



Drama Costumes and Character Shaping: Visual Narrative from Desk Design to Stage Costume

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Abstract: Outstanding theatrical costume is not only the crystallization of the designer's efforts, but also plays a vital role in the process of characterization. It not only reveals the identity of the character, but also adds color to the actor's performance and makes the character image more layered and beautiful. From the desktop design to the production and presentation of stage costumes is a two-dimensional to three-dimensional transformation process, this process not only involves how the designer through the conception, design and production of clothing to interpret the role of the era in which the background of the regional environment, personality traits, inner feelings, future destiny, etc.; also involves the costume and other departments is how to communicate and collaborate with the audience to present a vivid stage Performance. Throughout the process, the costume design department has to go through the process of conceptualizing the character image, drawing the costume rendering, communicating and negotiating with other departments, and then determining the style, color and fabric of the costume, and then starting the production and finally presenting it to the audience on the stage, so as to complete the shaping of the character's image and the role of its visual narrative.

Keywords: drama, script, stage costume, desk design, character shaping

1. Introduction

Theater art is a comprehensive art centered on performance, and the complete presentation of theater art requires the coordination of various departments. In theater performance, stage art plays an important role, is an important part of the visual performance, and stage costumes as the actor's "role packaging", is an inseparable part of his role. When the audience is watching a play, they will often have a pleasing feeling to the beautiful and chic stage costumes.

Stage costume is not only the actor's coat, but also an extension of the character image. Each piece of stage costume unites the designer's deep understanding of the role, and through the costume, the designer is able to create a more three-dimensional and vivid image of the character[1].

Stage costumes, as a visual narrative in theater performances, are usually divided into two styles: realistic and realistic. The choice of style is based on the director's design conception of the whole play, which is determined at the desk design stage. Either style affects the audience's perception and understanding of the characters, as well as the atmosphere and viewing experience of the entire performance.

1.1 Realistic style stage costumes

Realistic style stage costumes follow the historical reality, its expression is a real reproduction of a piece of life, the requirements of the costume is the style should be based on historical facts, emphasizing the real environment, from the styling line to the decorative patterns, from the choice of fabrics to the clothing process, from the color to the texture, etc., are striving to be accurate and relevant, in the realism of the play and the historical drama is often used.

For example, the play "Teahouse" by the Beijing People's Art Theater (China), which takes place in the period from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the period of civil war and improvement, focuses on the changes in the fate of characters of different status in the torrent of the times. The use of robes and coats allows the audience to clearly understand the period setting in which the story takes place. [2] The characters in the play come in all shapes and sizes, and their social status varies greatly. For example, Qin Zhongyi, the representative of the aristocracy, as a Manchu rich young man, landlord and capitalist, his elegant white silk tunic with dark patterns and gorgeous embroidery shows his nobility and affluence, which makes his "richness" distinctly manifested, and his vest of ultramarine green satin with gold edging and silk octagonal hat with jade trimmings are leisurely and refreshing, which is very much in line with his shrewd and bold character. Enterprising

character. Wang Lifa, as the shopkeeper of the teahouse, has a simple, less saturated blue-gray tunic that not only sets off his status and identity, but also better sets off Qin Zhongyi's social status (Figure 1). The stage costume fulfills its function of visual narrative well.



Figure 1: Beijing People's Art Theater Play "The Tea House"

1.2 Writing style stage costumes

The stage costumes of the writing style are not simply reproducing the real costumes of historical life, but emphasizing the subjective consciousness of the creator. Through unique design and creativity, it breaks the rules, breaks through the limitations of time and identity, and uses costumes as a medium to express the character's qualities and emotions. This style of clothing focuses on the use of lines and colors, and is intended to give people a certain psychological and emotional implication and impact, and the costume of the writing style is often a symbolic symbol that explains the deeper connotation of the script and the mentality of the characters in the play.

For example, in the Beijing Modern Dance Company's dance drama "Zodiac", the costumes of the twelve Chinese zodiac signs are characterized by their individuality, but they are not like common animal figures, they are more like twelve "people" with personalities. The costume design is cool and anthropomorphic. The details of each animal are designed to resemble the animal, but also to fit the actor's personality and feelings, and to fit the actor's body.

The costumes are designed with a symbolic language - black, flesh tones, fur, naked bodies and the necessary visual symbols that intertwine the primitive world of nature, showing untamed wildlife. Coupled with the actors' variegated physical movements, the bestiality of different animals is interpreted accurately and vividly, while leaving the audience with a wide space for imagination. In order to unify with the performance style of the whole play, the characters are also very restrained in the use of colors - large areas of black and flesh colors, creating full-bodied characters with both oriental philosophical underpinnings and international modernization. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Beijing Modern Dance Company Dance Theater "Zodiac"

2. Role analysis and design

Character analysis involves delving deeper into the characters in a script, reading the script to analyze the trends of the

story, the social status of the characters and the environment in which they live, as well as understanding their personality traits, emotional states, and relationships with other characters. Script reading and character analysis are the basis for costume designers to understand the characters and to design costumes.

Based on the in-depth analysis of the script and characters, costume designers can “customize” a unique costume image for each character that fits the character’s personality. Through careful design and production, the costume can highlight the character’s features and emotional state, etc., and create a vivid and dynamic character, and help the audience understand the character more intuitively through the narrative of the costume. Through the narrative of the costume, it helps the audience to understand the character more intuitively. Excellent costume design not only serves the plot, but also enriches the visual effect on the stage, so that the audience can be immersed in the theater world created by the creators.

2.1 Understanding of the character and collection of material

Script is one of the forms of literary expression techniques, but compared with poetry, prose, novels, etc., its purpose is very clear, that is - performance. [3] As a costume designer, after we get the script, the first thing we have to do is to read the script, in reading the script we have to understand the style of the script genre, the plot, the background of the times and other basic information, more importantly, we have to go deep into the inner world of the characters, to grasp the character’s personality, identity, status, etc., so as to bring the characters to life on the stage.

The work of characterization is summarized in two aspects, one is to understand the character and the other is to embody the character. On the one hand, we need to make a deep interpretation of the character, to explore its inner world, the motives and emotions of its actions, in order to better grasp its essence. Only with a deep understanding of the characters can we accurately reflect their spiritual connotations in clothing design. On the other hand, designers need to present the characters through clothing. In this process, we need to communicate and collaborate with the director, actors and other departments of the choreography. On the basis of the director’s overall conception, the stage scheduling of the main scenes and the specific requirements for the character image, the design conception of the costumes is carried out. Stage art departments are an inseparable artistic whole, and communication with the set, lighting, makeup and other departments can not be ignored, so we must communicate with other departments of the choreography before design conception. Only when all departments work closely together to form a unified artistic whole, can we perfectly shape the dramatic environment, emotional atmosphere and characterization, so that the audience is immersed in the drama.

Then it’s time to start collecting materials. In the case of realistic design style, it is very important to collect information and develop imagination based on a certain key element. In the case of realistic design styles, it is important to fully understand all aspects of the play as we begin to collect material. In addition to focusing on the style of clothing worn at that time, we should also know the details of their lives, including clothing, food, housing, transportation and other aspects. At the stage of collecting materials, we should not focus only on their clothing, but on the whole era and put our eyes on the cultural style of the whole era. Usually, there are two kinds of sources for our information, one is direct information and the other is indirect information. The so-called direct information is to go to the real life to investigate, to go deep into the real life, to feel and experience. Indirect source is to get the information by checking the related historical materials, such as books, images, paintings, etc. In addition, for the performance versions that have already been performed, we can also get the information by checking the related historical materials. In addition, scripts that have already been performed, whether they are stage plays, movie dramas, illustrations, cartoons and so on, are all valuable reference materials.

In the process of material collection, costume designers should develop the habit of self-censorship and scrutinize the collected materials. Only through in-depth research and repeated scrutiny can we ensure that our understanding of the period background and character traits is accurate, thus providing a solid foundation for costume design.

2.2 Drawing, modification and confirmation of renderings

After completing the work of collecting materials, we entered the stage of drawing effect drawings. In the final analysis, the design of costumes is to serve for the actors’ performance and exist for the characters’ performance. The design of stage costumes should first of all be compatible with the characters’ image, in line with the development of the plot and the differences in the identity of the characters in the play. In the same play, the style, color and fabric material of costumes should be different for different characters. For example, a confident and bold character may choose clothing with strong colors and sharp lines, while an introverted and cautious character may be more suited to understated, plain clothing; a character from a wealthy family may prefer luxurious materials and elaborate decorations, while a character from the slums may be more inclined to simple, shabby clothing.

Drawing a design is the first step in visualizing the image in our minds. In the creative process, we should not limit ourselves to the technical aspects, but use our life experiences, values, artistic concepts and other multi-dimensional knowledge.

At the same time, the costume design rendering is very purposeful: it has to accurately portray the character - the character's age, identity, temperament, the environment in which it is located, the character's manifestation, and so on. The design drawings are the basis of our communication with the director and other departments, which enables the director and designers of other departments to understand our design conception and intention. Most importantly, all costume styling designs are not simply repeating history, but presenting a beauty with a modern sense by looking at the previous with modern eyes. Innovation on the basis of inheritance can bring us a lot of novel and charming artistic effects. By combining historical elements with contemporary aesthetics, we can break the constraints and give more inspiration and vitality to the costumes. Let the characters on the stage have more vitality and resonate with the audience.

Of course, in some of the performances of the imaginative style, most of them are created with the artistic techniques of indirect expression such as abstraction, symbolism, and metaphor. Simple costumes and imaginative symbols can stimulate the audience's associations, allowing them to construct and interpret on their own while watching. The use of such artistic techniques not only brings a transcendent aesthetic experience to the stage, but also leaves more room for the audience's imagination, allowing them to have a deeper resonance in their emotions and thoughts. In such performances, costume styling design is no longer limited to the expression of the character's identity and emotion, but has become a form of artistic expression, which requires the skillful use of signs and symbols to present the character's features and emotions in an abstract form. Through the abstract language of costumes, the audience combines their own understanding and feelings, thus creating a poetic and deep stage performance that brings different visual experiences to the audience. Whether it is a realistic style or a written style of stage, costume design visually endows the characters with unique appearance characteristics and personality temperament.

Usually, our design drawings are finalized only after repeated refinements and adjustments by the entire creative team, including the director. In this process, we still need to have some patience in the face of repeated revisions. In the process of mutual exchanges with other departments such as the director, we can gain more inspiration, so as to further adjust and improve our design concepts.

3. Visual Narratives of Stage Costumes

The visual narrative of stage costumes refers to conveying the character's personality, emotional state and story background through costume design, thus presenting a vivid visual story to the audience. This narrative is not only the appearance of the costume, but also includes the integration of the costume with the actors, stage set, lighting and other elements.

Through the design and production of costumes, costume designers can skillfully interpret a character's identity, status and psychological state. A gorgeous gown may suggest the noble status of the character, while a tattered and plain outfit may reflect the character's poverty and humility. At the same time, the costume can also change with the development of the plot and the character's inner changes, presenting the audience with richer emotional levels and story development.

3.1 Confirmation of pattern and selection of fabrics

An actor's costume must be a customized costume. Whether it is a drama, opera or dance or musical, the designer must understand the physical form characteristics of each actor and measure each actor - collar circumference, shoulder width, chest circumference, waist circumference, hip circumference, arm length, leg length, but also their height, weight, head circumference and shoe size.

Before a costume is officially made, the factory bases the pattern-making and blanking on the design drawings. Pattern-making is the process of converting a designer's sketch or sample into an actual size template or pattern. Through pattern making, the style, cut and size of the garment can be accurately determined, providing a concrete reference for subsequent cutting and sewing.

Making a blank is a simplified version of making a garment from inexpensive cotton or other materials before using the actual fabric. The purpose of this is to validate the feasibility of the design at an early stage and to test the effect of the design in terms of cut, style and proportions. By trying on the blanks, possible problems can be identified and solved in time, thus avoiding mistakes and unnecessary costs before expensive fabrics are used, and ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the final garment.

The production of pattern making and white blanks is vital to ensure the accuracy, feasibility and efficiency of costume production, and is an integral and important part of the stage costume production process. The precise execution of these steps ensures rework in subsequent processes.

After entering the production stage, the designer will select suitable fabrics according to the initial design concept, and the choice of fabric directly affects the appearance and texture of the garment. [4] Different fabrics have different luster, texture and grain, which can give different visual effects to the garment. For example, silk, satin and other smooth fabrics

are often used to create a gorgeous, elegant effect, while cotton, linen and other rough fabrics are more suitable for creating a simple, natural effect. The color, pattern and texture of the fabric and other characteristics of the costume's expressive and visual presentation of the effect has a non-negligible impact. Designers should choose suitable fabrics according to the needs of the plot and the characteristics of the characters, and enrich the image of the characters and enhance the expressive power of the costumes through the characteristics of the fabrics.

Actors are often required to wear their costumes for long periods of time during performances, so the comfort of the fabric is critical. Suitable fabrics should be soft, breathable and comfortable without causing discomfort to the actor or interfering with the dramatic action. When selecting fabrics, special attention needs to be paid to the color, texture and weight of the fabric. For dance actors, the fabric should not be too heavy, so as not to affect their dance movements; for opera actors, the fabric of the costume should be as exaggerated as possible, huge, and need a lot of gorgeous and complicated decorations; for drama actors, usually to the character and form of the role as a standard of consideration, such as a tall and thin actor to play a bloated role, we need to increase the circumference of the waist, chest, waist circumference and hip circumference on the basis of the waist, chest, waist and hip circumference, so as to increase the weight of the fabric. If a tall, thin actor were to play a bulky character, we would have to increase the circumference of his waist, chest, girth, and hips.

Additionally, some shows are touring and stage costumes need to withstand multiple wears, washes and refurbishments, which takes into account the durability of the fabric. Durable fabrics maintain the shape and color of the costume, extending the life of the costume and reducing the cost of frequent costume changes.

In the process of costume production, costume designers can not slack off, must pay attention to the production process, pattern color, proportion, materials and other issues, through many attempts and repeated adjustments, in order to achieve the best results. Only in this way can we bring the actors the most comfortable and the most suitable costumes for their roles, and create the most perfect visual effects for the stage performances.

3.2 Visual presentation of stage costumes on stage

After the costumes have been created it is time to move on to the synthesis rehearsal stage. Synthesis stage can also be called rehearsal, it is carried out in the theater, is the performance of the elements are combined together, at the same time, in step with the same show, the performance of the actors and the stage of the various artistic departments of the creation of the integration of a harmonious whole, to create a complete and harmonious performance of the work of art. Synthesis is a difficult process, a kind of integration, in which each department will encounter various problems, due to the proximity of the official performance time, problems must be solved on the spot, so the synthesis of the time may be stretched to a long time.

Theater is a comprehensive art, in the performance, the close cooperation and coordination of costumes, stage sets, lighting and other elements can jointly create a specific stage atmosphere, promote the development of the plot, and jointly present the audience with a wonderful artistic feast. The stage of synthetic rehearsal is very important for all departments, it is both the stage of the overall effect of the experiment and test stage, but also a very good adjustment stage. All the preliminary work is to perform on the stage, only the image on the stage is the final standard to measure the effect.

During the composing stage, besides asking the actors whether they are comfortable and comfortable in their costumes and whether they are hindering their movements, we also have to go down to the stage to watch the effect of the costumes, to see whether the costumes have achieved the expected colors under the lights and whether they are in unity with the style of the whole play. Sometimes the effect of the costumes on the stage is often off, and we should make adjustments quickly. In addition, we should also ask ourselves whether the costume clearly expresses the character image and explains the character's identity, status, character, features, hobbies, etc. The synthesis enables us to see the various aspects of a performance. Synthesis enables us to see the overall image of each piece of a performance, which is an experiment and test of the overall effect of the stage.

After completing this part, we can formally enter the joint rehearsal and performance. This stage is a carefully planned and prepared stage, the hard work of all departments will be finally reflected on the stage, so as to bring the audience a profound and unforgettable artistic feast.

4. Conclusion

Theatrical costumes play a crucial role in characterization and visual narrative. From desk design to the presentation of stage costumes is a process of meticulous design and production, creativity and imagination.

In the process of characterization, the external appearance of a person - clothing, hairstyle, body language, performance, etc. - can convey a lot of information to the audience. Costume not only reveals the identity of the character, but also reflects the emotional state and inner changes of the character. For actors, costumes can be a good aid for actors to perform, add color to their performances, make the character image more beautiful, a suitable and exquisite stage costumes can enhance

the actor's sense of role, so that he or she can better put into the role. For the audience, through the clothing can be more deeply into the story, so as to understand the role, and establish an emotional connection with the role. For the designer, each costume design is a unique work of art, incorporating his or her own deep understanding of the role and unique creativity.

Stage costumes, although as a color block jumping in the picture, is one of the important visual images in the performance; however, it is not an independent existence, but with the actors as the carrier, with the set, lighting, make-up and other departments to match, interweaving a moving picture, stage costumes not only can shape the image of the actors, but also with the coordination of the set, which can render the environment of the atmosphere of the different scenes, to account for the background of the era in which the story takes place, Regional environment; with the cooperation of lighting can highlight the focus of the actor's performance, foil the atmosphere, externalization of the inner emotions of the characters, etc.; with the unity of the make-up, can make the character image more vivid and lively. Without the cooperation of other departments, even if the costume modeling is exquisite, the whole show will be eclipsed, costume modeling will become bland and tasteless. Therefore, costume design not only needs to be independent and wonderful, but also needs to be organically integrated with other artistic elements to jointly perform a wonderful visual feast, and the stage costumes can also better fulfill its function of visual narrative, bringing the audience a more vivid and rich theatrical experience.

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