

Examining the Inspiration Sources of Contemporary Chinese Local Fashion Designer Brands under Eastern Culture

Xi Chen

Business School, China University of Political Science and Law, China

***Corresponding Author:** Xi Chen, Business School, China University of Political Science and Law, China

Abstract: This article uses a multi-case comparative analysis research method to explore the inspiration sources for product design of three contemporary Chinese local fashion design brands, Robert Wun, Nunu Nono, and Mian. The study identified a wide range of sources for product creativity, including philosophy, drama, nature, ethnicity, calligraphy, painting, stories of family and friends, religion, and dimensions of time and dynasties. None of the three brands apply a single source of inspiration, different product lines have chosen various sources of inspiration. In addition, the founders' learning and professional experience have played an underlying driving role, bringing a continuous stream of creative themes and product content stories.

Keywords: Brand themes, sources of inspiration, contemporary Chinese local brands.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the popularity of China-Chic culture, clothing design with Chinese elements has gradually become popular across China and has become a design element that often appears in global design. Meanwhile, a large number of contemporary designer clothing brands with Eastern Chinese culture as the main design element have rapidly emerged. With a diverse range of styles, China's local cultural elements have become an important narrative theme in clothing design. Some designs are very classical, telling the propositions of Chinese philosophy, some are based on ethnic elements for creativity, and some start from ancient Chinese traditional architecture to find stories.

So, among these thriving contemporary Chinese local clothing brands that have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, how did the founders find inspiration and what are their creative themes? Understanding these issues will not only help us understand the main storyline of the brand or product stories of contemporary Chinese local fashion designer brands in Eastern culture, but also will help summarize the dimensions of brand narrative. It can also provide practical reference for fashion designers and entrepreneurs who are creating their own brands to gain a sense of storytelling.

Based on this, this article intends to conduct a cross case comparative study of three Chinese local clothing brands, revealing the ideas and sources of brand creativity and brand story selection, and thus building a framework for inspiration sources, aiming to provide reference for theory and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Creative Inspiration

What is inspiration? Inspiration is a sudden surge of creative ideas that arise from the subconscious of a person and emerge from their consciousness. It is the result of the creator's arduous conception and creative practice (Yao and Ding, 2017). Clothing design inspiration refers to the source of our creative ideas during the process of designing clothing concepts. Any object or feeling in life can become a source of creativity for fashion artists, whether it's tourism, lighting, entertainment, or architecture. The shape, volume, texture, and scent of objects in daily life are all good sources of inspiration, guiding the development of fashion design ideas and serving as the source of all fashion designs (Lu Xiao, 2013). Nowadays, there are various types of clothing, and we can see that they incorporate various elements and styles into their designs. The source of these elements and styles is the inspiration of clothing design. Good inspiration can create an influential and popular work.

2.2. Brand Creative Inspiration Sources

Many scholars have explored the sources of product creativity. Liao (2007) believes that creativity comes from six sources: new knowledge, customers, leading users, resonant design, innovative factories and secret plans, and open markets for creativity. Wang (2012) explored the natural world as a rich source of materials that can inspire creativity, with a focus on the role of biomimetic design in architectural design products. Lu (2013) found that history and culture, folk art, music and dance and other sisters arts and daily life are the inspiration for design. Li (2017) proposed using reverse thinking to connect clothing elements with inspiration sources: exploring inspiration from historical culture, ethnic art, related art works, surrounding life, nature, and personal preferences. Wu and Liang (2011) found that user needs, historical changes in material products, technological innovation, and social hot topics are the creative sources of products. Brukhomo (2015) proposed a "hierarchical model of symbolism" for traditional patterns, dividing dragon patterns and cloud patterns into three categories: "nature worship" (such as pine and crane symbolizing longevity), "ethical metaphor" (such as plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums symbolizing integrity), and "homophonic symbolism" (such as lotus and fish symbolizing "surplus for years"), emphasizing the need to combine modern aesthetics for geometric simplification and narrative reconstruction in design. Lv Yachi, Wu Yue, and Jin Bowen (2019) used Meizhou women's clothing (blue shirt, red and black pants) as a case study to verify the three-dimensional model of "color symbol folk narrative functional transformation". They pointed out that the red/black/blue colors correspond to collective memories of auspiciousness, longing, and the ocean, and that material upgrades (such as wrinkle resistant fabrics) are needed to achieve the transformation of ceremonial clothing into everyday clothing.

Through the research of various scholars in the past, we have found that inspiration and creativity in fashion design can come from a wide range of sources, including new knowledge, history, culture, art, music, dance, nature, and the personal preferences of creators.

3. CASE STUDY

3.1. Case Introductions

Robert Wun

Founder's background

The founder was born in Hong Kong, China and moved to London when he was a child. He can see the integration of Eastern and Western cultures in China and Europe, which gives him an aesthetic perspective of the fusion of East and West. In the later stage, he studied at the London College of Fashion (LCF) and his graduation project was inspired by the asymmetrical aesthetics of butterfly wings. It was discovered and exhibited by Hong Kong buyer Joyce. In 2014, he founded his own eponymous brand. The main product portfolio is clothing accessories.

Topic Source

The narrative inspiration for Robert Wun's brand design comes from elements such as philosophy, drama, and nature. For example, his design of the "Bloody Bride" dress features red wine stains on white gauze, while his work "Raincoat Man" uses a gauze skirt sewn with tens of thousands of beads to simulate raindrops in the rain, expressing conflicting and dramatic scenes through clothing. In his designs, he often uses some "horror" elements such as wine stains, holes, burn marks, etc., allowing us to see the fragility and resilience of life, the passage of time and its beauty, and also feel his reverence and love for life and time. Transform daily fears into ultimate romance. In addition to philosophical propositions, his design inspiration comes from the natural world and he likes to apply the asymmetrical beauty of butterflies and moths. His personal experience also brought creative inspiration. After his grandmother passed away, he designed the Armour series to pay tribute to the power of women.

Product Design Creativity

From a design perspective, Robert Wun's products often feature surreal silhouette designs.

Color Application

High saturation colors are used, with large areas using fluorescent yellow and flame red, creating a strong visual impact.

Material Application

The use of burnt chiffon and woven metal in the material is bold and pioneering in the use of fabrics.



Figure 1. Robert Wun's *Bloody Bride* and *Raincoat Man* Design

Nunu Nono

Founder's Background

Nunu nono is a Chinese high-end women's clothing brand founded by designer Zhang En in 2015. Zhang En graduated with a bachelor's degree from the School of Fashion at Wuhan Textile University and a PhD in Business Administration in Paris, France, with a focus on brand management and the fashion industry. She has been passionate about designing clothes for Barbie dolls since childhood, and regards fashion design as a lifelong dream. Since the age of 23, she has traveled around the world, from the Gobi Desert in the northwest to volcanic rock formations. This is also one of the reasons why natural landscapes have become the core design theme and inspiration for the brand.

Topic Source

Brand inspiration first comes from nature. For example, the 2024 Spring/Summer collection has launched a deep ocean themed product line inspired by corals and jellyfish. The material for the 2023 Autumn/Winter "Enyu" series is taken from the vastness of the desert, while the 2024 Autumn/Winter "Her Garden" series tells the story of cotton's life journey. Founder and designer Zhang En transformed natural landscapes into clothing narratives through his travels to over 200 regions around the world. Secondly, the Nunu Nono brand draws creative inspiration from painting. The material for the 2025 Spring/Summer collection "White Above White" comes from the fusion of abstract paintings by Russian painter Malevich and the triple realm of Zen Buddhism in China. The product series uses white to interpret the Eastern artistic conception of emptiness, infinity, and blank space, while also showcasing a philosophical idea. Several types of the product series, from pure white to black and white collision, embody the philosophical idea of seeing power in non action. Thirdly, the brand inherits Chinese culture and applies elements from intangible cultural heritage in its creation. The use of intangible cultural heritage elements such as Guangxiu, Pankou, and Song brocade, combined with French bead embroidery and organza three-dimensional decoration, has achieved the modernization of traditional arts and crafts.

Product Design Creativity

The Nunu Nono brand mainly uses minimalist design and deconstructivist design in product design. No complicated decorations, clean and concise, elegant and fresh.

Color Application

The brand prefers to use a themed color system, such as the ocean series clothing preferring blue-green, and the garden series using black, white, gray, and peach colors.

Material Application

Natural materials such as silk, wool, cashmere, triacetic acid, etc. are mainly used to showcase the texture of the fabric and the characteristics suitable for the skin. In terms of materials, the brand actively

develops new color tones and demonstrates independent innovation through methods such as dyeing and printing. In terms of craftsmanship, it utilizes intangible cultural heritage such as Guangxiu and Yuexiu, as well as French bead embroidery and crochet. They are skilled in using jacquard and pleating to create relief textured fabrics.



Figure 2. *Nunu Nono White on White Series*

Mian(宀)

Founder's Background

The brand name is derived from the character "宀" in oracle bone script, which symbolizes "eaves". After evolution, it is extended to mean coverage, representing the spiritual core of shelter and home. Director and Creative Director Sien Wang

Topic Source

Wang Sien transformed many elements of Chinese architecture into clothing design, such as arch of wooden architecture mechanics, tile patterns, and the texture of brick walls in old houses. For example, he used the inspiration of the arch of wooden architecture overhang structure in his clothes and designed a wide shoulder profile and asymmetrical hem. For example, he took the rubbings on the brick walls and used them as fabric textures to design clothing. The coat design uses the shawl made of the ancient tenon and mortise structure in the architectural design. In the hat design, the brim of the hat is inlaid with a miniature arch of wooden architecture metal piece, hiding the brand name "Yao", which once again shows the design elements of the theme from the architectural discipline.

Product Design Creativity

Firstly, in terms of product design, three product story series are proposed based on the narrative of three different life states under the eaves. In terms of materials, linen, pleated cotton, and wood materials are used, and the fusion of materials is skilled, such as presenting heavy and lightweight materials together, creating a conflict and contrast.

Color Application

It mainly draws inspiration from architecture, such as extracting unadorned colors from ancient buildings, and the brand also chooses ink colors of Chinese characters as clothing colors. The color application mainly uses low saturation plain colors.

Material Application

The brand first uses a lot of architectural elements, such as the cutting of cantilever mechanics, the magnetic suction system of tenon and mortise. The brand is very low-key and modest. All complex structures are hidden in the inner layer, and it does not want to show off the technology. Just like the skeleton of the arch of wooden architecture in the building is not exposed, it also learns a kind of introverted spirit in the building. Secondly, the brand also utilizes elements from intangible cultural heritage, such as embroidering copper wire with the calligraphy font "Wild Grass" to create the silhouette of the famous calligraphy work "Lanting Preface". In terms of craftsmanship, we actively explore black technology, such as developing fabrics with photosynthetic dyeing and self-healing functions.



Figure 3. Product Design and Styling of Mian (罍)

3.2. Case Analysis

After analyzing the three cases above, we can draw Table 1, which compares the founders of the case companies. We can see that the creativity of original Chinese local clothing brands cannot be separated from the founders' learning and work growth experiences. This plays a crucial role in their accumulation of inspiration materials, interests and preferences, and the cultivation of design styles. It can even be said that behind each work is a person, and seeing the work can imagine all the styles of this person.

Table 1. Cross Case Comparison of Educational Backgrounds and Career Experiences of Brand Founders

Brand	Cultural background	Educational Experience	Core Design Driving Force
Robert Wun	Born in Hong Kong and raised in London (Integration of East and West)	London College of Fashion (LCF)	Dramatic Conflict, Natural Asymmetric Aesthetics
Nunu Nono	Growing up in China and experiencing global travel	Wuhan Textile University (undergraduate), Paris Business School (doctoral)	Natural landscape, Eastern philosophy, intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship
Mian(罍) by Sien Wang	Deeply cultivate research on Chinese architecture and writing	Research Experience at Anyang Calligraphy Museum	Building mechanics, Chinese character genes, sustainable future

In addition, from the above analysis, we can see that Robert Wun, Nunu Nono, and Sien Wang(Mian 罍), the three brands, have drawn on rich external sources for inspiration and topic selection, including philosophy, drama, nature, ethnicity, calligraphy, painting, family and friends, religion, as well as the time dimension of different dynasties and eras. All three founders can tolerate diverse inspiration elements. At the same time, these diverse sources of inspiration and rich innovative materials also prove that the creativity of brands and products really needs to be all encompassing, in order to use cutting-edge concepts to create a unique brand personality for their own brand and impress and attract target customers.

Table 2 shows the sources of product creativity for Chinese local designer brands based on the practices of three case companies, as well as the main sources borrowed for the creative themes of the three case brands.

Table 2. Sources of Inspirations of Three Case Brands

	Subject								Age
	Philosophy	Drama	Nature	Nationality	Building	Calligraphy painting	Family and Friends	Religion	
Robert Wun	Δ	Δ	Δ				Δ		
Nunu Nono	Δ		Δ	Δ		Δ		Δ	Δ
Sien Wang (Mian 罍)			Δ		Δ	Δ			Δ

Specifically, the three brands have similarities and unique features. The similarity lies in the fact that all three draw nutrients from natural elements. Robert Wun is obsessed with the asymmetrical beauty of butterfly wings, Nunu Nono uses landscapes such as coral and deserts as narrative blueprints, and Mian reproduces natural weathering traces through the dyeing of vegetation and the texture of brick walls; At the same time, they all focus on the philosophical thinking, whether it is Wun's dramatic expression of the fragility of life, Nono's interpretation of the Zen "Three Realms of Seeing Mountains", or the deconstruction of "home" in time and space, all of which demonstrate a depth beyond simple visual design.

The differences between the three brands are reflected in the way they excavate their cultural roots. Robert Wun integrates Eastern philosophical ideas into Western high definition contexts from a cross-cultural perspective, and his works such as "Red Wine Stained Skirts" resonate through conflicting aesthetics; Nunu Nono focuses more on the modern translation of Eastern aesthetics, constructing an ethereal poetic world through the combination of intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship and natural imagery; And Sien Wang is like a cultural archaeologist. From the word "𠄎" in oracle bone inscriptions to the mechanics of arch of wooden architecture, he uses the technology of architectural gene recombination to realize the oriental expression of "decadal".

In the specific path of topic selection, the three designers present distinct differences. Robert Wu is good at elevating daily fear into art. His topics often focus on "unexpected moments" (such as rainstorm and wine stains), creating visual impact through highly saturated colors and destructive materials; Nunu Nono adopts a thematic narrative, with each series resembling a nature documentary (such as the "Her Garden" series), using gradient colors and three-dimensional pleats to recreate the course of life; The selection of the topic is more systematic in architecture, based on the framework of "three life states under the eaves". Through techniques such as cantilever cutting and modular design, abstract cultural concepts are transformed into wearable structural language. It is worth noting that the three form a gradient in the application of traditional elements: Wun completely strips away concrete symbols and conveys Eastern charm through metaphysical philosophical propositions; Nono selectively integrates intangible cultural heritage crafts (such as Guangxiu) while maintaining contemporary aesthetic dominance; Then, traditional techniques are deconstructed at the molecular level, transforming tile patterns into mechanical structures and compiling Chinese character radicals into process codes. This difference precisely reflects the three paradigms of globalization in Chinese design. Wun represents the avant-garde experiment of cultural hybridization, Nono demonstrates the elegant route of gentle improvement, and Mian (𠄎) has pioneered the technology driven cultural gene recombination model.

4. CONCLUSION

This article uses a qualitative case study method and selects three contemporary designer clothing brands from Chinese local culture, namely Robert Wun, Nunu Nono, and "𠄎", to explore which factors are the inspiration sources for the creativity of the three brands' products. Research has identified a wide range of sources for product creativity, including philosophy, drama, nature, ethnicity, calligraphy, painting, family and friends, religion. In addition to these factors, there are also time dimensions from different dynasties and eras, which together contribute to the emergence of innovative works for brands. All three brands do not rely solely on one source of inspiration, but instead choose different sources of inspiration for their diverse product lines in their rich product portfolio. This makes the products very three-dimensional and vivid, and can also cover a more diverse customer base in marketing, always giving consumers a refreshing feeling.

In addition, we can also see that the founder's own learning and professional experience actually plays a driving role at the bottom level. Only through physical experience can these influencing factors inspire sudden ideas and creativity. Robert Wun's dual life in Hong Kong and London will bring inspiration to his fearful aesthetics and feminism. Zhang En's French experience has achieved the fusion of her Cantonese and French embroidery, while Wang Sien's museum experience has made him feel how to turn decay into magic. Therefore, behind a product is actually a person, and the most important thing is for the brand founder to have more experiences, experiences, and knowledge, as well as to embrace change and bravely try, which can bring a continuous stream of creative themes and product content stories.

REFERENCES

- Liao Ruicong(2007).Research on Creative Sources, Techniques, Screening, and Evaluation, *Modern Management Science* (8), 47-50.
- Li Xin (2017).Exploring the Transformation Methods of Inspiration Sources, *Shandong Textile Economy*, (11), 2.
- Lu Xiao (2013).A Brief Discussion on the Ways of Inspiration Sources in Fashion Design, *Art and Technology*, 26 (5), 1.
- Lv Yachi, Wu Yue, Jin Bowen (2019).Exploring Fujian Taiwan Cultural and Creative Products with Mazu Cultural Characteristics - on the Application of Meizhou Women's Clothing Elements. *Journal of Putian University*, 26 (4), 5.
- Min Yue (2015).Research on the Application of Traditional Pattern Elements in Clothing Design, *Art World* (6), 1.
- Wang Ying (2012).Nature is the Source of Inspiration - A Brief Discussion on the Application of Biomimetic Design in Architectural Art Furniture and Interior Decoration, (8), 2.
- Wu Zuoguang, Liang Linglin (2011).Analysis and Exploration of Creative Sources in Product Conceptual Design, *Art and Design: Academic Edition*, 000 (02X), 212-213.
- Yao Mingqi, Ding Yuanliang (2017).A Brief Discussion on the Sources of Inspiration in Artistic Creation. *Popular Literature and Art: Scientific Education Research*, 000 (019), 74-74.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Professor Xi Chen is associate professor of Business School, China University of Political Science and Law. She is a consumer psychology and marketing researcher. Her expertise is in branding, luxury product management, consumer behavior, Chinese brand management. Her research focuses on consumer motivation and decisions, Chinese luxury brand, international luxury brand and industry management, branding, international marketing. Her publications appear in marketing and international management journals.

She was the recipient of the 2011 Emerald Excellent Paper Award for her research on 'Typology of the Chinese Exporters'. And She received the 'Best Teaching Cases of 100 Chinese Management Cases' annual award, and the cases she wrote appear in Ivey Business School Case.

Citation: Xi Chen. "Examining the Inspiration Sources of Contemporary Chinese Local Fashion Designer Brands under Eastern Culture." *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR)*, vol 13, no. 7, 2025, pp. 17-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0349.1307003>.

Copyright: © 2025 Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.