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The Contemporary Translation of Wabi-Sabi Aesthetics: From Eastern Philosophy to Fashion Design Practice

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Abstract:
This article explores the application of wabi-sabi aesthetics in contemporary fashion design. It analyses wabi-sabi's connotations, definitions and impact on fashion design, and examines cases of designer brands, summarising its expressions, characteristics and design elements for practical use. It explores the origin and connotation of wabi-sabi in Chinese Buddhist and Eastern Zen contexts. Then, it introduces the meaning and origin of wabi-sabi, as well asa its four core characteristics: simplicity, imperfection, seclusion and frugality. Through the analysis of wabi-sabi in other art and design fields, the paper reveals its influence on modern design and examines its impact on fashion. Through literature research, material analysis and a combination of graphics and text, the paper explores the external manifestations of wabi-sabi in modern fashion and summarises its characteristics in this field. It also uses relevant domestic and international brands as case studies. The paper identifies inherent design elements and provides references for the application of wabi-sabi in fashion, serving as a key theoretical basis for subsequent design practice. Finally, the author applies wabi-sabi to garment design, compares the results with the prior analysis and summarises the findings. The paper also discusses how new designers can grasp wabi-sabi, convey its spiritual culture through design, and explore its application.

Keywords:
Wabi-Sabi Aesthetics, Aesthetics, Simple and Plain, Fashion Design, Textile

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

The rapid development of economic technology has led many fields to fall into the misconception of mass production with a focus on quantity rather than quality, and in the field of fashion design, many fast fashion brands have emerged, making a large surplus of clothing or accessories and causing very serious environmental pollution. Such a focus on form rather than connotation has led designers to think about the spirit of design and what kind of design can meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of people.

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The Eastern wabi-sabi aesthetic is beginning to come into its own. The concept of wabi-sabi aesthetics is derived from the Buddhist concept of the three marks of dharma, namely impermanence, suffering and emptiness. It is a traditional Eastern aesthetic centred on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. Its emphasis on rustic, natural and unadorned aesthetics challenges the busy, fast pace of modern lifestyles and brings ease and comfort to the spiritual dimension. As a result, more and more designers are exploring more forms and approaches to design from a wabi-sabi aesthetic perspective, gradually resulting in many outstanding design works in the fields of architectural design, interior design and fashion design.Wabi-sabi aesthetics has awakened people to the pursuit of natural beauty, designers or brands are combining it with fashion design, and analysing design from the artistic perspective of wabi-sabi aesthetics to raise fashion design to a higher spiritual level. The article provides a theoretical basis to sort out the research ideas and provide a more efficient aid to the subsequent research.

1.2 Aim

It is hoped that the wabi-sabi aesthetic will convey to the public and to the consumer not only the form of expression, but also the spirit of simplicity and acceptance of imperfections and regrets, bringing a sense of peace and harmony to people's hearts. It is not about the pursuit of superficial things, but rather about the spiritual feelings. Through the study of the connotation of wabi-sabi aesthetics, the application of wabi-sabi in contemporary fashion design in terms of expression and expressive elements is analysed to create a series of fashion designs with the core spirit of wabi-sabi.

1.3 Points of Innovation

This article analyses the historical connotation of wabi-sabi aesthetics and how it can be applied to contemporary forms of expression through a large number of literature references as a theoretical basis, and then discusses how to develop new forms of expression through the original aesthetic connotation through specific experiments and practice of fashion design, and then explores the future development direction of wabi-sabi aesthetics.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Wabi-sabi

2.1.1 Definition of Wabi-sabi

The concept of wabi-sabi emerged from the arrival of Buddhism and Chinese culture in Japan. In the fourteenth century, under the influence of Zen Buddhism, “wabi-sabi” developed a more positive orientation and gained widespread attention. The word wabi originally meant ‘out of the world’, ‘simple, independent of nature’, and ‘sabi’ meant ‘solitude’ ‘thinness’. The combination of these two words means to express the extraordinary beauty of nature through imperfection and independence. This pure aesthetic connotation was gradually incorporated into Japanese aesthetics.

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2.1.2 The Spirit of the Wabi-sabi Aesthetic

In “The Beauty of Surprise and Silence - On Japanese Design Aesthetics”, it is mentioned that rudeness and simplicity are the core ideas of the wabi-sabi aesthetic, “The simplicity of the wabi-sabi approach can be best expressed in this way: ‘Material poverty, spiritual abundance’ is the motto of wabi-sabi.” The wabi-sabi aesthetic is a central idea, embodying an inclusive world view and an atmosphere of impermanence, simplicity and emptiness.

2.2 The ideological characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics

The wabi-sabi materials are inspired by nature and embody a process of “dematerialization” that, with the passage of time, gradually reveals the most rustic beauty of things themselves, imperfect but still full of charm. The Wabi-sabi aesthetic can be divided into four characteristic forms of thought: “simplicity, awkwardness, simplicity and invisibility”.

2.2.1 “Simplicity” in wabi-sabi

Wabi-sabi's “simplicity” emphasises the restraint of beauty, the elimination of unnecessary forms of expression, and the more important conveyance of spiritual connotations. The interior design shown in Figure 1 is a concrete example of the simplicity and restraint of this characteristic.

2.2.2 “Clumsy” in wabi-sabi

As in the article “wabi-sabi” there is this description of the contrast between wabi-sabi aesthetics and modernist aesthetics: “Modernism is about flawless, flowing and smooth, beautifully refined -- wabi- sabi is rustic and mottled”. And the Japanese literary scholar Junichiro Furusaki, in his Rite of Shade, has repeatedly referred to things that are rustic and unadorned as beautiful, arguing that natural things will derive a focus on the heart and quiet beauty through the wear and tear of time , which expresses the very central idea of rusticity in wabi-sabi aesthetics, rustic and unadorned, things that slowly deserve to be honed and savoured as they accumulate over time, expressing their most essential attributes. Such was the case with the tea utensils used in the Japanese tea ceremony. In 1488 in Kyoto, a monk called Murata Jukō decided to redefine the way of tea drinking. He encouraged the use of worn, weathered, and unglazed stoneware made by Japanese artisans (see figure 2), which also exemplifies the unpretentious style of the wabi-sabi aesthetic.

2.2.3 “Vegetarianism” in wabi-sabi

In wabi-sabi aesthetics, “vegetarian” means respecting the laws of nature, i.e. not deliberately changing things as they were, and respecting the signs of time and age. There is a need to accept the changes in everything, including the signs of our own ageing, with equanimity.

2.2.4 “Concealment” in wabi-sabi

“Concealment” in wabi-sabi means self-restraint. There should be more emphasis on the spirit and inner flavour of the communication rather than just superficiality. As in Eastern literature, the expression of emotion is more important than the format of the text.

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Figure 1 styled by joseph gardner (photo by anson smart)



Figure 2 Raku-style tea bowl from Kyoto, 18th-19th Century. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

2.3 The influence and application of Wabi-sabi aesthetics to fashion design

2.3.1 Four formal features of wabi-sabi aesthetics in fashion design

The aesthetics of wabi-sabi in fashion design: the beauty of simplicity is influenced by the spirit of Zen and Buddhist culture, the design of garments has returned to the use of materials, reducing useless decorations and highlighting the natural beauty of raw fabrics. This aesthetic connotation of simplicity is based on frugality and can bring a comfortable, understated visual impact. It emphasises the need to return to the use of materials and to ignore useless decorative elements, so that the natural beauty of the garment can be highlighted without the flashy appearance of the garment. The Eastern use of neutral colours in fahsion design gives a sense of comfort and beauty to the eye, and this simple beauty is based on simplicity with a simple aesthetic gene.

The wabi-sabi aesthetic of fragmented beauty in fashion design: The wabi-sabi aesthetic, with the beauty of fragmentation at its core, refers firstly to the conscious absence of parts, such as parts of shapes, colours and graphics, and secondly, to content that is very precious and needs to be expressed with care.

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The use of wabi-sabi in the design of garment can be aesthetically pleasing. A lack of formal perfection does not mean that a garment cannot be designed to look good. Designers are able to combine the real-life phenomenon of fragmentation with the beauty of fragmentation to give the public a special sense of beauty, which can express the designer's inner feelings and escape the impression of dullness, indifference and lack of emotion brought about by functionalism. The beauty of traces in wabi-sabi aesthetics in garment design: Traces are flaws in the design of a garment that reveal fading, wrinkles and distortions in the fabric, all of which express an emotional resonance with the wearer. After wearing a garment for a long time, people will leave different marks on the garment and seeing these marks will create an association with the wearer. The beauty of these traces, when applied to a garment, can feel rustic and awkward, but it is also a gift from nature, a unique state of mind in the face of something that is about to pass away.

The symbiotic beauty of the wabi-sabi aesthetic in fashion design: Wabi-sabi aesthetics seeks to achieve a balance between man and nature, and because man can never conquer nature, the combination of wabi-sabi and garment is more a matter of the whole body being dependent on and accepting nature. In this way, wabi-sabi is not only an exploration of humanity, but also a sustainable concept.

2.3.2 Case application analysis in related fashion brands

Wabi-sabi aesthetic can be summarised as irregular, asymmetrical, rough, simple, rustic and natural. And combining the three elements of clothing: silhouette, fabric, colour and design connotation, many brands have applied the three expressive characteristics of wabi-sabi in fashion design from their own philosophy, tapping into a deeper artistic value and a more unique aesthetic.

Yohji Yamamoto

Yohji Yamamoto has always had an anti-fashion approach to Japanese style, expressing his own ideas, breaking away from the world and rejecting the constraints of the inside and outside world to convey true freedom.

Silhouette: The brand’s Western tailoring techniques are combined with Japanese aesthetics to create a minimalist aesthetic. The brand's designs are predominantly black, with variations in black, such as the design of ruffles, raw edges and intentional missed stitches, which make the garments look less conventional.

Fabric: Yohji Yamamoto once said, “When a fabric is left for a year or two, after it has undergone natural shrinkage, it reveals its original charm.” In Yohji Yamamoto, the fabric is used to reveal the garment's charm, i.e. without excessive cutting and sewing. The draping, twisting and layering effects of the fabric combine to reflect the combined masculine and feminine appeal. As in the 2019ss womenswear (e.g. figure 3), the neutral styles and the seemingly casual but meticulous treatment of the fabrics show the fabrics in their truest form. This is in keeping with the wabi-sabi aesthetic of keeping things real and accepting things in their raw state.

Colour: “a sexy woman is not a face or skin or silhouette”, as the designer once said. “This is a reflection of the brand’s desire to keep its clothing pure, which is why the colour pattern of all black is used extensively in the different collections.” No matter how long it takes, the passion for the black aesthetic remains intact, with pure black and asymmetrical top buttons interpreting the imperfect, unpretentious aesthetic of wabi-sabi.

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Figure 3 Yohji Yamamoto 2019ss

Wuyong

Silhouette: Chinese designer brand "Useless" has a very oriental silhouette, with simple cuts and no superfluous, complex structures, inheriting the concept of "simple beauty" from the wabi-sabi aesthetic and adhering to the original handcrafted cutting and sewing methods. The simple, uncomplicated cut of the wabi-sabi aesthetic, which is based on the concept of "simple beauty", adheres to the original handcrafted cut and sewing. (e.g. figure 4)

Fabrics: Her garments are woven and spun from natural cotton and linen plants, rejecting all artificial chemical fibres, reflecting the "symbiotic beauty" of the wabi-sabi aesthetic. The brand also uses the ancient method of dyeing, where the vegetable dyes create wonderful variations in the fabric over time. This is a very time-consuming method of dyeing, but it is precisely this that gives the fabric its irreplaceable mark and creates a beauty that will stand up to repeated viewing. The designer hopes that this garment will slow people down, and that it will also awaken the memory of the vast expanse of land that is the source of life and should not be ignored.

Colours: The colours of the Wuyong brand are mostly low saturation, linen grey and yellowish colours. The use of vegetable dyeing makes the colours extremely simple and elegant, so that people do not lose sight of the substance of the garment itself because of the bright colours, and do not cater to the annual trendy colours, without imposing or over-expressing, being the opposite of digital prints and street mixes.



Figure 4 Wuyong (Useless)

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2.4 Sub-sections of this chapter

Through the definition of the connotation of wabi-sabi and the analysis of the characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics, the expressive elements of wabi-sabi aesthetics that can be visualised are summarised. This is followed by an exploration of the expression of wabi-sabi elements in fashion design, using brand identity and the three elements of garment to analyse the embodiment of wabi-sabi aesthetics in the iconic brands Yohji Yamamoto and Wuyong, allowing for a deeper understanding of how wabi-sabi aesthetics is used in the current market. In summary, the use of the waibi-sabi aesthetic in fashion is not just about the form of the design, but also about the positioning and philosophy of the brand, and the deeper spiritual will and representation it conveys to the public.

3 Methdology

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for this research, providing an explanation of the research development, and use the case studies, cotent analysis, and design-based studies to be the foundation of the design.

3.1 Case Studies and Content Analysis

Conduct in-depth analysis of fashion brands -Yohji Yamamoto and Wuyong - examining brand backgrounds, silhouette designs, fabrics, and details. Explore the influence of wabi-sabi on the fashion industry and other design fields from multiple perspectives, along with its practical implementation.

3.2 Design-Based Studies

Integrating literature review and brand case studies, this section explores the application of wabi-sabi aesthetics in apparel design through the lens of silhouette, fabric, and detail.

4 Fashion Design Practice : Essence

4.1 Inspiration

The author has used a large amount of literature images, and the central ideas of wabi-sabi and the elements of its expression in fashion design, as summarised above, in combination with the biased directions in which author is interested: Unexpected accidents and irregular things may destroy the original perfect state of things, but these things that have never been imagined will become unique traces of different people's lives. We don't have to strive for perfection, it is theseimperfections that make us different.

4.2 Design positioning

The original intention of the work is to combine the visual design elements of wabi-sabi, pay attention to the wabi-sabi aesthetics expressed by the clothing and the cultural connotation and spiritual quality behind the garment. The author positions the consumers of this design work as 20-50 year-old women, and they live in First-Tier and Second--cities with rapid economic development, but still many maintain history and cul-

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ture. This kind of people Love nature, love life, happy to spend money on dressing up and living a sophisticated lifestyle. They Look for products that have unique design and have their own pursuit of fashion, do not follow the trend.

4.3 Wabi-sabi practice with garment silhouette

As can be seen in Figure 5-6, during the sketch thinking process, the author based the design elements summarised above are applied to the design of the Wabi-sabi aesthetic. In terms of silhouette, the design is mainly loose and minimalistic, combining the feeling of the theme, exploring the relationship between the body and the garment, and focusing more on the comfort and convenience of the human body. The fabrics are mainly natural cotton and linen, some of which are sand-washed and aged to emphasise the simplicity and clumsiness of the Wabi-sabi aesthetic. The final sketch are as shown in figure 7. Drawing from the wabi-sabi aesthetic concept and aligning with the target consumer profile for this collection, we distilled the core silhouettes and details. The overall silhouette is relaxed and casual, featuring dropped shoulders that reflect the wearer's free-spirited and unrestrained personality. The addition of a draped collar further enhances femininity. Throughout the collection, details like pleats and frayed edges are employed to add texture to the fabrics and evoke a raw, natural feel.

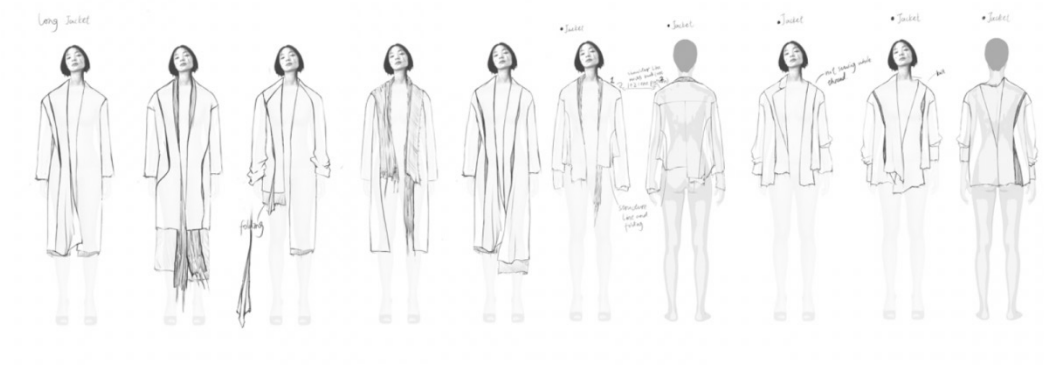


Figure 5 Sketch 1

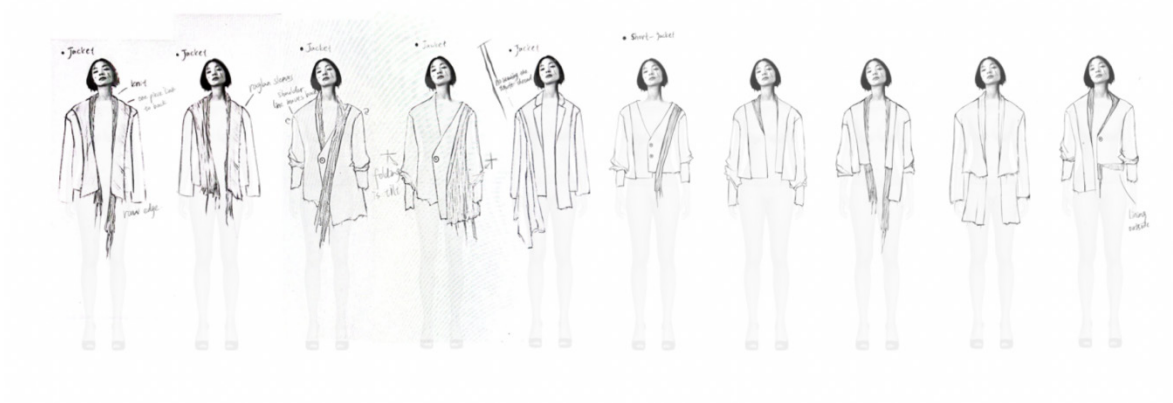


Figure 6 Sketch 2

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Figure 7 Final silhouette sketch

4.4 Wabi-sabi practice with fabric

In the selection of fabrics, natural fibres such as cotton and hemp were chosen as the main fabrics used in the design.Hemp was the first natural fibre to be widely used as a clothing material, as early as the Neolithic era, so it was the best choice to express the simplicity and naturalness of the fabric. The advantages of cotton as a natural fibre are that it is easy to keep warm and soft against the skin, and the combination of cotton and linen reflects the 'awkwardness' of wabi-sabi. It is the fabric that best expresses the wabi-sabi aesthetic of cherishing things. The combination of these two fabrics therefore expresses a simple, light-hearted attitude. For the fabric print, I chose to take elements from my previous 'paper tape' folder and use the tape as one of the tools for the print experiment to create my own print. The reason for choosing tape is that it is used as a correction tool, layered on top of each other, creating an undulating texture because it is not perfectly flat. This echoes the inspiration for the series and the wabi-sabi aesthetic concept of 'irregular, rough beauty'.This is followed by an experiment with texture by applying paper tape to the fabric (figure 8-10). And finally the final effect of the fabric (figures 11-12)

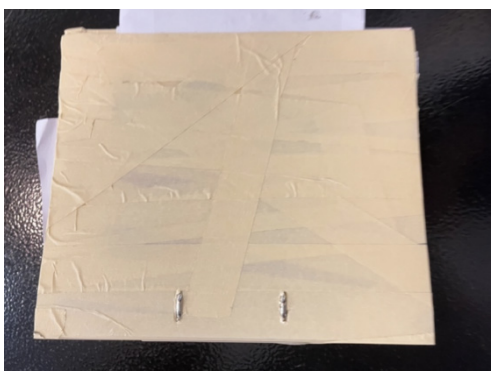


Figure 8 "masking tapes" folder

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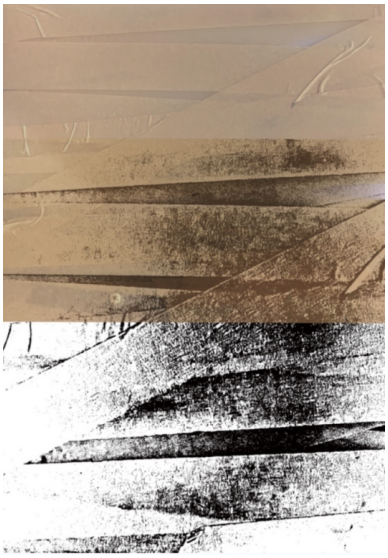


Figure 9 Scanning experiments of "Masking tape"

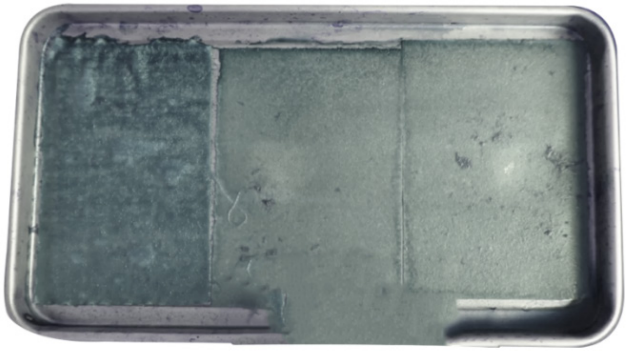


Figure 10 Process of Nature dye 1



Figure 11 Process of Nature dye 2

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Figure 12 Final fabric with dye

4.5 Wabi-sabi practice with color

In order to express the pure, unpretentious aesthetic of the Wabi-sabi concept, I experimented with some colour schemes. Initially, I wanted to use black extensively, but after discussing it with my tutor, I found that it was more at odds with the versatility of people accepting themselves that I wanted in my concept (e.g. figure 13). In the end, I opted for a more understated khaki colour palette and a pure black with a grassy green. (These colours were combined with each other in a more natural way; these shades have a more simple quality and reflect the 'simple beauty' of wabi-sabi. The hand-dyeing method allows for many unexpected variations and aesthetics, and is also more environmentally friendly and sustainable, expressing the 'beauty of trace' and 'symbiosis' of wabi-sabi.



Figure 13 Color experiment 1



Figure 14 Color experiment 2

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Figure 15 Color experiment 3

5 Disscusion

5.1 Reflections and shortcomings

There are still many shortcomings in this graduation design practice.Firstly, there were some problems with the time planning of the overall graduation design. The time spent on the courier journey of fabrics, samples and so on was not considered well in advance, which led to the problem of inadequate preparation in many aspects of the production afterwards.

Secondly, the choice of fabrics was too homogeneous and more fabrics of different degrees of softness and hardness should have been chosen. Thirdly, in terms of plant dyeing, the colour ratios did not take into account the difference in colour between the fabric and the dye as it dried and wetted, resulting in the final garment coming out poorly.

5.2 Sub-sections of this chapter

The main content of this chapter is to summarise, analyse and organise the elements of the wabi-sabi aesthetic style of clothing design after that the theoretical content of the study is applied to the practice of the garment graduation design work. Firstly, the elements of wabi-sabi design are analysed in the second chapter and applied to the final project. This is followed by a series of work starting from the initial inspiration and photo research, then experimenting with silhouettes, fabrics and colours, and finally reflecting on my shortcomings. It is hoped that through this series of works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the way wabi-sabi aesthetics are used in modern fashion design, drawing out the connotations of design and holding on to the purity of our own hearts in a noisy world. It is also hoped that more consumers will discover the spiritual connotations behind fashion design and bring out the greater value and meaning of garment.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

Through a review of literature, this paper uses the case study method,interdisciplinary research and innova-

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tive experimental. The paper focuses on the application of wabi-sabi aesthetics in the field of apparel design, thus summarising the forms and characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics in apparel design. The study focuses on the application of wabi-sabi aesthetics in the field of fashion design, thus summarising the forms and characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics in fashion design. The design elements of the Wabi-sabi aesthetic are analysed in terms of silhouette, colour and fabric, and combined with actual branded fashion cases. The following conclusions are drawn from an in-depth analysis of three aspects of Wabisabi aesthetic design: silhouette, colour and fabric:

(1) There are five expressions of the wabi-sabi aesthetic in fashion design: the beauty of simplicity, the beauty of symbiosis, the beauty of fragmentation and the beauty of traces.

(2) The Wabi-sabi aesthetic is analysed in terms of the three elements of the garment: firstly, in terms of the structure of the shape, the practical function of the garment and the simplicity of the silhouette; firstly, in terms of colour, the colours are mostly white and black, or low-saturation or neutral colours; in terms of fabrics, even though different brands or designers have their own preference for fabrics, they all give priority to natural fabrics in general. In terms of fabrics, even though different brands or designers may have their own preferences, they all give preference to natural fabrics and use traditional or artisanal methods to rework them in order to highlight their innovative nature. The designers combine the three aspects of silhouette, colour and fabric with their own spirituality in order to convey the wabi- sabi aesthetic in a visual way.

With the development of the times clothing has become more than just a tool to cover the body, but more importantly clothing should be more cultural and spiritual, different countries have different conditions, and throughout the world there are fashion designers in every country who are interested in the wabi-sabi aesthetic, even though the wabi-sabi aesthetic originated in Japan. It is not only a leading force in Eastern aesthetics, but also in the design industry, and has grown to occupy a very important place in the world's aesthetic culture. This thesis is an exploration of the integration of this aesthetic theory with fashion design, and I hope that in time it will serve as a catalyst for a theoretical system of aesthetics in Chinese fashion design.

6.2 Recommendations

The study combine wabi-sabi aesthetic and fashion design can make more designers think about the current state of fashion design. With the world moving at such a fast pace; with fast fashion brands sweeping the world and people living in increasing affluence, people should not just go along with the trends and forget their own heart and original intentions. While people have more choices, they are actually losing them. Most people don't understand what they really need, and people should always remember how to treasure an item. On the other hand, I hope that consumers will be more careful and conscientious in their purchases, and maintain a sustainable and environmentally friendly concept of garment.

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