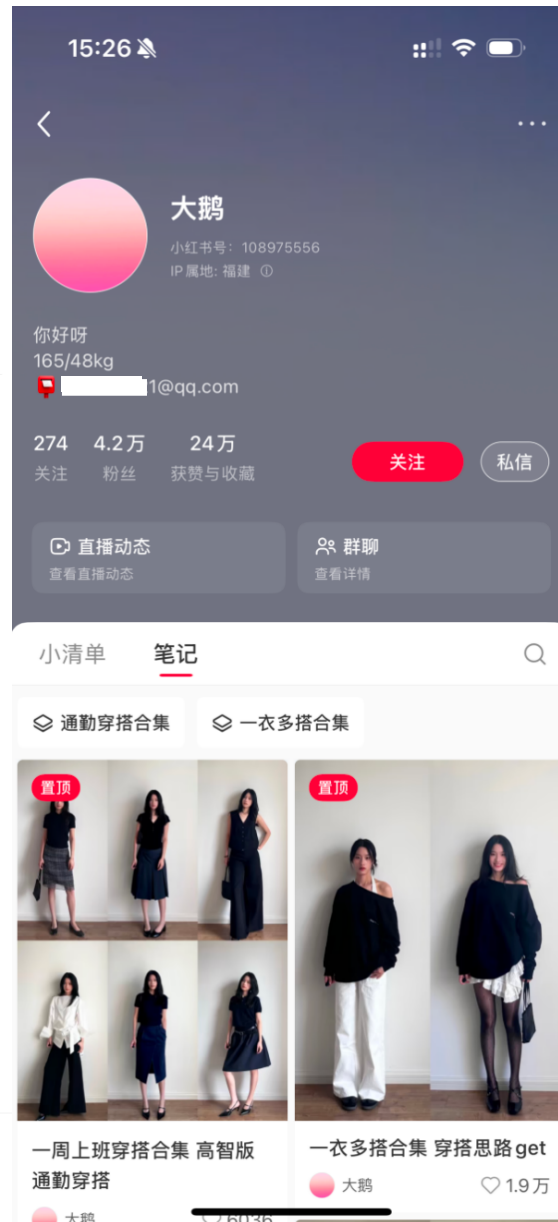


Fig. 27 the influencer of the post.

Liu (2025)

By contrast, posts under the #DOO appear far more casual. For instance, the first post retrieved from my search using this tag (Fig. 28) features a title (Fig. 29) reading “Working outfits • A week of disgusting office looks.” The poster adopts a playful tone, writing: “My colleagues said my outfits match those popular posts quite well. But honestly, I think I’m fine! I have my own

style!” In the comments section (Fig. 30), users responded with humorous praise such as “I don’t think it’s disgusting, I find it quite nice,” and “You got something!” The post received a total of 76 likes, 12 saves, and 13 comments. Entering the author’s homepage (Fig. 31) reveals a profile centered on everyday life sharing; notably, the username is ‘a messy account,’ suggesting that this may not be the poster’s main profile, but a casual account. The small following of 37 followers, further indicates that the primary purpose of the post may not be to gain visibility but simply to share personal experiences.



Fig. 28 the first post of the ‘DisgustOfficeOufit’ search.
Liu (2025)



Fig. 29 the post content.
Liu (2025)



Fig. 30 the comments on the post.
Liu (2025)

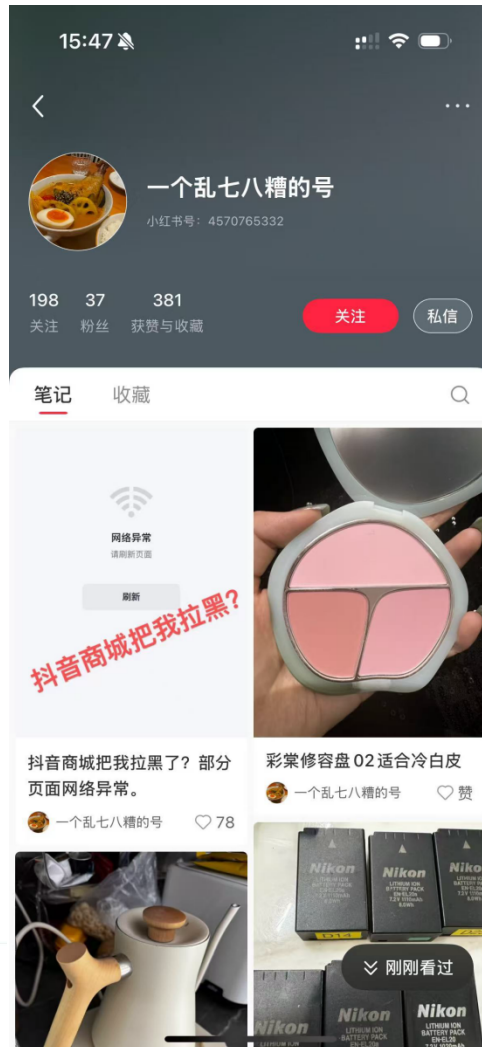


Fig. 31 the profile of the poster.
Liu (2025)

The comparison shows that absorbing aesthetic propaganda has become mainstream and that adherence to shared aesthetic standards is recognized as normative. These dominant standards reflect what numerous theorists argue: they embody idealized forms of femininity that women are urged to pursue, whether framed as powerful or feminine (Woodward, 2007; Entwistle, 2001). Yet striving for such ideals inevitably intensifies anxiety. As Clarke and Miller

(2015) observe in *Fashion and Anxiety*, this anxiety is bound to relations with friends and family, shaped by social evaluation, and embedded in environments saturated with philosophical and sociological expectations. By contrast, #DOO participants deliberately position themselves against conventional aesthetic norms. By distancing themselves from these standards, they seek to reject the anxieties they produce and instead pursue emotional comfort.

For men, however, search dynamics on these platforms differ notably. Searching for women's office outfits requires no gender specification, whereas for men one must explicitly enter "men's office outfit." I did encounter standardized influencer posts (Fig. 32), but engagement levels were lower than those for women's content. As shown in Figs. 20 – 23, most women's posts received over 1,000 likes, with several surpassing 5,000 and some exceeding 10,000. By contrast, most men's office outfit posts remained below 1,000 likes, with the highest observed figure reaching only 3,568.

Moreover, the recommended men's outfits appear highly homogenized. Taking as an example the most popular post on the homepage, with 3,568 likes (Fig. 33), the outfits consist of formulaic combinations of innerwear, trousers, and jackets, which variations in color, yet uniform in silhouette and lacking any bold prints. In men's fashion, particularly in workplace attire, the limited range of options means that almost any choice is more readily accepted and less likely to generate debate. This echoes Michelle Obama's observation, as cited in Bobb's (2017) *Vogue* article, that the standards applied to men's clothing are

markedly different from those applied to women. The restricted palette of options not only simplifies men's dressing practices but also alleviates the pressure and time investment required for sartorial decision-making.

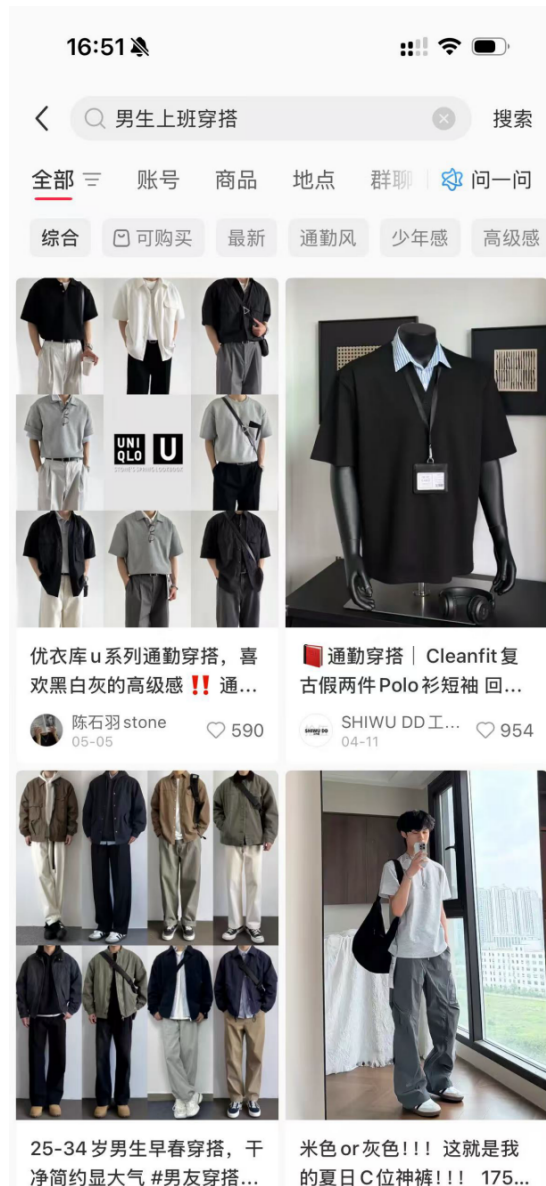


Fig. 32 Searching results for male.
Liu (2025)



Fig. 33 The post received the most likes (2025)

5.3 Protest of Comfort through Digital Platform

As shown #DOO occupied as a marginal space, beyond its function as a form of daily practice,

participants, whom are digital natives, find resonance with one another through online platforms (Hebdige, 1979). It is precisely this strong resonance that transforms into a 'protest of comfort,' echoing deeply within their lived experiences. Their posts are not merely shouting for comfort, also, inevitably, constitute a rejective response to the overwhelming dominant aesthetic standards.

Apart from finding collectivism through digital platform, rebelliously, they confronts the heightened anxiety. The stark contrast between ordinary posts and those labeled under #DOO provides evidence of this tension. The phrase in the introduction earlier, "#What does being ugly at work have to do with me after work?" articulates the claim: we do have refined taste, but we lack the time and energy to perform it in offices. Echoing literature review, the participants was justifying something unconventional offline by hiding online, and making it laughable with companions. #DOOers employ self-deprecating strategies online, deliberately 'lowering,' 'dramatizing,' and even 'clowning' their behaviors. Through generating laughter, they seek both social agreement and a sense of comfort.

Conclusion

The casual business trend of the 1990s initiated discussions around the need for 'comfort' in workplace dress. Although widely embraced, business casual offered limited improvements in comfort for women employees (Tootelian in Shri and Nair, 2010).

As discussed above, both physiologically and psychologically, women experience greater

discomfort in workplace attire than men. Physiologically, high heels, fitted skirts, and stockings not only impose discomfort in wear but also hinder warmth and mobility. Psychologically, first, the contemporary Chinese workplace exerts intense pressure, where most women remain disadvantaged, subject to discrimination, and face constrained career prospects. Second, comparative findings from digital ethnology show that aesthetic expectations regarding women's workplace dress are far higher than those imposed on men.

Confronted with these overlapping social pressures, young women who is already positioned at the margins, have turned to online spaces, where #DOO is provided a collective arena for solidarity, mutual comfort, and shared strategies of coping.

6 An Expression of Ugly feelings

As discussed, layers of pressure is placed on young Chinese women, and the resulting negative affective lead them to seek support online. Why do themselves call it disgust? And how does disgust shape their dressing practices? As an insider to this phenomenon, I initiated the #DOO before it went viral, excavating my past, may answer what a #DOOer express, and intentionally or unintentionally. And what accelerates those?

As stated in the literature review, affect refers to deep, pre-subjective bodily intensities, while emotion involves socially codified and expressible feelings. From this lens, what extent can #DOO serve as an empirical entry point into the affective dimension of dressing practices? That is, how might this phenomenon allow us to access, register, or translate the non-verbal, felt aspects of

everyday sartorial life? Furthermore, what other potential factor may be entangled with this affective layer of dress? How do these forces mediate the body's expression of discomfort, withdrawal, or quiet resistance through clothing?

Therefore, embodiment ethnography intertwined with autoethnography was applied to personal experiences by revisiting memories documented in diaries. Exploring how disgust borders established, when stickiness intensified, and how spatial disgust affirmed. Further examining of how these dynamics shaped emotional responses and sartorial choices.

6.1 Personal Experience

I started to carry out the #DOO practice since 2022, throughout 2023, until the resignation in June, 2024. The personal activity started from remote working mode during the pandemic lockdown, leveled up as an unspoken rebellious flag when experiencing ugly feelings in middle of 2023, made as a norm at the end of 2023 till first half year of 2024.

As mentioned, the reality of Chinese workplace is hard for the post-00s, while entering into the workplace during the pandemic, the decreasing economic environment and the competitive working pace. I thought about quitting in April 2023, after experienced extreme strikes from work, the practice of #DOO went align with all downs, the extent of practising also evolve through time, and finally resigned in June, 2024. On July 1st, I composed a over 3,000-word reflective narrative on my two years of full-time employment posted on my private wechat account. It serves as an emotional and analytical record of my evolving psychological states, embodied experiences, and

key moments of learning and disillusionment during my time in the workplace.

In this journal, I divided the experience into seven distinct emotional, existential stages with distinct chapter names :

Stages	Titles	Time
I	<i>Chaos and Disorientation - the Darkness Before Dawn</i>	<i>March-June, 2022</i>
II	<i>Coexistence of Heat and Hope - Early Signs of Illumination</i>	<i>July- August, 2022</i>
III	<i>The Happiest Days - A Fleeting Sense of Fulfillment</i>	<i>September,2022-April 2023</i>
IV	<i>Growing Pains and the Seed of Departure</i>	<i>April -June 2023</i>
V	<i>Fleeting Surprises, Overwhelming Despair</i>	<i>July-September 2023</i>
VI	<i>Devouring - Darkness as a Consuming Void</i>	<i>October-December 2023</i>
VII	<i>The Wounds of Rebound - Farewell as Lingering Attachment</i>	<i>January-February 2024</i>

As the titles suggest, *Stages I, IV, and VI* mark the most painful phases of my journey, during which I practiced #DOO with greatest frequency. *Stage I* was distinct: taking place during the pandemic's remote working period, when I remained in pajamas rather than performing office attire. By *Stage IV*, I was still attempting to conform to the professional values and aesthetic standards previously described, but the accumulation of ugly feelings began to overwhelm me. Due to the impact of extreme pressures, in *Stage VI: Devouring - Darkness as a Consuming Void* became the most searing and unforgettable episode of my experience, in the words directly pointed on to the practices, I wrote: "*November was an unyielding confrontation with the limits of my humanity, a relentless struggle of physical exhaustion and psychological willpower.*"

From March to June 2022, I experienced what I can only describe as a personal nightmare. Countless diary entries from that period testify to the depth of my pain: I hated myself and felt like a completely useless person.

At work, my direct supervisor could only be described as suffocating—although I do not mean this as a personal attack, it often felt as though the word “humanity” had little place in his management style. He would tell me that I “had no sense of aesthetics” and “did not understand color,” despite the fact that I had always excelled in color theory examinations. Day after day, I worked until three or four in the morning, functioning as unpaid labor without recognition and without respect.

The constantly delayed entry examination suddenly arrived, requiring me to produce thirteen documents within two days. I knew nothing about the process, so I relied on reference materials, only to collapse in tears for an hour before forcing myself through an all-nighter. I still remember seeing the sun rise at six o'clock the next morning, before finally collapsing into sleep.

Boundaries gradually eroded, and just when I believed things could not worsen, a deeper level of disgust would surface. During those two weeks, I never looked in the mirror, had no time to wash my hair, nor to wear makeup.”

6.1.1 Objective Reality: Stage I

I graduated from undergrads 2022 in Shanghai, China, during when Shanghai was experiencing the worse lock down scenario. From March to June, the government forbid residents having any outdoor activities. In the early March, I was living in my dormitory, getting start my internship for my future job - a governmental educational institute for juvenile after school activities, if I pass

the examination for the position, I will have a permanent contract with a one year trial contract, which was my dream job.

On the third day of internship, the locked down policy extended to my campus. Before the regulation of lock down went worse, I broke my leg and fortunately shipped to my parents. The regulations got fierce when the rising number of people tested positive, no no excuse taken for stepping out of the residency. During when I can only lying on bed, having one leg hanging and my laptop on my stomach for working. During the internship, assignments was unbelievably stressful while finishing my undergrads' final design and dissertation and preparing for the examination.

The work was stressful due to the long working hours and endless assignments. Since the lock down, no one from the institute had any experience of running juvenile activities online, as a born netizen, I was pinned with high hope. So for a daily routine, I had to woke up from 7a.m. to 10a.m., when some one from the work called me, had a 3-hour conference for discussing about the how and what should an activity arranged, and a 3-hour media communicating editing should be done. At around 8:30 p.m., I would be assigned with the draft of a video or post, and ran through three layers of verification and edition. Most of the time, my supervisor would asked me to finish that editing overnight for posting the day after. Video edition or wechat arcticle posts usually take me 3 to 6 hours, so working hours per day would be 12-16 hours, 4-7 days a week. If I have 3 days for not working, I need to finish my graduate dissertation and design project and prepare for a competitive examination. During when as a new beginner, no matter how hard I

tried, there was always loads problem of the results. I was scolded of knowing nothing of color matching, no spirits in the work I done. I felt useless and was always questioning myself but making efforts of fitting into the workplace and trying to earn respects.

6.1.2 Objective Reality: Stage IV

Perhaps the most excruciating moment came on April 4, when I was still in the office after midnight working on graphic layouts. By 0:00 on April 5—the day of Qingming Festival—I was still in the office opposite to a crematorium, revising text, images, and design materials. That day alone I had worked more than 16 hours. And yet, I knew there was still more to come: more work, more overtime. When others rested, I worked; when others worked, I worked overtime.

Throughout May, I was responsible for six large-scale events. The pressure drove me to break down even on my main social media account, while on a secondary account I vented my anger daily—ranting at work, raging at the absurdity of my situation. I can no longer recall the specific incidents that pushed me so close to collapse, but my friends still remember me then as speaking and moving like a walking corpse.

April 2023, I was assigned to a junior middle school for educational teaching trainee practice. Apart from my daily life of teaching Arts class for 6th graders, I still have to finish interim decision by the superiors when comes to last-minutes changes for activities. I often had to deal with last-minute posters, last-minutes articles, last-minutes lectures requirements without clear directions. There was finally a time when I could not take another last-minute call any more,

when I signed up the language exams IELTS for going abroad for further study. When I finished my art class with 6th graders, I got a call from a deputy director of my institute, demanding me to design a poster for the day after, I got the assignment around 3 p.m. with no instruction. Part of the materials I need was sent to me at 5 p.m. when the middle school need to close. I was trying to communicate with other associates for gathering information and driving myself back to the office building. I worked over night in the office that day finished three version of the posters they need based on the requirement while I found out the others were having their bank holiday for QingMing festival (a festival for commemorating the deceased ancestors).

6.1.2 Objective Reality: Stage VI

I thought the challenge was one of role identity. I thought it was a challenge of academic skills and professional ability. I thought it would be the same kind of challenge as last year.

But in reality?

It was one test of humanity after another, a relentless battle of physical exhaustion and willpower, a repeated confrontation with my own limits. Each time I believed things could not get worse, an even deeper level of disgust emerged.

During those two weeks, I never looked in the mirror.

I had no time to wash my hair, no time to put on makeup.

I cannot describe it all in detail, but I was at the edge of collapse.

That week I finished writing a paper and submitted four course syllabi. On Saturday night, without much reason, was the first time I got drunk, and the first time I cried openly while drinking in public.

The year 2023 marked the 70th anniversary of the institute , and it was also my second year of employment. Having finally transitioned from the status of trainee to that of a junior teacher eligible to participate in the city-level professional evaluation competition, I was confronted with the daunting task of preparing for this highly demanding project, which is the first step of the ladder of career promotion. My senior colleagues of the previous year, who also participated in the same evaluation. Owing to the suspension of other institutional projects during the pandemic, her evaluation became the institute's most important collective honored priority. She received support from the entire staff ranging from professional skills guidance and access to facilities, to project coordination and technical assistance. Despite the pressure, she ultimately achieved second place in the city-level competition.

By contrast, I was far less fortunate: my competition happened to coincide with the institute's 70th anniversary celebrations, all scheduled within the same month. This not only meant that no colleagues could spare the time to help me, but also that I was required to divide my attention among tasks related to the anniversary—photo editing, copywriting, technical support, and external communications. For my own competition, I had to borrow an unfamiliar institute's facilities and collaborate with students I did not know. When technical problems occurred during the livestream, particularly with the audio transmission, I had no team to support me. Everyone else was occupied, and I was left to confront and attempt to solve the issues alone—though most of the time I was powerless.

On my private social media, I wrote: “I have no strength left even to go mad; I simply don’t want to live.” Later, on a secondary Weibo account, I posted: “My colleagues are all on the brink of collapse. One of them, whose boarding-school child had a high fever and was sent home, had no time to take him to the hospital or even cook a meal—she ordered takeout instead—because she was still working overtime in the office until 2 a.m.”

At that time, I worked seven days a week, from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. I remember sitting in the office at 3 a.m., eating cold takeout.

During those two weeks, I never once looked in the mirror. I have no memory of what I wore to work, nor do I have a single photograph from that period. If not for this research compelling me to revisit that experience, I would have believed I had locked it away completely. I did not want to see myself; I considered myself disgusting—unworthy of recognition, affection, or acceptance. When it was finally over, I felt no pride, no sense of accomplishment, only the desperate urge to forget.

Two months later, I learned I had placed third in the city-level competition. One could say I had given my all and had reached a respectable position. Yet if I could, I would choose to forget it forever.

6.2 Decipher the Feeling

As outlined in the literature review, Ahmed’s (2013) theorization of disgust as a performative and spatial affect, along with Ngai’s (2007) conceptualization of its emotional limitations within the broader spectrum of ‘ugly feelings,’ jointly inform this study’s theoretical framework. Drawing

from both perspectives, I attempt to decipher the communicative and emotional expressions embedded in the #DisgustOfficeOutfit (DOO) phenomenon, using traces of evidence from my own lived experiences as material for analysis.

First, I argue that within the conceptual logic of the DOO, work and life constitute the primary boundary produced by the affect of disgust. What is deemed disgusting is not merely the office environment itself, but the inescapable societal pressure to work, the conflict between one's professional obligations and personal values, and, most painfully, the necessity of conforming to an ideological system one internally resists. In this sense, disgust becomes a spatial affect, permeating the office as a site where boundaries between self and structure are continually challenged and destabilized.

The DOOer experiences a cyclical process of self-disgust, in which attempts to draw a protective boundary around the self are continuously undermined by institutional demands. The failure to maintain a stable affective shield leads to the projection of disgust onto the body, expressed through outward appearance and dress. As a result, sartorial disorder and intentional 'ugliness' become symbolic acts of rejection, a repudiation not just of aesthetic norms but of the moral and psychological order of the office itself.

Conversely, outside of the office, the DOOer attempts to reconstruct personal order and reclaim a higher moral or classed sense of self. By re-establishing identity in spaces beyond the workplace, the individual enacts a form of emotional and social isolation from their office persona, thus

preserving their broader sense of self-worth and belonging. In this way, #DOO is not merely an aesthetic stance, but a form of embodied emotional labor, an act of resistance situated at the intersection of self identification including space, and affect.

6.2.1 Powerless feelings : In Stage I

In the early stages of my engagement with the #DOO practice, my motivations were not yet consciously political or aesthetic. Rather, the impulse stemmed primarily from the psychological impact of the pandemic lockdown and the disorientation of entering the workforce for the first time. At that point, the object of my disgust was not the system, but myself, specifically, the perceived inadequacy of my professional skills and emotional resilience. I internalized the setbacks I encountered as personal failures.

In my private digital spaces, I expressed self-flagellation, describing myself in harsh, derogatory terms (language visible only to myself). In contrast, in public-facing contents, I projected an image of positivity, effort, and self-improvement. This duality reflects the nascent formation of my disgust border: the boundary between who I felt I was and who I wanted to appear to be. At this stage, the border was unstable and inward-facing—directed more toward self-blame than structural critique, but already laying the groundwork for a future reframing.

Despite the emotional turbulence, I remained determined to move forward. This early phase reveals how disgust, in its initial formation, can operate as a tool of internal discipline before it is redirected outward toward systems, norms, or environments. It was a transitional state, in which

I sought to stabilize my self-image while still largely adhering to normative ideals of professionalism and aesthetic self-presentation.

On May 20, 2022, I was in the bottom of mood, posted on my personal wechat account, describing myself as a piece of trash, wrote and redistricted it to “only me”: *Heaven has made us talents, we’re not made in vain?” Nah! Some trash lies shattered, a dozen broken pieces, and every last piece is trash. Won’t taken for landfill, won’t burn for firewood.”* With the selfie (Fig.34), in which I was wearing no make up but clay mask and bath robe and a serious determined gaze the selfie is in thick filter while I seemed nice with characteristic of aesthetic. On the same day, I post a more positive with memory photos saying to the public saying *“Lately, my mental state’s like this: A mini-meltdown daily, A major crash every other day. So I hold tight to the joyful me. And wait, slow-burn, for her return. (Oh, stashed-away bliss...)”* At this stage, my resistance remained largely powerless. Although I was already engaging in the sartorial practice now recognizable as #DOO, the affective intensity had not yet reached the threshold of disgust. Rather, my experience aligned more closely with what Sianne Ngai (2007) describes in her chapters on irritation and anxiety, two low-intensity but persistent emotional states that characterize the impasse of late modern subjectivity. I was deeply irritated and anxious about my job, overwhelmed by procedural exhaustion and self-doubt, but the reality I faced offered no viable alternatives or exit strategies. My emotional energy was directed inward, toward self-modification rather than structural critique. I did not yet want to change the system, I simply wanted to change myself to survive within it.



Fig. 34 Facial Selfie (Liu, 2022)

6.2.2 Powerful Border: Stage IV

By April 2023, after the work experiences described in previous chapters—including interpersonal tensions with colleagues and supervisors—the emotion of disgust began to emerge more clearly in my embodied and emotional responses, increasingly filled with aggression. During this period, the spatiality of disgust began to extend outward; its stickiness, shaped by my shifting values, adhered to all perceived 'others', through which I began to reorder and produce affective and moral boundaries. My deeply internalized value system, formed through years of education and centered around ideals such as responsibility, critical thinking, and creativity—began to feel fundamentally invalidated by workplace realities.

Disparities in resource distribution and unjust delegation of tasks ignited anger within me, not

only toward individuals but also toward a broader organizational system that denied fairness. Yet, despite this emotional upheaval, I remained powerless to act upon it—caught in a paralyzing tension between inner resistance and outward conformity.

It was under such conditions that my disgust-border started to solidify. I began to mentally frame my inherited values as inherently 'noble' and became increasingly hostile toward colleagues whose work behaviors did not meet those standards. In my mind, a moral dichotomy was drawn: those who shared my values became allies, while those who didn't were marked as outsiders—contaminants, in Sara Ahmed's (2013) terms.

This inner revolt manifested visibly through dress. My clothing became a form of painful defiance rebellious in style yet still bound by the constraints of professional expectations described in Chapter 4. On one occasion, knowing I was to attend a meaningless group meeting, I dressed deliberately in a rebellious manner: applying double-winged eyeliner, dark grey lipstick or whatever comfortable. This was a direct response to a prior injustice, where a team leader had manipulated my lack of information to assign me the group's entire workload. I only discovered this after completion, through a casual remark by another team member (Fig. 35, Fig.36).



Fig. 35 Rebellious grey makeup (Liu, 2023)



Fig. 36 Rebellious outfit (Liu, 2023)

On April 6, after days of internal struggle, (Fig.37) I posted a message on my public social media account, visible to all, expressing a desire for mutual destruction—a symbolic “if I go down, we all go down” sentiment. While I masked this message in the form of emoji wordplay, its meaning was clear to anyone familiar with Gen Z’s semiotic fluency. In the comment section, among supportive replies from friends, one colleague, aware of the full situation, pleaded, “Don’t be like this, don’t be like this.”



Fig. 37 Rebellious emotion release (Liu, 2023)

During this period, it became evident that I was no longer turning my disgust inward—no longer blaming or hating myself—but rather redirecting that disgust toward the environment itself. In doing so, I attempted to distinguish myself from the workspace through sartorial performance. My dress became a tactical negotiation between my internalized values and the external codes of workplace respectability. As previously discussed, I did not entirely violate the expectations of propriety; instead, I pushed back through subtle, aesthetic deviations—not in formality, but in personal expression.

At times, my appearance clearly aligned with the #DOO aesthetic; at others, it diverged. However, on the affective level, the disgust-border had already been clearly drawn. My emotional rejection

of the workplace was no longer masked—it was directly performed, materially embodied through clothing. Yet, this form of expression still remained powerless, as Ngai (2007) would describe: though emotionally charged, it lacked the capacity for structural change.

Even at moments of deep disillusionment, I remained compelled to comply. For occasions deemed ‘important’ or ‘formal,’ I still dressed according to normative expectations, donning the appropriate professional attire—despite my reluctance(Fig.38). This contradiction captures the tension between internal resistance and external conformity, between the affective intensity of disgust and the institutional limits placed on its expression.

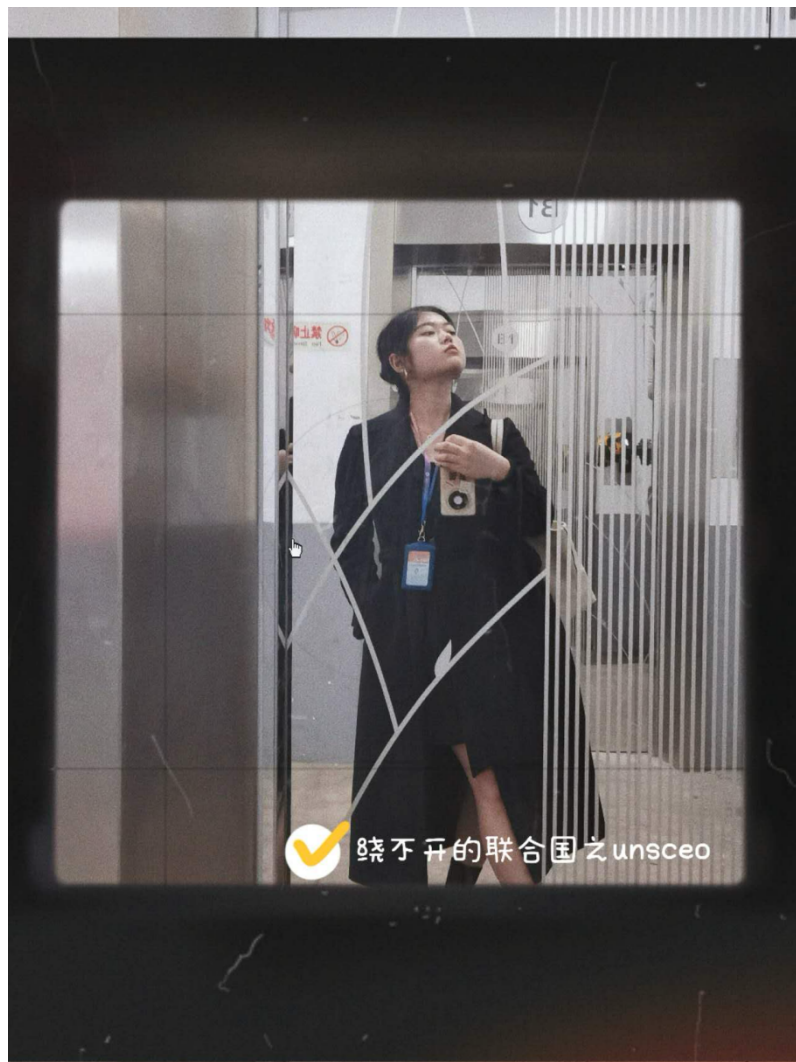


Fig. 38 Attend UNSCEO meeting
(Liu, 2023)

6.2.3 Numb Border : Stage VI

During Stage VI, October and November of 2023, the disgust feeling of mine, is stuck towards of covering myself in spite of someone who do not fit in the value. I uncovered that I like everyone, is living in the system, have nothing different than the others who I used to despise of, myself is a member of the disgust using my old border of disgust. Not until this stage the phenomenon finally make every sense to me. I could not hide myself through any border anymore, instead I was questioned by 'me', a member of all disgust.

However, just like Ahmed (2013) noted, disgust performance is powerful for the border negotiating, 'the office me' is not me, I can only be 'me' after work. I was numb during the period of work, the missing memory evident the numbness. The border acted as a isolation filter for my mental health before I realised.

During Stage VI, I have only one single photo of mine taken (Fig.39), on October 17, 2023, while I was experiencing the most extreme disgust feeling of my own, I had never worn glasses outside of my flat until then, and I can not recall anything during than period until I looked back to the captures, however only one thing is sure, I looked way worse than in this photo.



Fig. 39 Selfie in October 2023
(Liu, 2023)

The affective states I experienced during that period were difficult to articulate, numb, opaque, and at times completely indiscernible. What came closest to capturing my internal condition was an existential disorientation, akin to the alienation portrayed in Kafka's (1915) *Metamorphosis*. I felt like an aberration in the eyes of others, someone rejected by social structures, and eventually, by myself. I became unable to look at myself in the mirror, consumed by self-disgust and self-loathing. As Ruggerone (2016) notes, while disgust may manifest clearly as a recognizable emotion, the underlying affective states often remain unprocessed or undifferentiated. Under immense stress, my perceptual sensitivity dulled, a condition that borders on psychological or neurological disturbance and lies beyond the purview of this fashion-focused research.

Yet the documentation of my personal affective archive, namely, my own social media posts—

offers an entry point to understanding this emotional entanglement. On March 13, 2024, I wrote: “Is there a time when nothing feels exciting anymore? Things I used to look forward to— watching movies, playing badminton, eating good food, even drinking, sleeping, talking—now feel meaningless.” I described myself as being in a state of *‘heightened disgust, hypersensitive, suspicious, and unkind,’* despite seemingly living a happy and stable life. I added: *“It’s as if I’m forcing myself to look normal.”* On April 19, I continued this reflection: *“In a place where there is no sense of achievement or fulfillment, I am living on accumulated disappointment. I’ve learned to protect myself by becoming numb. I force myself to perform actions I despise and disagree with. Over time, I realize the mask of numbness has fused to my face I can no longer take it off.”* If performance is the mask, then numbness became my performance. Due to prolonged working hours and the constant demand for presentability, there was little backstage space to rest or reclaim the self. Eventually, the numb mask became my default mode of existence. When the time came to remove it, I realized I had lost the capacity to do so. My sense of self became unreal, unnecessary, and unrecognizable, which is close to the definition of nihilism.

It is in this context that I interpret the emergence of #DOO not just as a visual gesture, but as a profound affective and existential intervention. DOOers are actively, if painfully, attempting a kind of emotional self-rescue. They deliberately perform distress, seeking visibility in their suffering. Through the performative expression of disgust, though powerless in traditional terms, they stage one last symbolic resistance. By stretching the boundaries of Ahmed’s (2013) “stickiness,” DOOers carve out a space of positionality, repeatedly negotiating the borders of the self. It becomes a personal system of emotional order, a tactic for restoring one’s vitality and will to live.

If I were to give a deeply personal answer to the question “What do DOOers want to express?” I would answer: #DOO is how young Chinese female cooperate workers, crushed under the weight of workplace and societal pressures, break away from the disciplinary discourses instilled during their education. Through the performative affect of disgust, they reconfigure their value systems, not for approval, but to affirm their own standards of worth. DOO becomes a feminist strategy of survival, a quiet yet powerful assertion that what truly matters is not how one is seen by others, but how one chooses to recognize, protect, and ultimately love oneself.

Conclusion

Under multiple pressures, young Chinese women are embodied with the full spectrum of ugly feelings, with disgust emerging as the most acute (Ngai, 2005). As an affect, disgust shapes the clothing performances of #DOO. Drawing on Ahmed’s framework of the *performativity of disgust* (2013)—its stickiness, imaginaries, and border-making—this study analyzes the connections between emotional stages and dressing practices through textual and visual records of lived experience, seeking to supplement the theoretical gap between affect and fashion practice.

Theoretically, I propose that the relationship between affect and dressing practices must be examined through concrete affective frameworks that integrate the performer’s geographical and temporal site, cultural and social background, and the dynamics of psychological change. Mapping these interwoven threads enables a clearer account of the routes through which

actions unfold. A broader set of performer samples would allow for a more comprehensive grasp of the dynamic relations between affect and dress.

It is important to note that affect is a personal, pre-conscious intensity, whereas emotion is what can be communicated and shared. To infer affect solely from emotion is therefore partial; for this reason, embodiment research is necessary in the study of affect.

7 Major Conclusion

This study has examined #DOO through three interrelated perspectives: historical-cultural context, gendered comparison, and insider-embodied affective analysis.

Building on extensive historical research, I employed visual analysis and archival research methods, drawing on periodicals, newspapers, and photographs of the professional woman born in the 1960s, and contrasted these with images of young office workers in 2025. This comparison distilled the cultural inheritances and resistances embodied in dress. For the post-00s generation, the existence of #DOO in China is rooted in a society marked by profound intergenerational divides and rapidly shifting socio-economic and political conditions. Unable to articulate their disadvantaged position through more direct forms of action, young women resort to #DOO as both a silent cry and a reluctant compromise.

Through digital ethnography, I further compared men's and women's workplace attire in terms of both physiological and psychological comfort. Women's office wear not only

incorporates inherently uncomfortable elements but also generates intensified psychological pressures: first, women encounter greater structural burdens in the workplace, including discrimination, limited advancement, reproductive demands, and domestic responsibilities; second, aesthetic expectations are far higher for women than men, as evidenced by womenswear brand data and the overwhelming volume of styling discourses on social media. Under these layered constraints, young professional women—already positioned as a marginal social group—carry an excess of discomfort, which explains why they have become the primary practitioners of #DOO.

Finally, adopting an insider perspective through embodied ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, I examined how disgust, as an extreme negative affect, shapes #DOO dressing practices. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s framework of disgust as performative, I analyzed how this affect acts upon psychological states to produce distinctive sartorial performances: for example, the attempt to establish symbolic borders by differentiating oneself through dress from groups one finds “disgusting,” or the numbness that emerges when border-making fails. #DOO, in this sense, manifests as an externalized form of this border-establishing process.

By integrating historical-cultural insights with ongoing digital ethnographic data, this study explains the emergence of disgust within #DOO and advances a theoretical account of the role of affect in fashion practice. The conclusion reached is that specific affects, such as disgust, must be analyzed within concrete socio-cultural and situational contexts—whether

collective or individual—and understood through layered affective frameworks in order to grasp their influence on dressing practices.