AI-Generated Oriental Fantasy in Fashion Imagery: Digital Reimagining of Traditional Chinese Dress

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***Abstract*—This study focuses on the fashion expression of oriental fantasy-style clothing in AI-generated images, drawing on the 'visual grammar' theoretical framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. It treats AI-generated images as visual meaning systems with language-like structures, systematically interpreting the cultural expressions and stylistic compositions within the images. Using the visual social media platform Rednote (Xiaohongshu) as the data source, this paper collected and analysed 62 AI-generated fashion images of traditional Chinese clothing. The study establishes a coding system based on three visual dimensions: pattern elements, color combinations, and material textures, to identify the key visual elements that constitute the oriental fantasy clothing style. It further analyses how these elements work together to form a unique visual language, and summarises and systematises the style standards and visual preferences of AI-generated images in the fashion representation of traditional Chinese clothing. This study provides an empirical case for the visual reproduction of Chinese fashion culture through AI technology, offering a new perspective for cultural research in the interdisciplinary field of fashion and technology. Additionally, this paper constructs a visual element coding system for traditional attire applicable to AI-generated images, expanding the methodological tools for visual culture research.**

Keywords—artificial intelligence image generation; oriental fantasy style; traditional Chinese clothing; visual grammar; visual representation of fashion culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of generative AI technology has expanded the scope of fashion image creation. AI image generation tools such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and DALL·E can automatically generate high-quality, stylistically diverse visual images based on prompts, and are widely used in fields such as clothing design, conceptual fashion, virtual models, and digital displays. Furthermore, the influence of AI-generated images has transcended practical applications such as improving design production efficiency and enabling personalised customisation, extending into the reimagining of traditional clothing and the exploration of Oriental culture. As visual collaborators in style co-creation, these AI tools can respond to user-inputted prompts and cultural semantics, blending design concepts with visual styles to generate complex hybrid images that transcend the boundaries of traditional clothing design [1].

In this type of generated image, a style that blends traditional cultural elements with fantasy aesthetics has become an important trend in contemporary digital fashion visuals, which this study refers to as 'Oriental Fantasy' visual images. Oriental fantasy style is not a simple replication of traditional clothing in history, but rather generative AI absorbs, reorganises, refines and reconstructs patterns (such as dragons and phoenixes, auspicious clouds, and cranes), colors (such as red and gold), and materials (such as silk, gauze, and armour) with surreal compositions, dreamlike lighting effects, and fantastical scenes, creating symbolic, visually impactful digital fashion images [2]. This style is widely produced and disseminated on social media platforms (such as Rednote, Weibo, and Instagram), reflecting both AI's ability to reinterpret traditional clothing culture and the intertwining of cultural imagination and technological preferences in contemporary visual culture.

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II. RESEARCH RATIONALE AND QUESTIONS

Although there has been some preliminary research on the application of AI in clothing design and fashion communication [3], there is still relatively limited academic discussion on how AI constructs visual style language and symbolic grammar systems. In particular, there is a lack of systematic visual research on the composition and style generation mechanisms of oriental fantasy-style clothing in AI images.

On the one hand, most existing research on AI and fashion imagery has focused on technical implementation pathways (such as algorithm optimisation and data-driven design) and user acceptance, or explored AI's auxiliary role in creative design and the acceptability of aesthetic styles [4][5][6]. However, the visual composition, pattern styles, and cultural symbols inherent in AI-generated images have yet to be systematically decoded and semantically analysed in academic research. Current studies on image generation often prioritise model expressiveness or image aesthetic scoring, while insufficient attention is given to how symbolic elements within images collectively construct specific styles.

On the other hand, in response to the phenomenon of AI's preference for generating specific visual styles of Oriental fantasy, existing literature has largely remained at the macro level, discussing Orientalist visual inertia or data bias, while lacking micro-level mechanism studies that combine specific image expression forms, visual grammar structures, and generation principle. For example, Lan et al. (2025) noted that AI-generated images often exhibit excessive or misused use of traditional East Asian symbols, reflecting the model's stereotypical replication of cultural symbols [2]. The selective absorption of symbolic image data by AI during training, the regeneration mechanism of high-frequency visual templates, and the algorithmic preference for fantasy cultural symbols constitute a research area that has yet to be fully explored.

This article focuses on AI-generated fashion images, particularly oriental fantasy-style clothing, and attempts to answer the following three core research questions from the perspective of the intersection of fashion culture and technological media:

a) What visual elements constitute the main stylistic language of oriental fantasy clothing in AI-generated images?

b) How do these visual elements interact with each other to construct a systematic and recognisable style template?

c) In AI-generated fashion visual images, what technical or cultural factors contribute to the algorithm's preference for Oriental fantasy styles?

III. Related Work

A. Generative AI and Fashion Visual Culture

Traditional Chinese clothing has long been regarded as an important visual symbol of Chinese culture. With the development of digital media, the visual expression of traditional clothing has become increasingly diverse. Generative AI technology, through a 'prompt-image' mechanism, enables collaborative creation between users and algorithms [7], allowing images of traditional Chinese clothing to be continuously updated and reinterpreted within a contemporary aesthetic context. Modern AI image generation technology, centred on diffusion models and generative adversarial networks (GANs), achieves the reproduction of traditional cultural imagery through large-scale text-image alignment data. In the fashion industry, these tools have been used to generate advertising visuals, design proposals, and clothing style prototypes, providing a new avenue for the re-creation of traditional clothing.

Previously, many studies focused on highly realistic fashion image synthesis in generative AI, such as model imagery, scenes, and styling campaigns, involving model development and iteration, as well as publicly available datasets centred on fashion. Deng et al. (2023) developed a machine learning-based design system by combining image recognition, style transfer, and a clothing database to perform fashion-oriented modifications and image generation for Miao ethnic traditional clothing, demonstrating the application potential of AI in traditional clothing design [8]. Yu et al. (2023) constructed a large-scale fashion image dataset, providing a foundation for AI to generate highly complex clothing images from text [9]. Other studies have pointed out that AI-generated images are not only the product of aesthetic simulation but also constitute a form of algorithmic imagination, with their visual outputs constrained by training datasets and user prompt styles [10].

Zou and Wong (2023) collected and used a set of stylised fashion illustration datasets for training in their StylishGAN research, demonstrating how to achieve a transition from runway images to illustration styles through paired learning between reference photos and hand-drawn sketches [11]. This direction clearly indicates that AI is not only capable of generating photos but can also be used to create high-quality, stylistically consistent illustrations. Arzyrou et al. (2024) analysed that users share 'AI fashion illustrations' on platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, or NFT platforms as part of self-expression, and the rapid spread of this visual content reinforces the reshaping of DIY design aesthetics and aesthetic identity [1]. In social media knowledge extraction research, Ma et al. (2019) and Yuan et al. (2023) proposed using a joint image-text method to analyse 'fashion knowledge' from platform content, further demonstrating the potential of AI illustrations as a medium for fashion information dissemination [12][13]. Chen et al. (2023) used Midjourney and ChatGPT as tools to explore the process of generative AI in new Chinese-style women's clothing design, emphasising a designer-led human-machine collaboration model [14]. The article notes that in social media dissemination, AI-generated images of Oriental aesthetics (such as ink wash painting and buttonholes) are more likely to evoke cultural resonance.

B. Oriental Fantasy Aesthetics and Stylistic Language

The 'oriental fantasy' aesthetic described in this article refers to the fusion of classical symbols and modern fantasy elements, using visual elements such as long ribbons, tassels and cloud shoulders to create a fashion style with a touch of fantasy, which is frequently seen in games, illustrations and virtual fashion (Fig. 1). This style is particularly popular on generative AI platforms and social media, reflecting a blend of self-imagination and cultural reconstruction [1]. However, previous studies have primarily focused on aesthetic analyses or discussions of biases in AI-generated effects, with limited exploration of systematic coding that integrates fashion design language and visual symbols.

Fig. 1. Oriental fantasy-style AI-generated images. (*Source from Rednote*)

According to a social platform ecosystem trend report, on Rednote in 2025, 'New Chinese-style' and 'retro-style' fashion content garnered 350 million and 150 million views respectively, reflecting users' strong interest in expressing traditional cultural heritage [15]. Meanwhile, word cloud analysis shows that keywords such as 'cheongsam', 'Chinese style', and 'retro' have seen a significant rise in popularity, accompanied by creators reimagining patterns and visual styles [16]. Additionally, Vogue Business reported that influenced by Song Dynasty-themed costume dramas, the 'New Chinese-style' trend has continued to gain popularity on the Rednote, with content often presented in a 'traditional cultural symbols and fantasy reconstruction' format, sparking emotional resonance and creative interaction among younger audiences [17]. As such, traditional clothing-related content is increasingly shifting toward a visual expression that combines 'cultural symbol imagery with fantasy-driven reinterpretation,'

which has become a key strategy for platforms to enhance creativity and foster emotional resonance with users.

In summary, ther's been some early progress in research on generative AI in fashion design across both technical and application dimensions. On the technical side, stuff like image generation models (e.g., diffusion models, style transfer networks) and multi-modal corpus construction have laid a solid foundation for generating and controlling visual symbols. At the application level, practices such as AI-based reproduction of ethnic clothing, traditional pattern transfer, and digital virtual clothing creation are emerging, driving the reinterpretation of traditional culture within a fashion context. However, existing research primarily focuses on clothing design, pattern reconstruction, or the generation mechanisms themselves, without delving into the specific visual elements within the generated images—particularly the stylistic language underlying image generation, which is not the result of a single layer's superposition but rather the synergistic interaction between pattern symbols, color strategies, and material representations. This means that we need to return to the images themselves and conduct structured research on these AI-generated images from the perspective of visual semiotics and quantitative coding analysis to reveal the generative logic and aesthetic commonalities of the oriental fantasy style.

IV. Methodology

A. Data Sources and Sample Selection

This study employs qualitative content analysis to explore the visual reconstruction of traditional Chinese clothing in AI-generated images with an oriental fantasy style. During the data collection phase, based on preliminary literature review and platform observation, the researcher selected seven representative social media tags (Table I) as search criteria and conducted systematic sampling on the Rednote. A total of 71 image samples meeting the preliminary criteria were collected, covering multiple creator accounts and clothing styles, with publication dates spanning from December 2022 to July 2025.

TABLE I. IMAGE SEARCH RESULTS

Tags	#ai painting	#ai ancient painting	#ai fantasy	#ai ancient fantasy	#ai dreamy ancient clothing	#ai oriental fantasy	#oriental aesthetics ai painting
Sample size	3	11	2	13	18	12	12

All images must meet the following two core criteria: first, they must be AI-generated images (which can be confirmed through tag searches, prompts, drawing instructions, or image features); second, they must combine traditional Chinese clothing structures (such as Hanfu, cheongsam, and Tangzhuang) with fantasy-style elements (such as mechanical cyberpunk styles, glowing wings, and dreamy filters). To ensure sample quality, this study employs manual verification to screen images based on clarity, compositional integrity, and stylistic representativeness. Considering that images within the same post may share the same prompt text, this research selects only the first image displayed in each post and uses screenshots to capture the post's main information. For all images, this study established a metadata record table, including fields such as image ID, tag source, creator information, visual summary, clothing keywords, and prompt text. Based on this, researchers conducted cross-comparisons and manual deduplication of images, removing samples with high similarity, duplicate information, or ambiguous symbolic expressions.

Additionally, since users on the Rednote often post AI-generated image content with brief or lacking textual descriptions of clothing keywords, this study adopted a strategy dominated by human visual judgment during the secondary review stage, using the clothing structure and fantasy decorative symbols within the images as the core criteria for evaluation. Only when the visual composition of the image clearly incorporates traditional clothing elements (such as wide sleeves, cross-collars, cheongsam structures, etc.) combined with fantastical expressions, were they included in the final sample. Ultimately, 62 images were selected from the original 71 for subsequent visual content encoding and analysis. This screening process ensured the content diversity and stylistic uniqueness of the research sample while also enhancing the overall effectiveness and theoretical explanatory power of the analysis.

B. Research Ethics

Although the images are sourced from public platforms, this study adheres to academic ethics and image usage guidelines during use: all data does not include user facial or privacy features; image analysis is used for academic purposes and does not involve commercial use; if published, it will be noted that 'the images are sourced from public platforms and are AI-generated works.'

C. Coding and Visual Analysis Framework

This study draws on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *visual grammar* framework, which conceptualises images as meaning-bearing systems with structured visual language akin to verbal language [18]. Building on systemic functional linguistics, the framework identifies three metafunctions of visual communication: narrative representation, which captures actions, vectors, and processes within the image; conceptual representation, which reflects symbolic or classificatory meaning; and compositional structure, which organises visual elements through information value (left-right, top-bottom positioning), salience (visual prominence), and framing (boundaries or separations). To be more specific:

- At the narrative representation, this study examines whether the patterns or compositions of clothing in images convey a sense of action or process, such as whether the patterns exhibit a dynamic sense of spread or whether the postures of the characters reinforce the emotional or narrative tension of the clothing. Although AI images are predominantly static works, the interaction between patterns, postures, and backgrounds in some images constitutes implicit visual narrative clues.
- At the conceptual representation, this study analyses how images utilise traditional Chinese visual symbols (such as dragons, phoenixes, auspicious clouds, and lotus flowers) to construct decorative pattern systems, and explores the distribution of these elements within garment structures and their symbolic meanings. Additionally, the simulated representation of materials in images (such as the lustre of silk or the texture of

metal) is incorporated into the coding dimension to investigate how AI-generated images reconstruct the tactile perception of traditional garments through visual textures.

- At the compositional level, this paper examines the spatial organisation of patterns and color schemes in the image, such as whether the main pattern of the clothing is in the visual focus area, whether the combination of colors and materials forms a hierarchical relationship, and how the overall style achieves consistency through layout order. This dimension helps to reveal the possible template-based compositional structure in AI-generated images and their mechanism for generating oriental fantasy styles.

Fig. 2. AI-generated images analysis example. (*Source from Rednote*)

Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar theory provides a powerful tool for identifying the reorganization and grammaticalization of visual elements in AI models, helping to understand how generated images construct a visual style with consistency and cultural sensibility. Therefore, this paper establishes an image encoding system centred on three core dimensions: pattern elements, color schemes, and material textures (Fig. 2). The aim is to systematically deconstruct how traditional decorative patterns, color combinations, and material textures interact at the compositional level to form a recognisable visual language system.

D. Visual analysis results

In terms of pattern elements, AI-generated images generally combine traditional Chinese clothing patterns with fantasy visual vocabulary to construct an oriental fantasy style with decorative and aesthetic recognisability. Research results indicate that the most frequently appearing patterns include auspicious cloud patterns (13 times), golden decorative patterns (12 times), and floral elements (11 times), with peonies (5 times) being the primary floral motif (Table Ⅱ). The attire emphasises the Chinese auspicious pattern system, symbolising wealth and prosperity. In some images, peony petals are rendered in exaggerated forms, alongside cloud patterns and gold patterns to form the primary visual focal points of the attire. These patterns not only carry traditional aesthetic connotations but also reinforce the fantastical and narrative qualities of the imagery, imparting an elegant yet dramatic cultural ambience to the overall attire style. Some images also introduce totems, artefacts, anthropomorphic animals or mythical figures with divine connotations, giving the overall picture an elegant and mysterious oriental fantasy quality.

TABLE II. FREQUENCY STATISTICS OF MAIN COLORS

Patterns	***Cloud***	***Golden ornamentation***	***Flowers***	***Dragon***	***Tassels***	***Jade hairpin***	***Embroidery***	***Ribbon***
Frequency statistics	13	12	11	8	7	7	6	6

In terms of primary color schemes, AI-generated fashion images exhibit a significant preference for warm tones, accounting for 36% of the total, while cool-toned images make up 22%, and 4% of images employ a mix of warm and cool tones. This color distribution indicates that AI systems tend to prioritise creating a warm, soft, or sacred visual atmosphere in style construction. Additionally, in terms of high-frequency color usage, white (32 instances), black (27 instances), blue (25 instances), gold (23 instances), and red (22 instances) form the dominant color system (Fig. 3). Among these, gold is often used to highlight the nobility and mystery of characters, while the combination of red and gold reinforces traditional festive or courtly aesthetics. Blue and white, meanwhile, tend to convey a cold, ethereal, or fantastical atmosphere. Furthermore, while some images are visually dominated by white, they incorporate multi-color details, resulting in more complex color textures. These strategies of blending warm and cool tones and color contrasts help establish a clear visual hierarchy and emotional guidance path, demonstrating AI's ability to control visual aesthetics and adapt to cultural contexts.

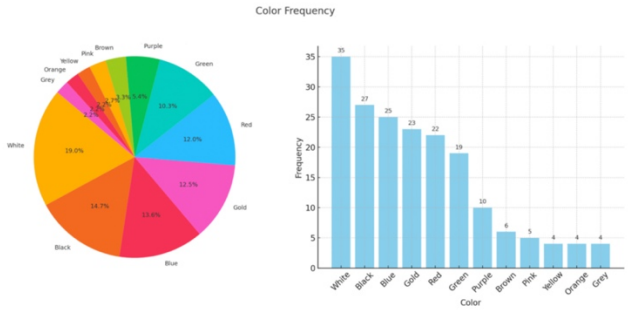

Fig. 3. Statistics on colors appearing in AI-generated images of fashion clothing. (*Source from the author*)

Common color combinations tend to blend warm and cool contrasts with highly saturated colors to create an oriental fantasy style with a dreamlike atmosphere and visual impact. In addition, the extensive use of digital visual processing techniques such as luminescence, gradients, and transparent layers in color matching makes the transitions between colors softer and more dreamlike, further enhancing the characteristics of oriental fantasy. In terms of colour distribution, AI-generated images often emphasise high-brightness colors in specific areas, such as golden trim, red ribbons, or blue halos, to create a clear visual hierarchy and sense of focus. This color strategy not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the image but also demonstrates AI's

ability to blend and reinterpret traditional and fantasy elements in visual generation.

In AI-generated oriental fantasy-style images, the visual presentation of materials is highly detailed and decorative. Soft materials such as silk and satin are widely used, with details such as satin sheen, light drape, and natural wrinkles being particularly common. This type of texture enhances the elegance and ceremonial nature of the clothing, giving the overall image a classic and sacred atmosphere. In addition, details such as gold thread embroidery, metal accessories, and gemstone reflections appear frequently, forming a visual narrative that combines luxury and fantasy. Some images also enhance the dreamlike colors using feather textures or luminous materials. The combination of these materials not only reflects the expressiveness of AI in visual simulation technology but also points to a collective imagination of oriental aristocratic aesthetics and fantasy scenes. Overall, the AI-generated system achieves a reconstruction and dramatic expression of traditional aesthetic elements through a multi-material fusion strategy at the visual semantic level.

Overall, 'ancient fairy tales' and 'gorgeous decorative style' are the most common styles of AI-generated oriental fantasy images, reflecting the AI image system's preference for elegant, light and delicate, ornate, and mythical oriental clothing vocabulary. These images usually combine flowing light, feathery gauze, metallic patterns, and symbolic patterns (such as dragons, phoenixes, and auspicious clouds) to create an extraordinary visual atmosphere. Secondly, 'Chinese Lolita,' 'Cyber Chinese,' and 'Futuristic Mix-and-Match' reflect AI-generated cross-cultural reinterpretations of traditional elements and modern popular styles, showcasing the technical system's exploration of novel aesthetic combinations in cultural simulation (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Cyber Chinese-style AI-generated fashion images. (*Source from Rednote*)

V. Findings

This study systematically visually coded and categorised 62 AI-generated images of oriental fantasy-style clothing to reveal the typical aesthetic configuration and systematic visual language presented by this style under AI-generated logic. Overall, AI images show a high degree of stylistic consistency and a tendency towards visual templating, mainly reflected in the repetition of compositional structure, visual focus distribution, and clothing symbol usage.

In terms of composition, common 'flying' compositions and suspended poses are used, accompanied by special effects such as halos, feathering, or starlight, to create a fantastical atmosphere that transcends reality. The vast majority of images adopt a central composition with the figure facing forward or slightly sideways, placed within a symmetrical or semi-symmetrical visual framework. Backgrounds are often composed of blurred, gradient, nebula, cloud sea, or fantasy architectural elements, emphasising the prominence of the central figure while incorporating visual elements such as light, ribbons, or mist to create a richly layered spatial sense.

Regarding clothing performance, the images often feature stylistic patterns that resonate across multiple layers, such as patterns, color schemes, and materials. For example, some images simultaneously use gold patterns, jade decorations, tassels, and light materials to create a fantasy atmosphere of 'holiness' or 'mystery' through the contrast between colours and textures. Accessory elements (such as phoenix crowns, jade hairpins, and gemstones) often form systematic pairings with character hairstyles and makeup, reflecting the presence of predefined visual symbol templates in AI-generated clothing designs. In fashion style, AI images generally blend Hanfu elements with mythological/gaming visual language, such as Song-style robes, palace attire, feathered imagery, and gold ornaments, and reinterpret traditional fashion aesthetics through highly detailed patterns and color schemes (such as contrasting warm and cool tones).

Furthermore, based on visual density, most images feature dense overlays of patterns, textures, and special effects in clothing details, such as large areas of cloud patterns and embroidery appearing simultaneously, with backgrounds overlaid with floating objects, halos, and dynamic elements, creating a sense of 'visual saturation.' This stylistic reinforcement strategy indicates that AI models tend to generate aesthetic impressions through the juxtaposition and reinforcement of high-frequency symbols, rather than through stylistic abstraction or minimalist design.

Overall observation also reveals that although the images reflect cultural diversity in terms of element selection, they show strong consistency in terms of structural organisation and color. This characteristic indicates that when learning the visual style of oriental fantasy, AI systems tend to refine and reproduce visual templates with typical characteristics.

VI. Discussion

Although this study systematically analysed the visual composition of oriental fantasy styles in AI-generated images based on image content, further reflection shows that there are certain limitations to approaching the issue solely from the image level. The preference of AI image generation systems for this style is not merely reflected in the aesthetic characteristics of the images themselves but is deeply rooted in the underlying technical mechanisms and data training processes. From a technical perspective, current mainstream diffusion models and generative algorithms heavily rely on image datasets containing Oriental elements during training. These datasets typically carry highly stylised compositional patterns and visual languages, causing the generative models to more easily replicate and deform into convergent image styles.

At the same time, from a cultural semantics perspective, the oriental fantasy style blends traditional Chinese cultural symbols (such as dragon patterns, flowers, and auspicious clouds) with globalised fantasy aesthetics (such as surreal lighting effects and dreamlike compositions) , showcasing a distinct 'cultural spectacularity' [19] and 'aesthetic heterogeneity' [20] within the global visual context. This stylistic feature not only possesses visual impact and symbolic significance but also aligns closely with the current platform algorithms' strategies aimed at maximising user clicks and preferences. Therefore, the AI model's generation process is

essentially the result of the synergistic interaction between technological bias and cultural appeal.

This finding suggests that combining image analysis with technical information such as AI training data and algorithm optimisation pathways will further aid in our understanding of the mechanisms behind AI-generated styles. Future research may consider incorporating methods such as model transparency analysis, prompt tracking, or training data tracing to expand the multidimensional examination of AI visual production processes, thereby promoting the integration of technical and cultural perspectives in image research.

VII. Conclusion

This study uses visual grammar theory as an analytical framework and combines manual coding methods to systematically sort out the visual composition path of oriental fantasy-style clothing in AI-generated images. The study found that AI tends to reuse a set of symbols with typical Oriental imagery in image generation, and through specific color matching, material simulation and composition techniques, it constructs Oriental fantasy templates that are highly consistent in style and easily recognisable. For example, elements that frequently appear in the image style, such as cloud patterns, golden decorative patterns, peony flowers, flowing gauze texture and pinkish-purple tones, constitute a stable and highly recognisable visual expression. This not only reveals AI's selective appropriation of traditional cultural elements in fashion visual production but also reflects the cultural preference mechanisms at play in the aesthetic optimisation process of generative models. However, this study also has certain limitations. The sample sources are primarily concentrated on the Rednote, and the coding standards also face some subjectivity. Future research could introduce cross-platform comparison mechanisms and analytical dimensions of image generation platforms.

The future holds great promise for AI's generative capabilities in the field of visual culture, which will continue to expand. AI will not only be used to assist in fashion design but may also shape human understanding of cultural styles. How to improve generative efficiency while avoiding the standardisation and homogenisation of cultural symbols, and how to promote visual AI research towards deeper cultural reflection and social integration, are important issues in the cross-disciplinary integration of fashion design and technology in the future.

Acknowledgment

The author acknowledges the support provided during the image analysis process.

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