

การแต่งกายกับภูมิทัศน์เชิงสัญลักษณ์ในพื้นที่คาเฟ่: กรณีศึกษาร้านกาแฟ

One Step Garden ณ นครเชียงใหม่

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะและรูปแบบการบรรจบกันของการแต่งกายในฐานะภูมิทัศน์เชิงสัญลักษณ์ในพื้นที่คาเฟ่ และเพื่ออธิบายว่าบริบทเชิงพื้นที่อาจสัมพันธ์กับความคล้อยคลึงของการแต่งกายของผู้ใช้พื้นที่อย่างไร โดยใช้ร้านกาแฟ One Step Garden ในนครเชียงใหม่เป็นกรณีศึกษา งานวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพแบบกรณีศึกษา ร่วมกับการใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนาเพื่อสนับสนุนการตีความเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บข้อมูลจากร้านกาแฟ 3 สาขา ได้แก่ สาขา Guangfulin สาขา Fresh Brew Workshop และสาขา Dinghai Shenzhen ข้อมูลประกอบด้วยภาพถ่ายและภาพนิ่งจากวิดีโอจำนวน 23 ภาพ/เฟรม รวมผู้ถูกสังเกต 126 คน รวมถึงข้อมูลเปรียบเทียบจากพื้นที่โดยรอบสาขา Guangfulin การวิเคราะห์มุ่งพิจารณาสี โทนสี รูปแบบการแต่งกาย และความเด่นชัดทางสายตา โดยใช้ค่าความถี่และร้อยละเพื่อแสดงแนวโน้มเบื้องต้น และตีความผ่านกรอบภูมิทัศน์เชิงสัญลักษณ์ สัญลักษณ์ภาพ การแต่งกายในฐานะการสื่อสารอวัจนภาษา และแบบจำลองการสื่อสารของ Jakobson ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การแต่งกายของลูกค้าส่วนใหญ่ใช้สีที่มีความอึดตัวต่ำ เช่น สีดำ สีขาว สีเทา และสีน้ำตาล ขณะที่สีสดปรากฏน้อยกว่า รูปแบบการแต่งกายโดยรวมมีลักษณะเรียบง่าย เป็นธรรมชาติ และไม่เน้นความโดดเด่นทางสายตา ลักษณะ

ดังกล่าวสอดคล้องกับบรรยากาศของคาเฟ่ที่เน้นวัสดุธรรมชาติ แสงอบอุ่น และโทนสี
อ่อนนุ่ม ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า ความคล้ายคลึงของการแต่งกายอาจสัมพันธ์กับ
บริบทเชิงพื้นที่ รสนิยมทางสุนทรียะ และการเลือกใช้พื้นที่ของผู้บริโภค งานวิจัยนี้เห็น
ว่าการแต่งกายสามารถเป็นองค์ประกอบหนึ่งของภูมิทัศน์เชิงสัญลักษณ์ในพื้นที่บริโภค
และมีส่วนร่วมในการสร้างความหมายทางสายตาและสุนทรียะของพื้นที่คาเฟ่

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Clothing and Semiotic Landscape in Café Space: A Case Study of One Step Garden Café in Shanghai

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to study the characteristics and convergence patterns of clothing as part of the semiotic landscape of café space, with a focus on how spatial context may be associated with similarities in customers' clothing expressions. One Step Garden cafés in Shanghai was selected as a case study. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach supported by descriptive statistics. Data were collected from three branches: Guangfulin Shop, Fresh Brew Workshop, and Dinghai Shenzhen Shop. The dataset consists of 23 photographs and video still frames covering 126 observed individuals, including comparative data from the surrounding Guangfulin heritage area. Clothing expressions were analyzed in terms of color, tone, style, and visual salience. Frequencies and percentages were used to identify basic patterns, while the main interpretation was conducted through semiotic landscape theory, visual semiotics, clothing as nonverbal communication, and Jakobson's communication model. The findings show that customers' clothing was dominated by low-saturation colors, particularly black, white, gray, and brown, while bright colors appeared less frequently. Clothing styles were generally simple, natural, and visually understated. These patterns visually corresponded with the cafés' spatial atmosphere, which is characterized by natural materials, warm lighting, greenery, and muted color tones. The study suggests that clothing convergence in this context may be associated with spatial atmosphere, aesthetic preference, and users' selection of space.

It argues that clothing can function as a component of the semiotic landscape of consumption spaces and contribute to the visual and aesthetic meaning-making of café space.

Keywords: Café space, clothing, convergence, semiotic landscape, spatial context



Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, cafés have increasingly developed beyond spaces for beverage consumption into social and cultural spaces associated with lifestyle, aesthetic preference, and identity expression. Previous studies have also shown that coffee shops function as spaces of consumption, social connection, and urban sociability, positioned between public and private space (Ferreira et al., 2021; Pozos, 2015). Through spatial design, atmosphere creation, and consumption practices, cafés embody the cultural values and aesthetic orientations of particular social groups (Ahmad et al., 2022). In the digital media era, cafés have additionally become important visual and symbolic spaces connected to photography, social media content creation, and online self-presentation (Dechaburananon, 2025). Therefore, cafés are not merely commercial spaces, but also semiotic spaces in which atmosphere, visual elements, user behavior, and symbolic meaning interact with one another.

This study focuses on the café brand “One Step Garden” in Shanghai, China, as a case study. According to the brand’s official description, One Step Garden emphasizes the creation of “green commercial spaces” and promotes a “natural lifestyle aesthetic” through experiential spaces designed to strengthen the connection between people and nature (One Step Garden, n.d.)¹. Although some branches incorporate traditional Chinese-style elements while others adopt more contemporary forms, the overall spatial atmosphere consistently emphasizes greenery, natural materials, warm lighting, and low-saturation color tones, creating a relatively stable aesthetic identity across branches.

The motivation for this study emerged from the researcher’s repeated experiences as a regular visitor of One Step Garden cafés. During field observation, the researcher noticed not only the distinctive atmosphere of the café space, but also recurring similarities in customers’ clothing expressions and patterns of spatial behavior. Many customers

¹ One Step Garden. (n.d.). Official website. Retrieved May 23, 2026, from <https://www.yichizhijian.com/>

stayed for relatively long periods of time, often bringing laptops for work or study, while the overall atmosphere remained quiet and restrained despite the absence of explicit rules regulating noise levels. In addition, customers' clothing frequently appeared visually coordinated with the spatial environment, particularly through the predominance of low-saturation colors and understated styles, thereby reinforcing the visual and symbolic atmosphere of the café space. These observations suggest that clothing may gradually become part of the semiotic atmosphere of the café space, contributing to the co-construction of a shared visual environment between the space and its users.

From an academic perspective, previous studies on cafés have mainly focused on consumer behavior, leisure culture, and spatial experience, while studies on clothing have largely emphasized identity expression and fashion communication at the individual level. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the relationship between clothing, spatial context, identity expression, and symbolic atmosphere within specific consumption spaces. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between clothing and semiotic landscape within the café context of One Step Garden in order to contribute to discussions on space, symbolic communication, and consumer culture from a semiotic perspective.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze the types, characteristics, and convergence patterns of customers' clothing semiotic expression at One Step Garden Café Shanghai, and to interpret how spatial context may be associated with the similarity of clothing expressions among space users.

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types, characteristics, and convergence patterns can be identified in customers' clothing semiotic expression at One Step Garden Café?

2. How may spatial context be associated with the similarity of clothing expressions among space users?

Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

To ensure clarity and consistency in the analytical framework, this study defines several key concepts, including spatial context, Semiotic Landscape, Clothing as Non-verbal Communication, and Convergence and Spatial Self-selection. Based on the theoretical views of relevant scholars, these concepts are explained as follows.

(1) Spatial Context

Spatial context refers to a space composed of physical, social, and symbolic elements, which largely influence and shape how people construct meaning and perceive a space. Hall (1966) argues that space is not merely a backdrop for social activities but significantly influences behavior and communication. Meanwhile, Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes space as a “socially produced space,” arguing that it is continuously constructed through the interaction of social structures, cultural systems, and everyday practices.

In this study, the spatial context of the café at One Step Garden includes not only its physical structure but also its atmosphere, aesthetic design, use of color, material selection, and the cultural meanings conveyed to its users.

(2) Semiotic Landscape

Semiotic landscape refers to the construction of meaning in public space through various visual and symbolic elements beyond written language, such as images, colors, spatial arrangement, architecture, and design. Compared with the traditional concept of linguistic landscape, which mainly focuses on visible written language in public spaces (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), semiotic landscape emphasizes multimodal and nonverbal forms of communication within spatial environments (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010).

In this study, the café space of One Step Garden is understood as a semiotic landscape constructed through the interaction between spatial atmosphere, visual design, and users’ clothing expressions.

(3) Clothing as Non-verbal Communication

Clothing as non-verbal language conceptualizes dress as a symbolic system that conveys social, cultural, and aesthetic meanings. Barnard (2002) suggests that clothing functions like language in social interaction, expressing identity, taste, and social status, even without explicit intent. Similarly, Barthes (1983) views clothing as a structured semiotic system whose meanings must be interpreted within specific social and cultural contexts.

In this study, clothing is not treated merely as individual expression but as a form of spatial communication emerging within the café context, co-constructed through interactions among space, context, and users.

(4) Convergence and Spatial Self-selection

Convergence refers to the tendency for individuals' behaviors, styles, or forms of expression to gradually become similar within the same social or spatial environment. This phenomenon is often associated with social influence and shared social norms (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Meanwhile, spatial self-selection suggests that individuals tend to choose spaces that align with their preferences, lifestyles, and identity orientations (Belk, 1988).

In this study, convergence refers to the similarities observed in customers' clothing expressions within the café space, while spatial self-selection helps explain how individuals with similar aesthetic preferences may gather within the same spatial context.

Based on the above conceptual discussion, this study argues that clothing can be understood as a form of semiotic expression within café space, while the café itself functions as a semiotic landscape constructed through the interaction between spatial atmosphere, visual elements, and users' practices. In this context, the similarities observed in customers' clothing expressions may reflect processes of convergence and spatial self-selection within a shared aesthetic environment. This understanding forms the core theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of this study.

2.2 Related Studies

Previous studies have widely recognized clothing as a form of nonverbal and symbolic communication. Clothing not only functions as physical appearance, but also conveys identity, personality traits, aesthetic preferences, and social values (Barnard, 2002; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Barthes (1983) further argues that clothing operates as a semiotic system whose meanings are shaped through cultural and social interpretation. From the perspective of communication theory, Jakobson (1960) suggests that communication is not limited to verbal language, but also involves aesthetic form and contextual meaning. In this sense, clothing can be understood as a semiotic expression through which individuals communicate symbolic meanings within specific social and spatial contexts. In addition, research in color psychology suggests that colors can evoke different emotional and psychological associations, influencing perception and emotional response within particular contexts (Elliot & Maier, 2014).

Regarding space and identity, previous studies indicate that individuals tend to choose spaces that align with their lifestyles, personalities, and identities. Belk (1988) argues that consumption practices and selected environments can reflect the “extended self” of individuals, while Proshansky et al. (1983) suggest that repeatedly used spaces can contribute to the formation of place identity. Within café contexts, spatial atmosphere, aesthetic design, and patterns of use may influence how users perceive and position themselves within a space. As semiotic spaces, cafés communicate symbolic meanings not only through signs and physical design, but also through atmosphere, visual coordination, and users’ practices.

Studies related to convergence and spatial preference further suggest that individuals with similar preferences and lifestyles may gradually gather within similar environments. Research in consumer behavior and tourism has shown that personality traits can influence spatial preference and activity patterns (Kovačić et al., 2022). This perspective is closely related to the idea of spatial self-selection, which suggests that individuals tend to choose spaces where they

experience aesthetic compatibility or a sense of belonging. Under such conditions, similarities in clothing expression may emerge not necessarily through direct imitation, but through shared aesthetic preferences and interaction within the same spatial environment. Therefore, clothing can become part of the semiotic atmosphere of a café space and contribute to the co-construction of a shared visual environment between the space and its users.

2.3 Research Gaps

Existing studies generally regard clothing as a symbolic form of nonverbal expression that reflects identity and aesthetic preference. Meanwhile, spatial studies suggest that individuals tend to choose environments consistent with their lifestyles and identity orientations. However, these two research fields remain largely separated. Although previous studies have examined clothing symbolism, personality traits, and spatial preference, relatively few studies have analyzed clothing as a form of semiotic expression within specific consumption spaces. In café contexts, existing research has mainly focused on consumer behavior, lifestyle, and spatial experience, with limited attention to the relationship between clothing, spatial atmosphere, and symbolic meaning. Even when customer behavior or café atmosphere is discussed, clothing is often mentioned only superficially, without examining how it interacts with spatial context or contributes to the semiotic atmosphere of the space.

Therefore, this study adopts the perspective of clothing as semiotic expression and situates it within the café context of One Step Garden to explore the convergence of clothing expression and its relationship with spatial atmosphere and symbolic meaning, thereby addressing the lack of integrated and context-based analysis in existing research.

Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, supported by descriptive statistics, to examine the convergence of clothing semiotic expression in One Step Garden cafés in Shanghai. Frequency and percentage are used not for statistical generalization, but to identify patterns of clothing colors, styles, and visual expressions as supporting evidence for qualitative interpretation.

The analysis is guided by semiotic landscape theory (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010), clothing as nonverbal communication (Barnard, 2002; Barthes, 1983), and Jakobson's (1960) communication model, especially the context and poetic functions, to interpret how café space, atmosphere, and clothing interact to produce symbolic meaning.

3.2 Research Sites and Data Collection

Shanghai was selected as the study location because of its high demographic diversity, which makes it an appropriate context for examining whether clothing convergence occurs across different spatial settings. Although One Step Garden has multiple branches across China, this study focuses on three branches in Shanghai. These branches were selected because they share a common brand aesthetic while differing meaningfully in their spatial and social contexts. Specifically, all three branches display a consistent visual identity characterized by greenery, natural materials, warm lighting, and a calm atmosphere conducive to extended stays, work, and rest. However, each branch is situated within a distinct spatial and social environment.

3.2.1 Research Sites

- **Guangfulin Shop (Songjiang District)**

Located within a historical cultural tourism area with a traditional Chinese architectural atmosphere. The customer base consists primarily of tourists, with some working visitors. Additional photographs were taken outside the café in the surrounding tourist area to enable comparison between internal and external clothing patterns.

- **Fresh Brew Workshop (Songjiang District)**

Although located in the same district as Guangfulin Shop, this branch presents a distinctly more modern atmosphere. The customer base consists primarily of individuals engaged in work or study rather than tourism.

- **Dinghai Shenzhen Shop (Baoshan District)**

Situated in a more developed urban commercial area, with the café located inside a building. The customer base is more varied in background and purpose of visit. This branch was additionally selected to reduce the influence of district-specific factors, given that the first two branches are both located in Songjiang District.

3.2.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from 7 December 2025 to 15 February 2026, as follows:

- Guangfulin Shop — on-site observation, 7 December 2025
- Fresh Brew Workshop — on-site observation, 6 January 2026
- Dinghai Shenzhen Shop — online observation using video materials sourced from TikTok, 15 February 2026

For the two on-site branches, the researcher entered each café as an ordinary customer and conducted non-participant observation for approximately three to four hours per visit (13:00–17:00). Photographic records were taken to capture general scenes within the café environment rather than focusing on specific individuals, supplemented by field notes documenting spatial features, customer behaviors, clothing styles, and overall atmospheric impressions.

For Dinghai Shenzhen Shop, on-site observation was not feasible. Data were instead collected through a TikTok video identified by searching the keyword “One Step Garden Shanghai”. The clip capturing the largest number of customers within a single scene was selected, as other available clips focused primarily on spatial atmosphere rather than customers. Eight still frames were captured from the clip for analysis. However, TikTok-based data may be limited by camera angle,

editing, and scene selection. Therefore, they were used only as supplementary visual evidence.

To protect privacy, the analysis focused only on overall clothing patterns and did not identify individual customers. Identifiable facial features and account information were not-included in the article

3.2.3 Dataset Overview

Branch	Observation Method	Photos/ Frames	Customers
Guangfulin Shop (inside)	On-site	6 photos	37
Guangfulin Shop (outside)	On-site	2 photos	31
Fresh Brew Workshop	On-site	7 photos	17
Dinghai Shenzhen Shop	TikTok (1 clip)	8 frames	41
Total	23 photos/frames		126

Duplicate appearances of the same individuals across multiple images were identified and excluded during data organization. The research subjects were customers present and actively using the café space during each observation period. The study focuses on overall patterns of clothing expression within the spatial context rather than on individual demographic variables such as gender, age, or occupation.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed through a combination of descriptive and interpretive approaches. The analytical procedures were carried out as follows:

(1) Data organization and preparation

The collected visual data, photographic records, video clip and field notes were first organized and reviewed.

(2) Coding of clothing characteristics

Clothing data were coded based on three key dimensions, including color and tone, style, and visual salience. Prior studies commonly distinguish between vivid (high-saturation) and muted (low-saturation) colors in terms of color classification, noting differences in their levels of visual salience and psychological impact. Vivid colors are generally

more attention-grabbing and visually stimulating, whereas muted colors tend to appear more restrained and less salient (Elliot & Maier, 2014; Singh, 2006). Based on this distinction, this study adopts an operational classification of clothing colors for analytical purposes: black, white, gray, beige, brown, and dark blue-denim are categorized as low-saturation colors, while red, yellow, orange, pink, and floral patterns are categorized as high-saturation colors. In terms of style, clothing was examined based on overall form and visual expression. Clothing style was coded according to observable features such as degree of formality, layering, and overall visual impression. Visual salience was assessed through color brightness, contrast with the spatial background, pattern prominence, and the degree to which clothing stood out within the café scene.

Coding was conducted by the researcher using the same criteria across all branches, and ambiguous cases were reviewed repeatedly by comparing photographic records with field notes.

(3) Identification of convergence patterns

After coding, patterns of similarity were identified within each café context, examining whether customers' clothing shared similar color tones, visual intensity, and overall aesthetic direction. Particular attention was given to the alignment between customers' clothing and the café's spatial characteristics, especially in terms of muted color palettes and non-prominent styles, as well as similarities among customers themselves. Frequency counts of clothing categories were calculated from the photographic data to reveal dominant trends and provide empirical support for the observed patterns, functioning as supplementary evidence rather than primary findings.

(4) Interpretation based on theoretical frameworks

The identified patterns were then interpreted through four analytical lenses:

- **Semiotic Landscape** — to analyze clothing, color, and style as semiotic signs co-constructing meaning within the café space.
- **Visual Semiotics** — to analyze meaning derived from color, form, and visual composition of the overall clothing landscape

- **Clothing as Nonverbal Communication** — to analyze clothing as an expression of identity, aesthetic taste, and spatial belonging
- **Jakobson's Communication Model** — to analyze the role of context in governing symbolic meaning within the space, and the poetic function in explaining the aesthetic coherence between customers' clothing and spatial atmosphere

It should be noted that this study does not assume customers consciously adjust their clothing to match the café environment. Rather, the analysis focuses on how clothing expressions, spatial atmosphere, and shared aesthetic preferences may together produce observable patterns of visual convergence within the same café space.

Research Results

This chapter presents findings based on field data, structured according to the logic of “space—clothing—convergence—symbolic meaning”, sequentially describing the spatial semiotic characteristics of One Step Garden cafés, the semiotic expressions of clothing, their convergence within the café spatial context, and the symbolic meanings reflected in these elements.

4.1 Spatial Semiotic Characteristics of One Step Garden Cafés

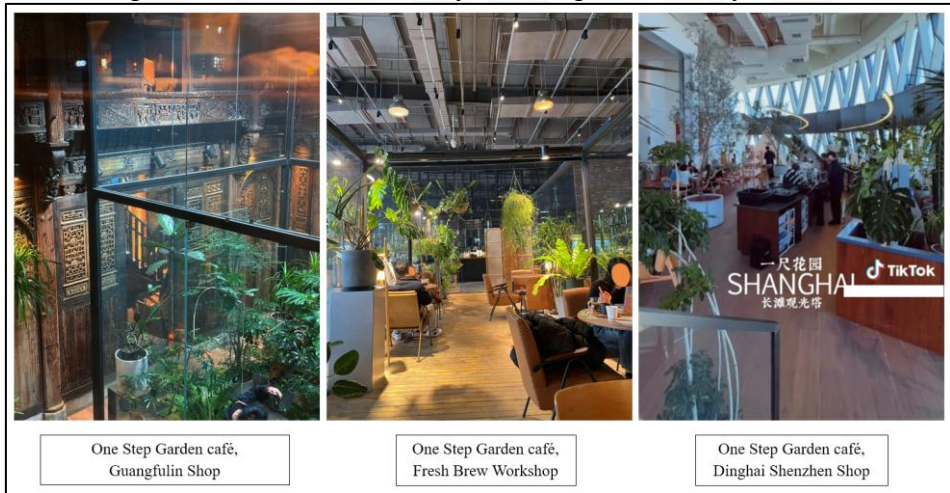
Based on field observation of One Step Garden cafés, the overall design reflects a natural aesthetic through the use of wood, cotton and linen fabrics, plants, and low-saturation colors such as green, brown, black, and white. Bright colors and strong contrasts are largely absent, creating a restrained visual style that functions as part of the café's semiotic system and suggests calmness, simplicity, and closeness to nature. Natural light and warm indoor lighting further produce a soft visual effect, reinforcing the café's calm atmosphere as a key nonverbal element of spatial communication.

In terms of atmosphere and sensory experience, the consistent use of color, material, and lighting produces a low level of visual stimulation, creating an environment that appears calm and warm. In Jakobson's (1960) terms, the spatial design functions as context, a structured communicative environment that frames how meaning is produced and

perceived within the space. Observations show that many customers appeared to stay for relatively long periods, suggesting that the space may be interpreted as encouraging lingering, reflection, and quiet activity, functioning as a semi-public space.

In terms of function, One Step Garden operates simultaneously as a social leisure space and a place for individual work and reading, with different modes of use coexisting without conflict. Across the three branches, low-saturation colors, natural materials, and culturally grounded symbolic elements form a stable spatial identity and communicate a coherent aesthetic orientation.

Figure 1
The atmosphere in three branches of One Step Garden café



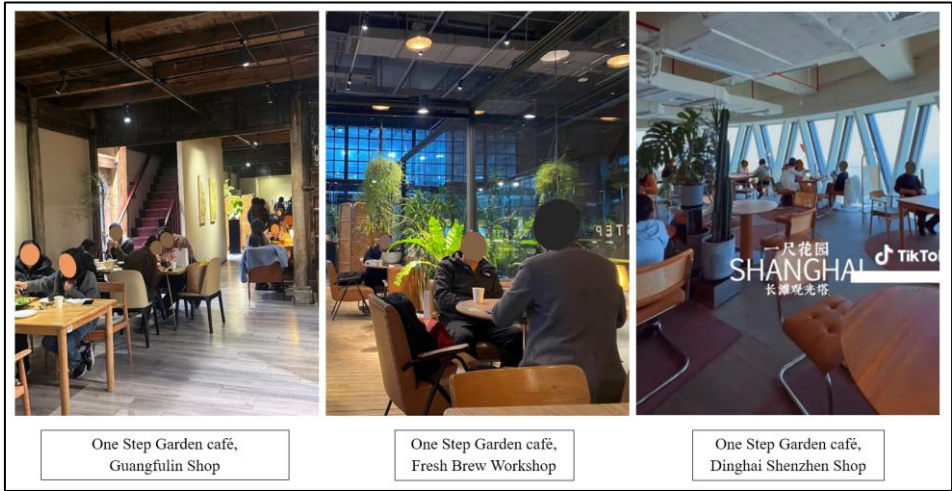
Although each branch differs slightly in spatial context, they share similar core semiotic features. Guangfulin Shop contains stronger traditional Chinese semiotic elements reflecting its location within a cultural tourism area. Fresh Brew Workshop presents a more contemporary atmosphere oriented toward individual work and study. Dinghai Shenzhen Shop, situated within a commercial building in a more urbanized area, appears to have a more varied customer base. Despite

these differences, low-saturation colors, natural materials, and a calm atmosphere remain consistent.

4.2 Overall Patterns of Clothing Semiotic Expressions

During the observation in the café, customers’ clothing was mainly in low-saturation colors such as black, white, gray, and brown, while bright colors appeared less frequently. Overall, the clothing colors did not create strong visual contrast with the spatial environment, forming a soft and restrained visual scene. This pattern allows clothing to function as part of the café’s broader semiotic atmosphere. The following are examples of customers’ clothing.

Figure 2
The space user’s clothing in three branches of One Step Garden café



Based on the coding of observed clothing color items, the results are as follows:

Table 1

Clothing color statistics of three branches of One Step Garden cafés

Café branch	Num. of people	The color of clothing worn by space users (piece)											
		black	white	beige	gray	brown	dark Blue/denim	yellow	pink	blue	red	orange	floral
Guangfulin Shop	37	32	6	2	13	6	1	0	2	0	1	0	0
	%	50.79	9.52	3.17	20.63	9.52	1.59	0.00	3.17	0.00	1.59	0.00	0.00
Fresh Brew Workshop	17	21	3	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	%	70.00	10.00	0.00	10.00	6.67	3.33	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dinghai Shenzhen	41	35	9	0	2	4	4	0	0	3	1	1	1
	%	58.33	15.00	0.00	3.33	6.67	6.67	0.00	0.00	5.00	1.67	1.67	1.67

** Note. Percentages are calculated based on the number of coded clothing color items, not the number of observed individuals. One individual may contribute more than one color item.*

As shown in Table 1, black is the most frequent clothing color in all three branches: 50.79% in Guangfulin, 70% in Fresh Brew Workshop, and 58.33% in Dinghai Shenzhen. Other low-saturation colors include white, beige, gray, brown, and dark blue/denim, accounting for 44.43% in Guangfulin, 30% in Fresh Brew Workshop, and 31.67% in Dinghai Shenzhen. Bright colors appear less frequently: Guangfulin shows only pink and red (4.76%); no bright colors appear in Fresh Brew Workshop; Dinghai Shenzhen shows blue, red, orange, and floral patterns (10.01%). These figures serve as supporting evidence. The dominance of low-saturation colors carries semiotic significance beyond its visual appearance. At a connotative level, such color choices signal restraint, understatement, and an urban sensibility oriented toward quiet and mindful consumption, values that align closely with the café's own aesthetic identity. In this sense, customers' clothing does not merely coexist with the spatial environment but actively participates in the production of its semiotic atmosphere.

To further explore the relationship between spatial context and clothing expression, a comparison was made between customers inside Guangfulin Shop and visitors in the surrounding cultural heritage area outside.

Figure 3
The space user's clothing at Guangfulin Cultural Heritage site



Field data show that tourists outside the café wore bright-colored clothing more often. Based on photos taken at two locations in Figure 3, the results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2
Clothing color statistics of Guangfulin Cultural Heritage site

Guangfulin cultural heritage site	Num. of people	The color of clothing worn by space users (piece)								
		black	white	beige	gray	brown	dark Blue/denim	yellow	pink	blue
Entrance to Guangfulin heritage site	5	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1
On the bridge in front of the café	26	29	5	1	1	2	4	0	4	3
Total	31	32	6	1	1	3	4	1	6	4
Percentage (%)		55.17	10.34	1.72	1.72	5.17	6.90	1.72	10.34	6.90

** Note. Percentages are calculated based on the number of coded clothing color items, not the number of observed individuals. One individual may contribute more than one color item.*

As shown in Table 2, bright-colored clothing accounts for 18.96% among visitors in the outdoor heritage area, -which is higher than that observed inside any of the three café branches. This difference suggests that the café space may function as a distinct semiotic setting, within which a more restrained and aesthetically coherent clothing pattern tends



to emerge, in contrast to the more visually varied clothing observed in the surrounding tourist environment.

In terms of clothing style, customers' clothing is generally simple, natural, and comfort-oriented, with few instances of excessive decoration, exaggerated design, or strong individual expression. At a connotative level, this stylistic tendency reflects an aesthetic of restraint and everyday comfort, consistent with the calm and natural atmosphere of the café. When viewed collectively, individual clothing expressions within the same space form a shared semiotic landscape that is visually cohesive, aesthetically understated, and broadly aligned with the spatial identity of the café.

4.3 Convergence between Spatial Context and Clothing Semiotic Expressions

Visual correspondence: Field observation shows that the café space mainly uses low-saturation colors, while customers' clothing is also mostly in basic colors such as black, white, gray, and brown. Overall, clothing does not create strong contrast with natural materials and the simple spatial background, but appears visually coordinated. In this sense, clothing functions as a visual message that becomes part of the café's overall semiotic landscape.

Atmospheric correspondence: The calm and restrained atmosphere of the space is consistent with customers' generally understated clothing expressions. The use of QR code ordering and a relatively non-interactive service model also supports a quiet and independent environment. Within this context, clothing appears less visually prominent and more restrained, aligning with the café's calm spatial atmosphere. In Jakobson's (1960) terms, the café environment functions as a context that helps frame how customers' clothing expressions are perceived within the space. This alignment is also reflected in customers' activities. Whether working, reading, or socializing, their clothing tends to be comfortable, natural, and understated, suggesting a coherence between how customers use the space and how their clothing appears within it.

Convergence pattern: Across all three branches, the observed clothing semiotic expressions show a pattern of convergence in both color and style. This convergence does not represent complete uniformity, but rather a shared tendency toward visual restraint and aesthetic coherence. In Jakobson’s (1960) terms, this alignment may be understood through the notion of poetic function, whereby the combination of visual signs, including colors, materials, and styles, produces an aesthetic coherence and contribute to a shared semiotic landscape within the café space.

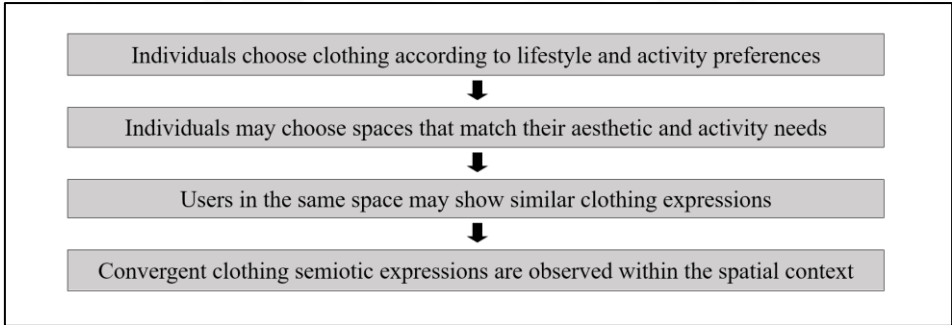
In this sense, clothing can be seen as part of the shared visual composition of the café, contributing to the overall impression of One Step Garden as a calm, natural, and aesthetically coherent semiotic space.

Discussion

5.1 The Relationship between Spatial Choice and Clothing Convergence

Based on the findings of this study, the convergence of clothing semiotic expressions is not simply accidental, but may be understood through a process in which individual clothing choices, spatial preferences, and shared aesthetic tendencies gradually come together within the same café context, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Spatial aggregation process of clothing semiotic expressions



This process may be understood as a tendency of self-selection and spatial aggregation rather than direct spatial determination. Space users may not consciously adjust their clothing to match the space.

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Rather, those whose aesthetic preferences and activity needs correspond with the café context may be more likely to appear in the same space. In this sense, the café environment functions as a context in Jakobson's (1960) terms, framing how clothing expressions are perceived and how visual coherence is formed within the space.

Previous studies have viewed clothing as a symbolic system for expressing identity (Barnard, 2002; Barthes, 1983), suggesting that individuals use clothing to communicate identity and aesthetic preference. At the same time, spatial studies suggest that people tend to choose spaces aligned with their self-expression and identity (Belk, 1988), while space also contributes to identity construction (Proshansky et al., 1983).

This study partly supports these views by showing a relationship between clothing and space at the level of visual and semiotic expression. Rather than focusing only on individual clothing expression, this study suggests that clothing convergence may also emerge through the interaction between spatial atmosphere and customers' aesthetic preferences, even without explicit coordination among space users. However, since this study is based mainly on observation rather than interviews, this interpretation remains tentative and requires further support from customer interviews or additional contextual evidence.

5.2 The Related Social and Cultural Factors

The formation of this convergence may be related to several social and cultural factors. First, in contemporary cities, café culture is increasingly associated with creative work, reading, being alone, and light social interaction. Natural, understated, and calm styles may become meaningful visual qualities within such spaces. Second, in the digital media era, cafés also serve as spaces for photography and social display, where low-saturation colors and simple clothing styles may create a more refined and visually coherent effect. Third, this tendency may also relate to broader urban consumer aesthetics, such as restraint, minimalism, and a natural aesthetic.

From Jakobson's (1960) perspective, this convergence can be further understood through the poetic function of visual communication.

The selection and combination of spatial colors, materials, lighting, and clothing styles work together to produce aesthetic coherence within the café's semiotic landscape. In this sense, the study not only explains the convergence of clothing semiotic expressions in spatial contexts, but also suggests an interaction between individual preference and spatial structure, providing a perspective for semiotic landscape and spatial culture studies.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the convergence of clothing semiotic expressions within the spatial context of One Step Garden cafés in Shanghai, based on field observation and spatial analysis of three branches. The findings show that customers' clothing presents a relatively stable visual pattern within the café space.

In terms of color, low-saturation tones such as black, white, gray, and brown appeared frequently across the three branches, with black being the most common. Bright colors appeared much less frequently. Even in the Guangfulin tourist area, where brighter clothing was more visible outside the café, the clothing colors observed inside the café showed a stronger tendency toward low-saturation tones. This suggests a noticeable difference between the visual patterns inside and outside the café space.

In terms of style, customers' clothing was generally simple, natural, and functional. Exaggerated designs and highly prominent personal expressions appeared less frequently. Although individual differences remained, customers' clothing showed similarity in color, style, and visual salience. This similarity does not indicate complete uniformity, but rather a shared tendency toward visual coordination and aesthetic restraint.

Overall, the convergence of clothing semiotic expressions may be related to the café's spatial context. The use of low-saturation colors, natural materials, warm lighting, and a calm atmosphere provides an aesthetic framework within which clothing expressions appear visually

coordinated with the space. This suggests that spatial context can play a role in shaping how clothing is perceived and how visual coherence is formed within consumption spaces.

Finally, in terms of practical application, these findings may help café operators and space designers better understand the relationship between spatial atmosphere and users' visual expressions. Attention to color, material, lighting, and atmosphere may support the creation of a more coherent spatial image.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although this study provides a systematic observation and analysis of the convergence of clothing semiotic expressions in the spatial context of One Step Garden cafés, there are still some limitations. First, the study is based on three branches with a relatively limited sample, and the data were collected within a specific time period rather than through long-term observation. Second, the data sources are not entirely consistent, as some data were collected from TikTok content, which may have been subject to selection, editing, or limited perspectives. Third, the study relies solely on observational data and color/style classification, which involves a degree of subjectivity, without interview data from customers, conclusions regarding spatial self-selection and aesthetic identity remain tentative. In addition, the data collection period did not account for seasonal or festival effects, such as New Year, the Chinese New Year, or Valentine's Day, which may influence customers' clothing choices. Therefore, the findings mainly reflect clothing semiotic patterns within a specific time and spatial context.

Future research may expand the sample and scope, conduct longer-term observation, incorporate customer interviews, and account for seasonal variation to improve generalizability and explanatory power, and compare different types of spaces to further examine the interaction between space, clothing, and socio-cultural factors.

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