

THE POSSIBILITY OF PREDICTING LUXURY BRAND LANVIN、BALENCIAGA AS EXAMPLES

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ABSTRACT

There is a strong tendency within the Japanese apparel industry to use the trends presented at Paris and Milan fashion weeks and then manufacture and design clothes that incorporate these trends. In other words, the Japanese apparel industry is a trend follower. As a result, the Japanese apparel industry is not contributing towards globalizing the broader apparel market. Brands originating in Japan that export to the world are not strong in design. In order for the Japanese apparel industry to globalize, it is important to take in to account creation that introduce new designs to the world. This study is focused on ready-to-wear (hereinafter referred to as “pret-a-porter”) luxury apparel, and examines the possibilities of predicting the pret-a-porter designs of clothing suitable for sale in Paris and Milan. It is important to understand the present conditions of fashion houses which is, in fact, distributing original designs to the world. We elected to make studies of Balenciaga and Lanvin in order to gain an understanding of the inner workings of fashion houses. It also investigates, and makes forecasts, for designs which will be presented at Lanvin 2010-11 Autumn/Winter Collection. This paper is an interim report on the progress of this endeavor.

Keywords: *fashion, luxury brands, design management*

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1. FOREWORD

The prêt-à-porter designs of fashion houses reflect their era and trends in the market. In the design process, creative directors (hereinafter referred to as “CD”) have an enormous amount of creative control. However, as they are participants in the fashion business, this creative control is constrained by the following factors: (1) The brand’s primary concept (2) the brand concept as added to or modified by creative directors (3) budget concerns including sales volume, manufacturing costs, marketing expenses and profits (4) fabric trends (5) the archive of existing products (6) idiosyncrasies of the media and its reception of the brand thus far (7) customer reception (8) the CD’s ideas, career history and thought patterns (9) relationships with business partners such as fabric suppliers (10) the cognitive constraints of the CD as a human being (11) past collections, which have been reported in great detail in the media, and (12) other factors.

If one takes all of these factors into account, it may be possible to predict the direction upcoming collections and the accompanying exhibitions will take to a certain extent. We believe, in other words, that the abovementioned factors provide clues that can help deduce the process by which CDs design products. We shall examine these possibilities in this paper.

2. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS RELATING TO DEDUCTION

The designs of CDs at Paris and Milan fashion houses naturally differ from those at Japanese apparel manufacturers. Before embarking on the deduction process, it is necessary first of all to clarify this difference. The Japanese apparel industry has a strong tendency to follow existing trends when producing clothing. This reflects the character of the Japanese people, who by and large would rather wear clothing that looks fashionable because it deftly incorporates trends and thus feel secure and confident, than experiment with outlandish or individualistic creations. Consumers consider what others around them will think when selecting clothing, and this tendency affects the industry. Accordingly, the Japanese apparel industry does not create trends, but echoes them. Furthermore, the originality needed to create fresh designs has not been seen as a valued trait. These tendencies are a major stumbling block when it comes to the internationalization of the Japanese apparel industry. To overcome this, the Japanese industry must be encouraged to design products on the strength of its own original ideas, rather than merely following the designs presented at Fashion Weeks in Paris and Milan. We believe that making predictions regarding the prêt-à-porter products to be presented at upcoming Fashion Weeks, by the fashion houses discussed herein, will aid this process. At this point we should specify the fashion houses under discussion here. Owing to practical considerations, we elected to make studies of Balenciaga and Lanvin in order to gain an understanding of the inner workings of fashion houses. In addition, we researched the course of development of products made by Lanvin and made actual predictions regarding the 2010-11 Autumn/Winter Collection. Some designs unveiled at Fashion Weeks are simply intended to draw publicity, whereas others are actually meant as examples of merchandise for sale. In this study, we focus on the latter. We analyze the results, and examine the possibilities of making predictions regarding luxury brand designs.

3. THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JAPANESE FASHION

Looking at the Japanese fashion industry over the past 30 years, starting in 1980, we see that (1) Japanese apparel manufacturers have achieved success and business results in the Japanese market, and (2) Japanese designers have emerged from this industry to find recognition in the Paris and Milan fashion world. However, the Japanese fashion industry has shown little international growth, especially when compared to the Japanese automobile or electrical appliance industries.

3.1. The 1980s

The hanks to skyrocketing stock and real estate markets, Japan was drenched in the euphoria of an economic bubble. Boosted by the booming economy, the fashion industry experienced a golden age, during which the DC (Designer's & Characters) brand craze and imported brand craze came to prominence. DC (Designer's & Characters) is a Japanese English term. It refers to a uniquely Japanese fusion of two phenomena, the "designer brand," which aggressively promoted the name of its designer, and the "character brand," which strongly reflected the character of the brand name or company producing it. A uniquely Japanese phenomenon, the "DC brand" craze got its start when the clothing was presented in fashion magazines published by Magazine House, Ltd. It grew in popularity and other magazines followed suit, until the trend had thoroughly caught on with the general public. Characteristics of DC brands were (1) they were brands created by Japanese designers, for the consumption of Japanese consumers, (2) black was the color of choice, and (3) detailing was often fanciful or sophisticated. Department stores and "fashion buildings" provided a stage on which the DC brand craze unfolded. The Plaza Accord, a September 1985 economic agreement paving the way for a much stronger yen, touched off the imported brand craze. After the Accord, many consumers could purchase imported luxury items from Europe and the United States that had previously been beyond their reach. Until then, clothing from Parisian haute couture brands like Christian Dior, Pierre Cardin and Yves St. Laurent had been produced through licensing, in a business model originating in 1973 when the Takashimaya department store signed a licensing agreement with French designer Emanuel Ungaro. However, after the 1985 Plaza Accord, Italian brands like Armani, Versace, and Max Mara stole the spotlight. Armani, Versace, and Max Mara were not produced through licensing agreements, but imported.

3.2. The 1990s

The economic bubble burst. Consumers began to gravitate toward well-made products that would last for a long time, even if their prices were high. As land prices dropped, one luxury brand after another opened outlets in Tokyo's ritzy Ginza district. The luxury brand craze of this decade was an extension of the imported brand craze of the late 80s. LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) epitomized the phenomenon. Until this time, LVMH had been seen as time-honored, "archivalist," and traditional (with a history going back to 1854), building on this tradition to create products appreciated for their stunning impact and lasting resonance, but priced out of the range of all but a few consumers. However, in 1997 Marc Jacobs took over as CD, and the brand as a whole took a direction influenced by Marc Jacobs's original concepts. Japanese consumers responded positively, and LVMH grew in prominence. Previously, it was the role of designers to determine a brand's overall image and

direction, but around this time, the spotlight shifted from the chief designer to the CD. The 80s was the age of the designer, but the 90s was the age of the CD. It could also be said that the 90s marked the transition from the age of the designer to the age of the brand.

3.3. The early 2000s

The luxury brand market continued to grow over the 15 years from the collapse of the economic bubble in the early 90s through around 2005. This period saw the growth of a new business paradigm for these brands, namely the “democratization of luxury.” Handbags are a key example of this phenomenon. Being more affordable than prêt-à-porter, less susceptible to the influence of changing trends, and with a tendency toward purchase of tried-and-true standard items, handbags are an ideal medium for the “democratization of luxury.” With a massive middle-income bracket, a tendency toward brand loyalty, premium display conditions in Japanese department stores, and the launch of large-scale storefronts and “brand buildings” by brands with a large amount of expendable capital, the Japanese market proved to be an ideal laboratory for this democratization experiment. Accordingly, the growth of the luxury brand market, characterized by increasing democratization, continued unabated up through the early 2000s.

3.4. The late 2000s

The late 2000s saw the increasing dominance of “fast fashion,” inexpensive clothing with designs that are quick to reflect current trends, including The Gap, Zara, H&M (short for Hennes & Mauritz), and Forever21. H&M made its Japanese debut in Ginza in September 2008 and attracted long lines of up to 8,000 customers during its first week of business. Like other “fast fashion” providers, they continually offer new merchandise, entrusting manufacture to suppliers in Asia or Europe rather than operating their own factories. Once an item is sold out, it is not replenished, but replaced with a new design, and rather than offering reduced sale prices on items, these companies set prices low to begin with and keep them there. The combination of these low prices and designs that embody current trends to a certain extent has proved irresistible to consumers. After its Ginza debut, H&M expanded rapidly, opening stores in Harajuku, Shibuya and Shinjuku. Previously the exclusive gathering place of luxury brand emporiums, Ginza has begun changing, with Gucci withdrawing and LVMH scrapping plans for a new outlet, while in the meantime The Gap and Forever21 have opened outlets. American casual-wear retailer Abercrombie & Fitch has opened its first Japanese store in the area as well. Ginza is undergoing a “fast fashion” transformation, increasingly becoming a gathering place for global SPA (specialty store retailer of private-label apparel) brand outlets. The late 2000s has been the stage for an ever-fiercer battle between purveyors of “fast fashion.”

3.5. The importance of fashion prediction

The Japanese fashion business has enjoyed steady growth in the fertile ground of the Japanese market, despite the advances made by overseas luxury brands based in Paris and Milan. Japanese apparel manufacturers have seen no need to expand their presence overseas, in terms of sales. Unlike Paris and Milan fashion houses, they have had a massive and dependable market right under their noses, and have been able to maintain sufficient sales simply by following the Paris and Milan trends. In other words, Japanese apparel manufacturers are similar in concept to the fast fashion purveyors now beefing up their

presence in Japan. Both require a continual supply of new designs without requiring actual creativity. These two camps have the potential to come into true competition. Japanese fashion designers have grown up in this environment, where it was not necessary to predict the Paris and Milan fashion house designs that would appear at upcoming Fashion Weeks, but only to absorb them in retrospect. They also lack the ability to make such predictions. It is important to recognize this situation for what it is and address it. With this in mind, let us trace the history of the two fashion houses we have chosen to focus on, Balenciaga and Lanvin.

4. BALENCIAGA

Cristóbal Balenciaga was born in San Sebastián, Spain in 1895. His simple yet exquisite silhouettes found favor, and he became a prominent figure on the Paris fashion scene, achieving recognition the world over. What particularly drew attention was his repeated creations of innovative silhouettes, such as the cocoon silhouette, barrel silhouette, tunic dress, baby doll look, and sack dress.



Figure 1
Figure 2
Figure 3
Figure 4
Figure 5



Figure 1: 1947
Cocoon silhouette
Figure 2: 1951

Barrel silhouette

Figure 3: 1955 Tunic dress Figure 4: 1957 Baby doll look Figure 5: 1958 Sack dress

Current CD Nicolas Ghesquière was named to the post in 1997 at the age of 26. Since presenting his debut collection in 1998, Nicolas Ghesquière has been recognized by journalists and buyers as a designer to watch. Let us compare the designs of Nicolas Ghesquière with those of the founder, Balenciaga. The design shown in Fig. 6, from the 2006-07 Autumn/Winter Collection, appears to be influenced by the sack dress (Fig. 5) first presented in 1958. While the overall length has been shortened and volumes and proportions have been changed, the uniting theme of “round, yet sharp” is the same. While these two adjectives contradict each other when put into words, soft yet supple fabrics and shape-creating couture techniques help to harmonize these polar opposites and unite them in one article of clothing. Meanwhile, the design from the 2008-09 Autumn/Winter Collection shown in Fig. 7 seems to be inspired by the cocoon silhouette (Fig. 1) design unveiled in 1947. The shoulders are rounded, while the waist and sleeves are narrow and scrupulously designed. The new design expresses a strong and contemporary image of womanhood while employing the couture techniques prevalent in the late 1940s and 1950s. The overall silhouette is also updated and given a unique twist through the use of latex material. Designs such as these two illustrate the fact that old designs from the archive are used as the basis or inspiration for new designs. It can be inferred that when creating new designs, Nicolas

Ghesquière keeps the founder’s concepts, and creations from the archives, in mind even as he boldly pursues his own original design ideas.



Figure 6: 2008-2009A/W



Figure 7: 2006-2007A/W

5. LANVIN

Jeanne Lanvin was born in France in 1867. Orient-flavored silhouettes and ethnic detailing characterized his work. He was also admired for his elegant style, drawing inspiration from painting and the arts of the ancient world, as well as the artful embroidery using sequins and beads that decorated some of his designs, and his exquisite use of colors including original “Lanvin colors” created by dyeing fabrics. Current CD Alber Elbaz assumed the post in 2001. Honored with France’s Legion d’Honneur medal, with the title of Chevalier, in January 2007, Alber Elbaz is one of the most celebrated designers active today. Let us compare the designs of Alber Elbaz with those of Jeanne Lanvin, founder of Lanvin. Fig. 10 shows a design from the 2008-2009 Autumn/Winter Collection, which appears to draw inspiration from the embroidered bolero jacket (Fig. 8) of 1939. Embroidering the entire surface of the bolero jacket with beads and shortening both the length and the bust, Alber Elbaz has updated the design to suit the contemporary, active woman. Another example is the design from 2005 Spring/Summer in Fig. 11, which seems inspired by the 1923 evening dress shown in Fig. 9. Both the silhouette and the color palette have been reproduced relatively faithfully, and a pleating technique is used to achieve a soft feminine touch. Examples such as these illustrate the way Lanvin, like Balenciaga, employs the archive of past designs as a basis for new designs. While interpreting the present era according to his own strongly held personal ideas, Alber Elbaz executes designs that adhere to fundamental Lanvin concepts and pay homage to past designs from the archive.



Figure 8

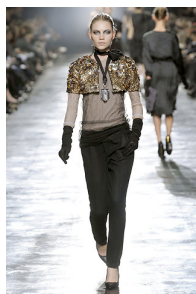


Figure 9



Figure10



Figure 11

Figure 8: 1939 Embroidered bolero jacket **Figure 9:** 1923 Tulle evening dress

Figure10: 2008-2009 A/W **Figure 11:** 2005 S/S

6. BEHIND THE SCENES AT LANVIN AND BALENCIAGA TODAY

We will now present some observations on the state of affairs at these fashion houses today, to the extent of our knowledge, focusing on the CD's seasonal creations, the staff surrounding the CD and relations between the fashion house and fabric suppliers, etc. It will be clear that the fashion house CDs described herein play a different role altogether than the MD (merchandisers) at Japanese apparel manufacturers.

(1) In order to present fabric suggestions to the CD, the textile director visits fabric shows (such as *Premiere Vision*) and fabric dealers, and acquires a wide variety of fabric samples. After the collection is complete, the textile director immediately proposes fabrics for the next season to the CD.

(2) After completing the collection, the CD begins considering and deciding on fabrics for the next season. After these decisions are made, the textile director orders quantities of the selected fabrics for the creation of samples. The CD conveys the target image for the current season to assistant designers.

(3) Studio staff members assemble materials from libraries or the company archive storage facilities, and make presentations to designers. Presentation methods differ depending on the assistant designer, with each presenter selecting a method to which he or she is best suited. Some staff members go as far as to create large numbers of full-size 3D models for these presentations.

(4) On the basis of the assistant designers' presentations, the CD executes design drawings reflecting the season's target image.

(5) Atelier staff members receive reference materials including design drawings, photographs and 3D objects, and fabricate samples. The design drawings and other reference materials are given to the staff around one month before the collection is to be presented.

(6) The CD has a fitting model wear the sample items, and conducts a fitting check before deciding on the final design. In some cases, the final design may end up as something completely different from the original design.

(7) The atelier staff creates samples. In the mere month between when they receive design drawings and reference materials from the CD and the presentation of the collection, they must fabricate approximately 200 samples, including alterations.

(8) The CD presents the works in the collection. After the collection is finished, the CD is given suggestions for fabrics for the next season by the textile director, and decides on the fabrics. (The CD, assistant designers and atelier staff go back to step (1) and begin working once again in preparation for the upcoming season.)

(9) Staff in charge of sales and PR hold shows and take orders for products.

(10) The textile director takes orders at shows and orders fabrics.

(11) The staff member in charge of patterns for mass production fabricates the patterns and sends them to the sewing plant. (Atelier staff has no involvement with mass production patterns.)

(12) Staff in charge of sales receive the products from the sewing plant, and distribute them to the buyers who placed orders at the show.

(13) Retail employees sell the products in stores.

The following information regarding the state of affairs at these fashion houses has also been obtained through interviews.

a) Each season's collection begins with fabrics, but CDs do not visit fabric shows (such as Premiere Vision) themselves. This is impossible for them because the fabric shows are held at the same time collections are presented. Accordingly, it is the textile directors of each fashion house that go to fabric shows and the like, to find interesting fabrics to propose to the CD. When they find such fabrics of interest, they approach textile companies to order them. In addition, fashion houses may receive suggestions directly from fabric suppliers with which they have close relationships. Both textile directors and fabric suppliers must keep the tastes of the CD in mind when making proposals, or the fabrics will not be selected. In the design process, the choice of fabric is an extremely important one for the designer, as it forms the basis of every article of clothing.

b) Before the CD decides on a final design, assistant designers use all available methods to produce reference materials to present to the designer, who then interprets them according to his or her own image and decides on a design. It is safe to say that the CD must have not only the ability to come up with original designs, but also the ability to preside over a wide range of factors and bring them together into a finished package.

c) There is storage room for the archives on the company premises, and it is evident that these archives provide a vital reference when deciding on designs. Apparently, hints are often obtained from the silhouettes, fabrics, colors, prints and so on of works in the archive, and these are then applied to the needs of the current era when finalizing a design. We believe this is partly an illustration of the loyalty of these brands to their fundamental concepts.

d) During fitting checks, the CD is always present from start to finish. Fitting models are also on duty at all times, and often work an eight-hour day during which fitting checks and alterations are performed seven or eight times. At Lanvin and Balenciaga, the CDs and designers have highly exacting standards regarding the works in their collections, and pursue their own original concepts unflaggingly until they are satisfied. Upon completion, these designs attract attention from fashion journalists and buyers, produce sales results, and go on to play a major role in determining the direction of fashion trends.

e) At fashion shows, buyers from all over the world place orders, after which the products are fabricated. However, Lanvin and Balenciaga hardly ever modify the sizes of the clothing to suit the inhabitants of the country in question. Some fashion houses manufacture small sizes especially for certain countries, or modify the colors used, but others do not as a basic rule. It is thought that this is because their products are manufactured in small lots.

7. ANALYSIS OF PRODUCTS IN THE LANVIN COLLECTION, AND METHODS EMPLOYED

In the research we will conduct henceforth, we will analyze the products presented in collections since Alber Erbaz assumed the post of CD at Lanvin, and explore the possibilities of predicting future designs. Our analysis will be focused primarily on the following five factors: (1) Historical background (2) Key words of the collections (3) Fabrics used (including treatment of fabrics, etc.) (4) Form, and (5) Colors and patterns. By examining the connection between historical background and key words of the collections, we may gain an understanding of the message the CD hopes to convey to the world at large. By extension, it may be possible to predict the thoughts, or thought patterns, of the CD. Meanwhile, by examining form, color and pattern, we may forecast the future archive and customer reception of collections. Naturally, we will analyze the products actually presented, giving consideration to the words and behavior of the CD. The eventual goal is to improve the precision with which predictions can be made.

8. CONCLUSION

At present, this is an ongoing study and has not reached what could be called a conclusion yet. We will continue to study the above findings and move forward with the research outlined in section 6 of this paper, and will attempt to predict tendencies of the Lanvin 2010-2011 Autumn/Winter Collection. The outcome of our predictions will be published on the following web site:

<http://www.ke.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~otani/pg26.html>

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