

Exploring the Influence of Conceptual Art in Yohji Yamamoto's Designs on Western Perceptions of Japanese Fashion

Lingyi Wang

Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, 511370

Abstract: Yohji Yamamoto, a Japanese designer, gained international recognition in the fashion industry with his original creations after the Second World War, and he successfully introduced Eastern aesthetics to the world. This article argues that the "conceptual art" present in Yamamoto's designs influenced Western attitudes towards Japanese fashion. By analyzing the historical context, family background, and life experiences of Yamamoto, as well as examining the formation of his three main design styles—anti-fashion, genderlessness, and deconstruction—the article highlights Yamamoto's unique understanding of clothing, fashion, and the human body. It becomes evident that his design philosophy has had a significant impact on contemporary fashion designers and clothing brands.

Keywords: Yohji Yamamoto; Fashion design; Anti-fashion; Genderlessness; Deconstruction

In the 1970s and 1980s, Japan's economy overgrew in the three to four decades following the World War, introducing Western ideas and culture, and Kimura (1986) points out that the oil crisis caused by the war in the Middle East led to a reorientation of Japan's policy of friendship with the Arabs. In addition to the oil trade, other aspects of the economy and culture were also closely linked to the Middle East. As a result of the cultural influences of East and West during the same period, a new style of clothing began to emerge that differed from the tight and flamboyant styles of the West, namely loose clothing with an oriental character, represented by Yohji Yamamoto. With Western fashion dominating the scene, Yohji Yamamoto broke with traditional gender norms of clothing and questioned fashion in a rebellious spirit. This paper will argue that the expression of 'conceptual art' in Yohji Yamamoto's designs influenced Western attitudes towards Japanese fashion, considering the social context of the 1970s and 1980s and Yohji's family background. Conceptual art refers to the traditional relationship between ideas and expression in works of art that are altered without social and cultural constraints, emphasizing the importance of ideas and concepts over the works themselves^[1].

Yohji Yamamoto's aim as a representative of the anti-fashion style is not to abandon fashion but to become fashionable. 'I want to achieve anti-fashion through fashion. That's why I'm always heading in my direction, in parallel to fashion. Because if you're not waking what is asleep, you might as well stay on the beaten path.' According to Yohji Yamamoto^[2]. Morley (2013) mentions that similar to conceptual art, the clothes created by conceptual fashion designers are often not in line with the current aesthetic. At a time when the Western fashion industry is known for its minimalist lines and colorful clothing, Yamamoto looks to the clothing of Japanese peasants for inspiration (Kawamura, 2004), making fabrics obsolete, tearing them and destroying their balance, challenging everyone's perception of beauty, claiming in his book *Making Clothes: Destroying fashion that 'perfection is ugly, and in things made by the man I want to see deficiencies, failures, chaos, distortions.'* His anti-fashion attitude attracted the attention of the Western fashion world; the media did not buy into the idea that the clothes looked like those worn by hobos or disaster victims, but most. However, mainly that Yamamoto was delving into his stuff out of the influence of the mainstream (Patricia, 2008). Not only does Yohji Yamamoto interpret clothing as being aesthetically timeless and functional, but he also avoids the consumerism trap, which refers to

how businesses use propaganda and brainwashing to entice consumers to buy something expensive and useless. Yohji Yamamoto's choice of abrasion-resistant, sturdy fabrics for his clothing combines aesthetics and practicality, making the clothes unmistakably of their time. I wanted people to keep wearing my clothing for at least ten years or more, so I requested the fabric maker make a very strong, tough finish. It is very close to designing army clothing they live forever^[3]. Not only that but the aesthetic is also reflected in the details of Yohji Yamamoto's design philosophy, as when Marra-Alvarez (2010) wrote about a hidden pocket in an unexpected place in Yohji Yamamoto's clothes, as observed by fashion journalist Bernadine Morris. The simple fabrics and extreme details are also an expression of Japanese aesthetics. It is thus clear that Yohji Yamamoto is not departing from tradition. He is only breaking with the strictly archaic form of the kimono; the spirit of traditional culture is blended into his work and never discarded. The dichotomy between East and West is evident in Yohji Yamamoto's work, which challenges the norms of Western society while pushing Japanese culture internationally^[4].

Yohji Yamamoto was influenced by his mother's image of an independent working woman and the traditional female imitators (onnagata) in Japan, as mentioned by Patricia Mears(2008). When he entered the fashion industry, Yamamoto showed the world the genderlessness of his design philosophy. Yamamoto believed that clothing was not about showing body curves or exposing skin, but about weakening gender identity and protecting the human body." I wanted to protect the garment itself from fashion while protecting the female body from something, maybe the eyes from a man or a cold breeze." According to Yohji Yamamoto(quoted in Morley,2013). Yamamoto defies the traditional gender constraints of the clothing industry and breaks with the original structure of clothing. Silhouettes and draped silhouettes, such as oversize coats and straight skirts, which both men and women can wear, can be seen in abundance in his shows. Yamamoto's multi-layered, loose silhouettes, which do not accentuate the female form, are therefore a rarity for Westerners who are used to gender-specific, body-conscious silhouettes (Marra-Alvarez, 2010). In addition to tailoring, color was also a key focus in Yamamoto's expression of his design philosophy, which some say was also influenced by his mother's widowhood after World War II, and his clothing was primarily black, a massive departure from the brightly colored Western clothing. In his article, Marra-Alvarez(2010) suggests that black in Yamamoto's design philosophy denotes neutrality and not the disaster that the Western media has spread. Through his designs, Yamamoto gives black a different character, warm, cool, understated, and flamboyant, as he says in his book, "Black is the color with the most attitude, it clearly says 'I do not bother you, and you do not bother me'" (Yohji Yamamoto, I drop an (I drop a bomb). Yohji Yamamoto opened the door to black, which many designers have since used. With its design-inspired silhouettes and penchant for monochrome, the pioneering designers represented by Yohji Yamamoto have been accepted and even studied by the Western fashion world^[5]. Yohji Yamamoto challenged long-held Western notions of gender and beauty, and many began to see modern Japanese design as a work of art, with some avant-garde Western women mixing and matching Yohji Yamamoto's clothes.

Deconstruction is also one of the key ways in which Yohji Yamamoto expresses his ideas. Deconstruction, which means decomposition and composition, first appeared in Martin Heidegger's book *Being and Time* and was applied in philosophy and later extended to the field of aesthetics. Deconstructive design in clothing is not a haphazard patchwork but an intrinsic connection between each part and a tight relationship between the whole. Yohji Yamamoto's idea of deconstruction is reflected in his novel structures and cuts and how he changes the established ideas of clothing and expresses women's clothing (Romano, 2011). This relates to traditional Eastern thinking and ethnic traditional visual symbols such as the kimono, the tea ceremony, and the house. Yohji Yamamoto's fusion of Eastern aesthetics and early Western deconstruction styles has slowly led to a modern deconstructionist style, presenting a Zen-like mood and a sense of unrestrainedness in the garments themselves. Loscialpo (2011), for example, writes.

Based on the oversized silhouette, Yohji Yamamoto breaks the structured lines of the garment, making the garment break away from the conventional shape, changing the traditional way of dressing, allowing the garment to be put together in a more accessible form, and making people think about the function and meaning of the garment itself. Yohji Yamamoto's deconstructionist style represents the styling of the garment and the understanding of the wearer of the garment itself and the culture of the society, which has helped to promote Eastern culture. Smelik (2014) states that he sees a futuristic feel in Yohji Yamamoto's designs, making the wearer think more deeply about the body and freedom, rather than focusing on the tiny body so that this design may become a new fad. Yohji

Yamamoto's deconstructionism seemed to be a provocation to the capitalist society, which could be seen as a cultural invasion.

Fashion design was one of the significant areas of success in Japan after the Second World War, and Yohji Yamamoto, as one of the Japanese fashion designers who broke into the Western fashion scene, earned respect and recognition for his original work while subverting the world's fashion aesthetic, taking his place at the top of the international fashion scene and taking Japanese culture to the world. This article discusses the formation of Yohji Yamamoto's design philosophy about the context of his time and the influence of his life experiences and analyses Yohji Yamamoto's understanding of clothing, fashion, and the body in terms of the three main styles in his designs. As a rapidly emerging economic power in East Asia after the war, it is easy to see that Japan has much to offer in terms of clothing. This concludes that the influence of the designer Yohji Yamamoto, who is also from an Asian country, on Japanese and even Chinese fashion designers and clothing brands is visible, from which certain inspiration is gained: in today's diverse world, we should draw on the wisdom of traditional culture and the strengths of foreign cultures, incorporate them, form our design philosophy and test our design theories in practice.

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About the author:

Lingyi Wang (1999—), female, born in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, teacher of Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, engaged in visual design and film art research.