

Retro Futurism: The Resurgence of Y2K Style in the Fashion Field

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Abstract: Y2K style was born in the late 1990s at the end of the 20th century. This period was at the turn of the new and old centuries. At that time, people were full of yearning and longing for the future world. Therefore, this aesthetic style with both the sense of future technology and a little retro flavor was integrated into the design field. Y2K style has been popular for a period of time, and began to decline since 2003. Later, new popular style gradually took her place. In recent years, with some design fashion brands integrating the Y2K aesthetic style into clothing design again, fashion icon and celebrities have spread and promoted the Y2K style, and young people in the era of Z have their own unique aesthetic pursuit, which has made the resurgence of Y2K with retro futuristic style from the minority to the public, and gradually formed a new atmosphere in the fashion circle. This article uses qualitative research methods to study the development and evolution of Y2K style as well as its current impact on the fashion field and the reasons for its popularity again.

1. Overview of Y2K Style

1.1 Background and reason of Y2K style

The word "Y2K" comes from the "millennium bug" crisis in computers. In the 1990s, computer science and technology were not developed, and the programming system was still relatively backward, which may lead to a series of serious problems when the computer processed the date after 2000. The original meaning of the word Y2K was an important bug in the processing of dates by early computer programs. At that time, people who were about to enter the 21st century believed that this bug might lead to the paralysis of global infrastructure, and the word Y2K was born. Where Y represents "year", while K represents the Latin prefix "kilo", representing 1000. Y2K is now used to refer to the year 2000, David Eddie abbreviated the "Year Two Kilo" representing "2000" as "Y2K" in June 1995. Therefore, "Y2K" began to spread as a synonym for computer problems in 2000.[1]

At first, "Y2K" refers to the program bug of the computer, but later it refers to a special visual sensory style culture emerging in the western countries from the late 1990s to the early 21st century.[2] At the end of the 1990s, the Internet was in the transitional stage of the transition from the new century to the old century. During this period, the Internet was popularized all over the world. Due to the "millennium bug" crisis, the public was full of unknown fears about the coming new century, but more people were optimistic. They had unlimited imagination and vision for the future, and imagined the future as a utopian country with highly developed technology.

Finally, this imaginative concept of the future was extended to the visual sense culture, which gave birth to the "Y2K" aesthetics. "Y2K" style is usually included in "Y2K Aesthetics", referring to all clothing design, product design, music genre and visual effects that meet the "Y2K" aesthetic. In the overview of the encyclopedia website fandom, Y2K style prevailed in popular culture from 1995 to 2004. Named after Y2K Bug, it has a distinctive aesthetic period and integrates fashion, hardware design and technology.[3]

2. The Development Process and Characteristics of Y2K Style

2.1 Y2K style features from the 1990s to the early 21st century

The formation and development period of Y2K aesthetic style was from the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century. The characteristics of "Y2K" style in this period mainly included the following two types of characteristics: the first type was the cold mysterious style that used colorless and cool colors as the main colors, heavy material texture and tight and smooth lines. The second category is the future technology style using high saturation colors, translucent texture materials and high-tech core technology applications.

The clothing industry has always been the leader of fashion trends. In 1995, at the Thierry Mugler fall couture show, the designer Thierry Mugler incorporated his imagination of the future world into the design. This is also the first appearance of Y2K style in the show in the

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1990s. [3] The shape of the future steel machinery female soldier in the show is also a typical representative of the futuristic fantasy in the Y2K style. The glittering gold and silver metal texture materials bring a strong sense of future science and technology. The shape of the semi-human and semi-robot also seems to confirm the public's infinite fantasy about the high development of future science and technology. The smooth and sharp arc shape contour lines also bring a soft feeling to the cold material texture. It seems that everything is full of utopian fantasy about the future world.

Then in 1999, Alexander McQueen launched the Givenchy fall 1999 *fin de siècle* series, which shook the classic and elegant style of Givenchy once released. Inspired by the Y2K millennium bug crisis, the model wore the "android couture" clothing and walked on the silver mirror T-stage. In addition to using metal texture and PVC fabric, the clothing also decorated the surface of the clothing with circuit board patterns and high-saturation color LED light emitting tubes as design elements, Alexander McQueen conveyed people's vision and expectation for the future of technology after the millennium through clothing design. In the same year, the hot release of the film "The Matrix" injected new popular elements into the Y2K style. The characters in the film were mostly in achromatic and cool colors as the main colors, and the tight-fitting knitwear, shiny black tight-fitting leather jacket, ultra-long black windbreaker, black sunglasses and electronic digital technology accessories. The combination of these fashionable pieces and design elements shows the rational, calm and high-tech fantasy of the future world. Just four months after the film was released, John Galliano, then the design director of Christian Dior, was influenced by "The Matrix". In the show of Christian Dior fall 1999 couture, we can see the smooth PVC coat, metal coat, leather boots, and black eye makeup like wearing sunglasses. These elements are imitating and expressing the coldness and technology of "The Matrix".

The years 1999 and 2000 were the peak of Y2K style. As the most typical popular symbol of the millennium, Y2K style can not only be seen in fashion shows, films and television works, but also in many European and American singers who released records around the millennium, having been affected by Y2K style in their own modeling, and having applied Y2K aesthetics in their own works. For example, Britney Spears told a fantasy story about the future world in her music video "Oops I Did It Again" in 2000. In the music video, Britney Spears told that a Martian living on Mars fell in love with an astronaut from the earth. Britney Spears, as the heroine, wore tight tights made of bright red latex in the music video. The tight style highlights her soft and beautiful body curve, and her face was painted with metallic silver-gray eye makeup, and the dancers beside her also wore silver metallic leather and PVC translucent clothing to dance in the imagined Martian living environment. The image of Britney Spears in red tights in the film has also become one of her classic shapes. In addition to Britney Spears, TLC also uses a lot of PVC, metal texture materials, strong futuristic makeup, high saturation hair color and eye makeup in the clothing modeling of "No

Scrubs". Michael Jackson's "dream" mv uses a lot of future science fiction elements in the scene setting and clothing modeling.

The popularity of Y2K style in western countries has also led to the rapid spread of this trend from the West to the East. At the other end of the world, stars in Asia have also begun to follow suit. For example, singers such as Faye Wong, Coco Lee, and Lee Jung Hyun have also incorporated Y2K aesthetics into their album's overall image design. Y2K style is now popular in the world, which also proves that the public is full of expectations and good imagination for the coming new century.

Not only clothing, movies and music are affected by Y2K style, but also the appearance design of some game consoles, such as PlayStation, Xbox and game UI design, are full of Y2K aesthetics.[4] In terms of architecture, in 1997, the Encounter restaurant on the top floor of the Los Angeles airport theme building, which is known as the city's cultural and historical monument, began to open. The building where the restaurant is located looks like a spaceship that has just landed. The interior of the restaurant is mainly decorated with simple and smooth curves, and at the same time, it is equipped with white and purple mysterious lights. The whole restaurant and building seem to be visitors from outside space, This aesthetic feeling full of futurism just meets the public's imagination of the future world.

From the above examples, it can be seen that from the late 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century, Y2K aesthetics has had an impact on design aesthetics in many fields, especially on clothing design. Y2K style also quickly became popular in the world and became a trendsetter.

2.2 Continuation of Y2K style - McBling style (from 2003 to 2008)

With the advent of the 21st century, due to the bursting of the Internet foam and the fatigue of the public's appreciation of the same aesthetic, Y2K style has gradually declined, and its popularity has been replaced by a new style, which is McBling. McBling is a popular aesthetics from about 2003 to 2008. It inherits some features of Y2K aesthetics. Although McBling style and Y2K aesthetics are often discussed together or mistakenly considered to be the same style, and McBling style has a certain aesthetic impact on the resurgence of Y2K more than a decade later, there are still obvious differences in the initial style characteristics between the two.

The word McBling is a compound word, which is composed of Mc and Bling. Mc is taken from McMansion. McMansion refers to those fake mansions used by the media in the 1980s. These fake mansions are built with cheap building materials and sold at a high price, which is used to satirize the aesthetics of ostentatious and vulgar taste. Bling refers to shiny things, so the term "McBling" is ironic and used to refer to the colorful and complicated clothing style at that time.

The first signs of McBling aesthetics began around 2000-2001. One of the earliest examples of this style is the music video of Madonna's song "Music" in 2000. But the

iconic figure that really made the style of McBling rise is Paris Hilton. At that time, the reality show "The Simple Life", which she participated in, was popular. Her clothes in the program caused a wave of imitation among young people. This wave of imitation also marked the end of the Y2K era and the arrival of the McBling era.

Paris Hilton, the representative figure of McBling style, became a household name because of the popularity of the reality show "Simple Life". Although she was not a practitioner in the fashion industry, she led the fashion trend at that time. Although her dress style has been wildly criticized by the media, it has been warmly pursued by the younger generation. The popularity of McBling style was guided by the popular culture at that time. In addition to the core representative of the style, Paris Hilton, the singers Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and so on were also the leaders of Y2K style. In the campus youth films such as "Cheap Girl", "Legal Beauty" and "Leading the Way", we can also see the clothing style of McBling's sweet hot girl style.

To some extent, the McBling style can be said to be a partial continuation of the Y2K style, which is also the reason why some people later mistakenly believe that the two styles are the same. The McBling style of the 2003-2008 period has the following main characteristics: bold and exaggerated color matching, reflective fabric material, use of rhinestone sequin material, and tight short clothing style. For example, a jacket shorter than the navel, a low-waisted pants or a miniskirt. Compared with the previous Y2 style, the McBling style weakens the cold future sense of technology, and uses a large number of bright and exaggerated colors, especially the use of pink, which makes the McBling style more feminine than the Y2K neutral style.[5]

3."Y2K" Style Returns

In about ten years after 2008, the Y2K style seemed to fade out of people's sight temporarily, as if it had disappeared. However, from 2018 to 2020, with the emergence of the virtual idol of the Metaverse, the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic and the global economic recession, the negative development of the earth has spread among the public, and the "Y2K" style, which carries the future utopia, has returned to the public's view again and quickly swept the world [6], the resurgence of Y2K style seems to have caused a boom. In addition to many design brands and designers incorporating Y2K style into the latest design works, many star trendsetters have also begun to pursue Y2K style.

The most representative example of Y2K style's return is the early autumn series of cooperation between Dior men 2019 and the famous Japanese artist Hajime Sorayama. The nearly perfect giant bionic female robot standing in the show is the representative work of Hajime Sorayama, Sexy Robot. Sexy Robot, a Utopian product, blurs the boundary between the real human body and the robot. Hajime Sorayama displays his imagination of the perfect female body on the cold and emotionless robot. The combination of cold metal materials and the feminine soft curves, and the use of multiple lights with the

blooming cherry blossom patterns to create the image of blooming flowers, which is also the right expression of Y2K's fantasy future aesthetics.[7] In addition to the show installation design, which is full of utopian imagination, this season's clothing design is also full of the spiritual core of Y2K aesthetics. The overall black and gray clothing is dotted with pink cherry blossoms. The clothing fabric processed by high-tech metallization technology is glittering with the light of metal texture. The cannage pattern is cut on the surface of the fabric by laser etching technology. The inside of the cold outside contains a trace of beauty and tenderness, which is exactly consistent with the Y2K style filled with Utopian ideas.

In addition to Dior men, many luxury brands have also begun to try emerging cultures, such as the Archlight Sneakers in the spring and summer 2018 series launched by Louis Vuitton, which are inspired by future trends and basketball shoes in the 1990s. It is characterized by the extremely high arch on the sole, the ultra-long tongue, and the high heel. The color of the upper also uses the gray color of metal technology, the high saturation fluorescent color, and the patterns with special design sense. It looks like a laser light from a distance, making the shoes look very virtual technology sense. In Jeremy Scott's autumn and winter 2018 series, there are many metal texture fabrics and transparent materials used. In the clothing silhouette, the jacket and skirt design inspired by the design of circuit boards and spaceships can be seen. The use of these elements can also show that designers are full of yearning for the era of technology. Moreover, Balenciaga set the launch of the 2021 fall series in the virtual game world, and showed the ready-to-wear release of the series to the players through the release of the online game "Afterworld: The Age of Tomorrow". The story background of the game is set in 2031 in the future, and the world after ten years is imagined through fable stories. The designer expresses his imagination of future clothing through gamification. In this game, you can see the flowers in full bloom, the hands that can blow fire and the twisted flying car in the air, all of which seem to make the audience enter a strange world full of fantasy. The dress of the characters in the game is also avantgarde and modern, and the presentation of this way also fully expresses Balenciaga's endless imagination of the future world.

The McBling style, which is considered to be the continuation of Y2K style, is also an important branch of style development in the process of the resurgence of Y2K style. Among them, the most representative clothing brand is Blumarine. Under the leadership of the current design director Nicola Brognano, the clothing brand that has been established for more than 40 years has also changed its style in recent years, from the original intellectual and elegant classic style in the past few years to the current popular sweet and cool Y2K style. Blumarine focuses on exploring and reconstructing the style of pop idol in 2000.[8] Taking the popular idol in the 2000s as the inspiration muse, he drew on the current popular millennium trend and refined the original classic elements of the brand to combine and innovate, creating a new Blumarine. For example, in the 2022 spring and summer series, the overall use of bright high-saturation colors such

as pink and yellow, sexy bold designs that expose large areas of body skin, frequent low waist lines and butterfly design elements seem to create a dreamy millennium dream.

In addition to these fashion brands, some stars and fashion icon are also following the trend of the millennium style. In May 2020, Lady Gaga released her new album "Chromatica". From the album cover to the MV modeling, it was full of Y2K style. In the album cover picture, Lady Gaga wore a black leather corset which was fixed in the middle of an oversized metal ring. Her left arm wore a metal armor, and her right leg was a prosthetic made of metal materials. Such a semi-human and semi-mechanical shape also created a strong sense of technology. Besides, Korean women's group BLACKPINK used high-saturation hair color, unique makeup and metal material accessories to create a futuristic visual effect in the preview of the new album "How you like that" in 2020.

The resurgence of Y2K style in the fashion circle is not only a large-scale outbreak, but also a synchronized fashion between the East and the West. In June 2020, the female inspirational competition variety "Sisters Riding the Winds and Breaking the Waves" was popular in China. Although Zhu Jingxi, one of the contestants, failed to make her debut in a group, her unique dress style left a deep impression on the audience. Her unique future and

scientific makeup and clothing in the program not only made her stand out among the contestants, but also made Y2K style popular in China. In the program, Zhu Jingxi has not only been interpreting the stage of Y2K style, but also said that she wants to be a Y2K style women's team. In her music works, she also expressed blind optimism and vision for the future, which also coincides with the ideological connotation of Y2K aesthetics. In July 2021, SuperELLE magazine even teamed up with a group of famous Chinese celebrities to shoot fashion blockbusters with the theme of # back to y2k # to pay tribute to the retro futurism style.

Two years later, the aesthetics and style of Y2K are still being imitated by everyone, even with increasing popularity. The word Y2K has been viewed by more than 90 million people on a social networking platform named Xiaohongshu, and the total number of videos with the word Y2K tag on TikTok video platform has reached 630 million. On July 20, 2022, well-known singer and actor Ju Jingyi released a photo of the cowboy Spice Girl on Weibo, which attracted a lot of attention. This set of summer-limited Spice Girl makeup and dressing style, which was positioned as Y2K style, was also imitated by netizens. According to the trend of the number of Y2K notes and "Ju Jingyi" notes provided by ReMai Data, the release of this model has aroused the attention of Y2K style.

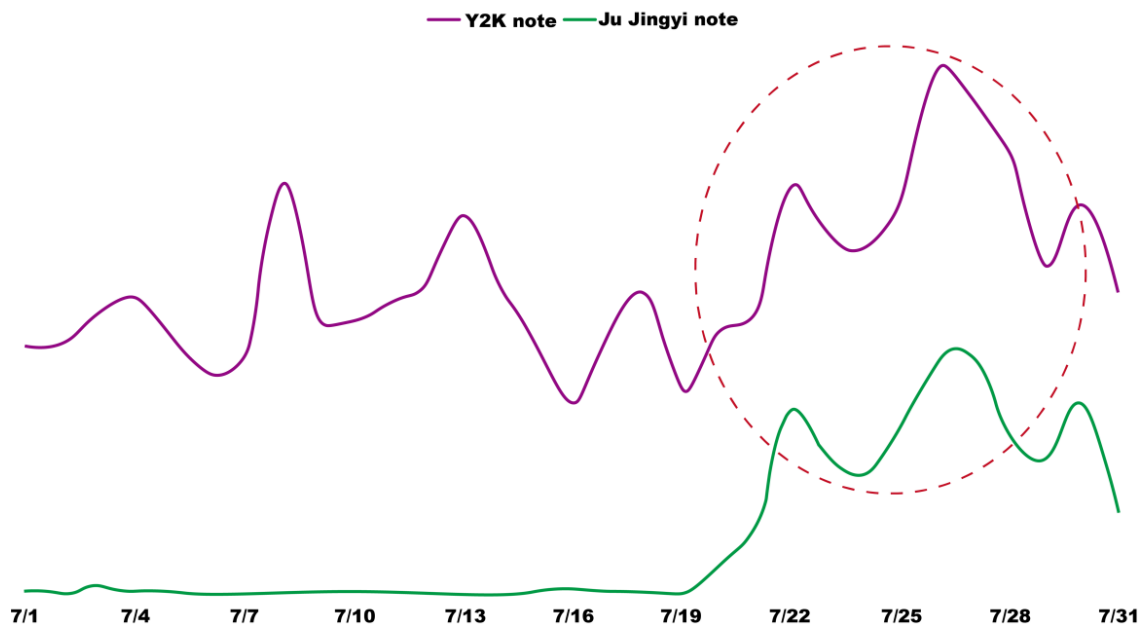


Fig.1. Transmitting tendency

Picture Source: ReMai Data

The term #Ju Jingyi Cowboy Spicy Girl Makeup# currently has 26.65 million views in Xiaohongshu, among which butterfly denim top, blue eye makeup and Y2K Spicy Girl three-strand braid provide rich imitation inspiration for users of Xiaohongshu. Many fashion lovers have uploaded photos of themselves imitating # Ju Jingyi Cowboy Spicy Girl Makeup #, and the combination and promotion of star effect and popular trend can also rapidly expand public awareness of Y2K style.

4. Research on the Reasons for the Resurgence of "Y2K"

Jame Laver, a fashion culture researcher, believes that fashion trends are cyclical. The so-called old is new, and the old can also become a trend. Over a period of time, the change of trend can be repeated repeatedly. In Laver's law, new elements may enter into silence after a cycle. After a period of accumulation, a few elements may be used

again.[9]As a style that was popular more than 20 years ago, Y2K style is also in line with this law after being out of fashion for more than 10 years. The philosopher Jacques Derrida put forward "Hauntology" in 1993. Derrida believes that things are differences, infinite differences. It produces and disappears, it's something and it's not something. In fact, the public is constantly exposed to the product of retro futurism vision. Through the act of disappearance, the era has put some things ahead of time and made them something we are destined to encounter repeatedly. The era we live in is not an entity, but a Hauntology formed by the overlapping of the past and the future. The public always looks at the things of retro futurism with a familiar and strange feeling.[10] The resurgence of Y2K style is based on the current review of the past and unlimited vision of the future, which is the typical feature of retro futurism. Elizabeth Guffey believes in the article "Crafting Yesterday's Tomorrows: Retro-Futurism, Steampunk, and Making in the Twenty-First Century" that if futurism is a term that describes our expectations for the future, then retro futurism describes how we remember these visions.[11] The birth of Y2K aesthetics is at the intersection of two centuries. In the past two years, with the emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic and war, which are full of unstable factors, it seems to have returned to the situation where the future is unknown but has infinite beautiful imagination more than 20 years ago. At the same time, with the public's reliance on science and technology and the introduction of new concepts such as the metauniverse and NFT virtual idol, the public is also full of unlimited imagination for the future development of science and technology. It is also normal for the optimistic Y2K aesthetics to become popular again under such circumstances.

5.Conclusion

Y2K style has existed as a short-term fashion style phenomenon and has become popular again after more than ten years. Its return not only integrates new features, but also brings some influence to the fashion field. The Y2K style that returns again is also like a link linking the development of fashion aesthetics in the 20th and 21st centuries.

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