

The Impact of minimalism on product Design: A Case study of Muji

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Abstract. Simplicity and naturalness, and a focus on product materials and functionality itself are typical features of the minimalist style, which, as a popular modern design style, has also had a profound impact on product design. Muji develops minimalism in its design philosophy and product content, espousing a philosophy of simple and natural living and the removal of superfluous decoration. The appearance of the products is presented only through the use of simple lines and geometric shapes, the use of high purity colours to return the properties of the raw materials themselves, and the use of environmentally friendly recycled materials to simplify the packaging to its most basic state. The product is presented to the consumer in a minimalist manner, while retaining its functionality and practicality. Taking Muji as an example, this article explores the application of minimalism in Muji's design from both the design concept and the product, and analyses the reasons for its transformation from an 'unbranded' to a 'branded' brand.

Keywords: Minimalism, product design, Muji.

1. Minimalist style

Minimalism is also considered by many people as "less is more", originated in the 1960s and was widely recognised at the time, becoming a major school of art and design in the West. After the end of the Second World War, when the economy was in a downward spiral, designers changed their design style to better suit the market. Many designers advocated a return to natural design and minimalism became widely accepted. The influence of minimalism on design was widespread, initially in the fields of painting and architecture, but gradually it spread to all sectors, including design, fashion, fashion and literature, and became a widely recognised artistic trend [1]. Minimalist design is not 'without design' or 'no design', but rather the simplification of the most essential elements of a product, such as shape, colour, material and function, and the removal of unnecessary decoration, so that the product presents the designer's original design intention. The product is designed to reduce the cognitive burden on people, thus facilitating their use and appreciation. Behind this seemingly simple design lies the designer's own understanding of minimalism, which is expressed in the form of appropriate white space, creating a sense of calm and visual focus. By bringing out the necessary information and visual focus, all the user needs to do is to focus on the necessary information, and the minimalist design reflects the infinite possibilities of artistic form and visual impact.

Minimalism is the pursuit of a higher level of spirituality, as design has developed to a high degree of autonomy and material life has been greatly satisfied, the pursuit of minimalism is an interpretation of the philosophy of elegant living, from a single material pursuit to a higher level of spiritual needs, through a more rational attitude to life and restraint in decoration. Minimalist design has two levels, one is the pursuit of "good" design, using the simplest lines and structures to complete the functional design of the product, through some details of "careful" design to enhance the value of the product, seemingly no design but in fact after careful consideration, the final presentation of the product to the public. The other is the pursuit of 'source', which is a human-centred and environmentally simple design that brings humanistic care to people and the environment.

Minimalism differs from functionalist design in that it pursues a perfect combination of form and function with a focus on function, and aesthetics and humanity in product design are its main concerns [2]. Minimalism is a combination of the two, focusing on the combination of functionality and aesthetics in the design process, a minimalist Eastern philosophy with a similarity to the Western "less is more" philosophy [3]. In the minimalist mindset, the highest level of beauty is equivalent to

but rather to explain the concept of "this is good" through its products and the values behind them. This seeming simplicity of thinking is based on a design philosophy derived from Laozi's "contend without doing anything". In fact, to achieve such a state of mind, one needs to be satisfied with a 'plain' life, which coincides with the corporate values to which Muji aspires, to be satisfied with a simple life and to find the joy that belongs to the very essence of life.

A return to simplicity and nature. Muji's packaging is simple and natural, with materials chosen to be as natural as possible and colours chosen directly from the material itself, and a closed design loop from the very beginning of the product design, all to reflect the value of 'this is good'. It starts with our daily lives and encourages an exploratory eye to discover what can be designed and to develop an eye for the 'Indigo'. As Muji advocates, minimalism is not about not designing, but about communicating the idea of rational consumption. It is an attitude to life that restrains itself and its desires. It is an approach to life that restrains itself and its desires. Kenya Hara also writes in his book *Design in Design*: "Creativity is not about being surprised by new forms and materials, it is about being surprised by the fact that it comes from the seemingly mundane everyday life. [5]"

As a 'special one', Muji is a product that is thoroughly researched from the outset, going against the tide and contrasting with what is already on the market and what the general public thinks. There is no shortage of new and quirky looking products on the market, and this is what attracts people to them. Another important factor is that people no longer recognise the learning costs of such complex products and are attracted to the natural, uncomplicated consumer philosophy of Muji. Muji's rational and minimalist design is a great way of restoring the charm of the product itself. In an environment that is already inundated with materialistic culture, there is a need for such a reasonable product mix. The product is not a novelty. Muji does not rely on novelty, but rather on its simple and unpretentious quality, which is achieved through the use of the most appropriate materials and the finest production processes. This interest is achieved by omitting useless processes and leaving only the useful parts.



Fig. 2 Wicker box

3. The visual expression of Muji's "minimalism"

The most fundamental aspect of Muji's product design process is the constant process of subtraction, with designers asking themselves repeatedly what else can be cut. Muji's design philosophy gives us a visual impression in three ways: firstly, it eschews exaggerated shapes and pursues the most 'minimalist' experience; secondly, it uses natural and virgin materials and pays attention to the use of environmentally friendly recycled materials; thirdly, it pursues a simple visual texture and respects the colour characteristics of the materials themselves. From these three aspects, the design of the details brings the consumer not only a visual experience, but also a psychological sublimation.

3.1 The "Shape" of Muji

Muji's shape is simple and clear, mostly using straight lines and squares, integrating a large area of the plane, reducing the processing of the fine details, simple shape, rational modeling, precise proportions, Muji's most classic is storage.

As shown in the picture, is the classic storage combination of Muji. Made of plastic, the storage box is divided into different sizes by small partitions. The designer did not use too much decoration, but used a semi-transparent plastic material for practicality, so that users can quickly find the items they need. The shape is simple and square, which seems to lack innovation but makes the storage space of the product the most practical, although there is no decoration, but contains the designer's thorough and rational thinking, is a typical minimalist design work.



Fig. 3 Muji storage box



Fig. 4 Muji storage box

3.2 The "materials" of Muji

In order to retain the beauty of the material itself, Muji only processes the material to the minimum, avoiding artificial traces to the maximum extent possible, giving people a simple and natural feeling, using a lot of natural materials, such as wood, rattan, linen, cotton thread, unbleached paper, etc.; the selection of materials focuses on highlighting the functionality of the product, combining practicality and function perfectly



Fig. 5 Muji storage bag



Fig. 6 Muji storage bag

Muji is characterized by simplicity and environmental protection, simplifying unnecessary decorations, production processes and complicated techniques, highlighting the beauty of the raw materials themselves, maximizing the practical value of functions and materials, and saving materials while completing the functions of the products, perfectly interpreting the concept of environmental protection and human-centered design. Most of the materials chosen are recycled and recyclable, and the furniture, pencils, rulers, storage baskets and other daily necessities are made of wood in its original color, which is simple and natural, giving people a sense of freshness and health. Muji's

environmental philosophy is highly respected by consumers, and its environmental, simple, and human-centered design principles also resonate strongly. Its environmental protection, simplicity and human-oriented design principles also resonate strongly. In today's fast-developing commodity economy, holiday gifts are also being introduced, and packaging designs using wicker, bamboo, and hemp rope are emerging to attract consumers.

3.3 The "color" of Muji

Muji's design style is highly unified, and the colors are mostly monochromatic, which creates a unique and recognizable style. Each offline store is decorated with wooden materials and retains the basic colors of the materials. "It conveys the most objective sense of nature to consumers. When people walk into the store, they will be impressed by this feeling, which is the visual perception that Muji strives to create, giving people a sense of intimacy, and it tries to make you feel at home when you walk into the store. When you walk into a Muji store, you can not only admire but also touch, thus realizing a dual experience from the mind to the sense of touch.



Fig. 7 MUJI store

In Muji shops, bright colours are rarely seen, and apart from the red 'Muji' box, all other products are in a single natural colour, keeping to the inherent colours of the material itself, such as wood grain and transparent colours. Apart from black, white and grey, the colours used are mostly elegant and charming camel, and fresh and clean blue-grey. Even in the choice of clothing colours this principle is strictly followed, using only black and white, brown and blue to be. Never going outside the design principles to chase the alternative. It is this insistence that has shaped Muji, which looks understated and cool. This sensible, subtle and intellectual temperament is what makes Muji so fascinating.

Muji has abandoned the traditional use of multiple colors. In its color system, the use of black, white and other pure colors is also influenced by the lifestyle of the Japanese nation, and is also closely related to the natural environment, religious beliefs and aesthetic standards. Based on these traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts, it is easy to find that the use of monochromatic and natural colors in Muji's design is one of its important characteristics. Powerful. Japan is an island country with limited natural resources due to volcanoes and earthquakes, and this has led to a strong sense of admiration for nature, which Muji has incorporated into the products that the public needs to evoke empathy and love. The paper packaging is as simple as possible, mostly using virgin pulp paper or unbleached brown paper, transparent and translucent materials, and the storefront is decorated with white and log colors to reflect a sense of originality. A sense of originality, clothing also use cotton, linen materials. This is inevitably related to the nature-loving habits of the Japanese people; on the other hand, it reflects the Japanese people's ecological and ethical attitudes and values; at the same time, it is also a concrete reflection of their national view of nature and traditional aesthetic concepts

4. Summary

Muji's products are simple and elegant, but this minimalist style is not just a matter of subtraction. Rather than simply removing superfluous decorations in pursuit of a clean look or a sense of modernity, Muji creates an ultimate "emptiness" with no restrictions on how it can be used or how it can be portrayed, and as much white space as possible. By analyzing the design elements of Muji, it is the simple lines, pure colors and simple packaging that guide it, and it is the integration of this silent beauty into the details that creates classic products. The essence of design is to create a better life, not only to give the user a good experience but also for the sake of sustainable development, eliminating superfluous production processes is also a contribution to environmental protection. With such products, Muji hopes to remain "naturally unmarked" and to continue to show people the true nature of life.

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