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Multiple Expressions: The Authenticity and Innovation of Tang Dynasty Costume Design in Chinese Films

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Abstract

In the Chinese films with the background of Tang Dynasty, the costume design of Tang Dynasty is an important factor in shaping the film roles and enhancing the artistic expression of the film. At present, the design styles of Tang Dynasty costumes in Chinese films are quite diverse. This paper explores the design methods and expression forms of Tang Dynasty costumes in films by analyzing the design styles of Tang Dynasty costumes in several representative films, to better inherit and develop the Tang Dynasty costume culture.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty Costume, Film Costume, Design Style, Multiple Expressions, Chinese Films.

Introduction

The Tang Dynasty was the most culturally open period in ancient Chinese history, with strong cultural inclusiveness. The literature and art of the Tang Dynasty were at the leading level of the world at that time, and the costume culture of the Tang Dynasty was an important part of the culture, and the most colorful chapter in the Chinese costume history. In recent years, the number of films based with Tang Dynasty as background has been on the rise in China. The costumes of the characters in the films often arouse heated debate, that reflecting the public's love for Tang Dynasty costume culture. The rich and colorful costumes of the Tang Dynasty brought the creators an inexhaustible source of creation as well as a large creative space. From the design style of Tang Dynasty costumes in Chinese films, we can find that the appearance of Tang Dynasty costumes is diverse in different films. Overall, it can be divided into two kinds of design styles, one is the design style that focuses on show the authenticity of Tang Dynasty costume history, and the other is the design style that focuses on innovative design of costume based on Tang Dynasty costume history. This paper will analyze these two kinds of design styles in Tang Dynasty costume.

The Design Style that Focuses on Show the Authenticity of History

The design style that focuses on show the authenticity of history refers to the film costume design that focuses on restoring or reproducing Tang Dynasty costumes in history. Show the authenticity of history is the pursuit of many film costume designers. Film costume

designer Tongxun Chen said that he needs to study history carefully before designing film costumes. Film costume designer Tim Yip sat down with many scholars and historians for a long time and consulted a lot of books and materials in order to make the film *The Battle of Red Cliff* look more realistic. "Film costume design needs to be extracted and re-designed on the historical authenticity of costume. Film and television plays to the realistic requirements of the picture, the same requirements of costume design" (Lu Zhichang, 2009). The costume design of films with the background of the Tang Dynasty should also respect the history and design based on the basic appearance of costumes in the history of the Tang Dynasty.

The film *Xuan Zang* has followed a relatively real creative method in costume design. The film tells the story of Xuan Zang, a famous monk in the early Tang Dynasty, who went to India and other countries to seek Buddhist scriptures. The creator of the film costume referred to many Buddhist statues and documents related to the image of monks in the Tang Dynasty, striving to make the image of Xuan Zang in the film more in line with the image of monks in the Tang Dynasty, so that the whole film has a sense of documentary. According to the description of the monks in the Tang Dynasty in the notebook novels of Tang Dynasty, the common dress of the Buddhist monks in the Tang Dynasty was called the square robe, which was formed by changing its color on the basis of the traditional wide-sleeved robe in the Han Dynasty. The color is usually black, and the fabric is rough. Tang Dynasty monks also wear Pei (a sleeveless outer wear clothing), wearing shoes (Yue Cong, 2012). The costume of Xuan Zang in the film is quite consistent with the image in the Tang Dynasty's notebook novels. The costume Xuan Zang wore when he traveled westward used the collocation of black and gray, and the clothes were rich in layers. The material of the cassock was coarse cotton with heavy texture. The whole set of clothes gave people a rough and simple feeling. The designer has also made some parts of the costume vintage to give a sense of the hardships of Xuan Zang's journey (As shown in Figure 1). Another costume was the orange-red cassock worn by Xuan Zang while practicing Buddhism in India, a reference to the shoulder-length cassock that is very common in Indian Buddhism. Monks in the Tang Dynasty usually wore one-sided cassock, while Xuan Zang wore shoulder-length cassock in India, gave him a more local feel. Film costume designer believe that such designs will make the character of the film characters fuller. Since Xuan Zang took Buddhist scriptures in the Western regions, the costumes of the film are heavily referenced and used for reference the costume appearance of India in the Tang Dynasty. In the Indian scenes of the film, the gorgeous saris worn by the actors and the gold ornaments on their heads are highly reminiscent of the characteristics of the Western regions costume in the Tang Dynasty. For example, the shape of the king's crown and the slanted gold uttariya on the body is the national costume of ancient India. The Indian actor who plays the king also said, "at the moment of wearing the crown, I really feel like a king."



Figure 1 Xuan Zang

The Tang Dynasty costume design in the film *The Assassin* is an excellent historical representation. The story of the film is based on the legendary novel *Nie Yinniang* of the Tang Dynasty. Although Nie Yinniang is a fictional character in the novel, many of the characters involved in the film are real people in history. The film is also set in a specific period, the late

Tang Dynasty. The costumes in the film, the women's hairstyles and accessories all correspond to the costumes of this period in history. In addition, the color system implemented in the Tang Dynasty, namely the color sequence composed of orange, purple, red, green, blue, black and white to mark the hierarchy and status of social members, is also reflected in the film (Na Chunying,2009). The costumes' color and hierarchy of male characters in the film are basically consistent with the regulations of the costume color system in the Tang Dynasty. The detailed design of costume in this film is also very particular. From the selection of style, fabric, pattern to the production method, have fully referred to the relevant literature of Tang Dynasty costume. In order to better understand the cultural life of the people in the Tang Dynasty, the costume designer of the film went to Japan, India, Dunhuang China and other places for in-depth investigation, trying to meet the first-hand cultural relics from the Tang Dynasty (Huang Wenying,2015). For example, the costume worn by Princess Jia Cheng in the film is very close to the appearance of noble women's costume in the late Tang Dynasty. The costumes of women in the late Tang Dynasty are relatively fat, most of the skirts are worn above the high point of the chest, and the collar is straight, which does not highlight the curve of women's chest. This is the style of Princess Jia Cheng (Na Chunying,2009). The peony pattern on Princess Jia Cheng's costume also has an obvious Tang Dynasty style. Peony is a pattern commonly used by noble women in the Tang Dynasty, which has a good meaning of good luck. The peony pattern on the upper Ru is a dark flower leno, and the peony pattern on the skirt waist is a clay gold (clay gold is to grind gold into gold powder, make dyes, and dye them on utensils) printed leno. This design is not only rich in changes, but also reflects the noble identity of Princess Jia Cheng. The red and purple used in Princess Jia Cheng's costume are also in line with the setting of the role identity (As shown in Figure 2). The costume design of this film fully demonstrates the artistic charm of Tang Dynasty costume through the pursuit of historical authenticity.



Figure 2 Princess Jia Cheng

The Tang Dynasty costume design in the movie *Legend of the Demon Cat* also attaches great importance to the reproduction of Tang Dynasty costume in history. The film takes place in the flourishing Tang Dynasty. In order to highlight the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty, many appearances of the Tang Dynasty costumes appear in the film. The important appearances of Ru skirt, large-sleeved shirt, Hu clothing, round collar robe and so on in the Tang Dynasty are all shown in the film clothing. Most of the styles, colors and patterns involved in movie costumes can be found in the historical documents of the Tang Dynasty. The color of the men's official costume in the film is also basically consistent with the costume color system of the Tang Dynasty. For example, Bai Juyi in the film is a scribe with a low official position and wears a green round collar robe. Chen Yunqiao is an Imperial bodyguard with a high official position. He wears a red round collar robe. The round floral pattern used on the robe is a common pattern of the Tang Dynasty. In addition, futou headwear would be hard on the male character's head and the style of futou folded on the flaps would also be consistent with futou headwear in the flourishing Tang Dynasty. This shows that the costume designer of the film is also very respectful of history. The costumes of female characters in the film are mainly based on the appearance of Ru skirt, which are similar to those in the history of the Tang

Dynasty. They wear short Ru or shirt on the top and long skirts with high waists on the bottom, with varied collar shapes and skirt colors. Ru skirt, as the common costume of women in the Tang Dynasty, are the most common style of Han women in the Tang Dynasty. In this film, Ru skirt appeared in large numbers, highlighting the colorful, gorgeous and sexy side of Ru skirt in the flourishing Tang Dynasty, showing the unique beauty of women's costume in the flourishing Tang Dynasty.

The Design Style That Focuses on Innovation Based on History.

The design style that focuses on innovative design of costume based on history refers to paying more attention to formal beauty and visual effects in film costume design, which is often used in films with unclear ages or strong fictional stories. Dramatist Ouyang Yuqian believes that "(film)" is centered on emotions. Any tool, as long as can express the emotion is. It is not necessary to strive for realism "because we want it to be like life, not absolute real life". It can be seen that the design of Tang Dynasty costume should not be completely copied from history but should be innovative.

The film *Curse of the Golden Flower* has a strong subjective color in the design of Tang Dynasty costume. The designer exaggerated the Tang Dynasty costume by using gold in a large area, which did not conform to the regulations of the costume color system in the history of the Tang Dynasty. The film also simplified the appearance of costumes in the Tang Dynasty. The shape is mainly large-sleeved shirts, and other appearances are relatively few. The costume of female characters highlights the style characteristics of low-cut costumes in the Tang Dynasty. This style of low-cut costume was popular in the flourishing Tang Dynasty, but the background of this film story is the late Tang Dynasty. It can be seen that the designers did not rigidly adhere to the chronological changes of costume in the Tang Dynasty in history. In addition, to make the costumes look more luxurious, instead of the light and flowing silk fabrics of the Tang Dynasty, the film costumes were decorated with heavy embroidery and beads. The whole piece of the king in the play was studded with 18K gold pieces with gold thread, weighing about 40kg, and the heavy headdress



Figure 3 The King

made the whole costume look very heavy (As shown in Figure 3). At the beginning of the film, there was controversy over the costume design of the film since the costume was quite different from the costume of the Tang Dynasty in history. However, the film costumes create a luxurious atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty court, which is very consistent with the overall style of the film. The large area application of high saturation color in costume also brings a strong visual impact to the film picture.

The film *The Banquet* also has a strong sense of form in Tang Dynasty costume design. Although the film is set in the late Tang Dynasty, it actually tells a dramatic story like Hamlet. Tim Yip, the costume designer for the film, tried to combine classical Chinese elements with Western drama elements when designing the costumes. He believes that when designing, "first make the Tang Dynasty clothing 'appearance'..... Then remove the whole detail, such as embroidery, color, etc., and present the whole appearance with plain surface "(Zhou Jingwei,2016). The costume of the film has been greatly altered, with the appearance features of Tang Dynasty, such as big-sleeved shirts and Ru skirts. For example, the costume of queen Wan was extended the sleeve length of the big-sleeved shirt, and increase the arc of the cuff, the skirt of the floor was also extended processing (As shown in Figure 4). The front of the dress is also decorated with the style of shelter-knee (a traditional ceremonial robe element in Han Dynasty). Some of the patterns in the film costumes are extracted from the costumes of Beijing Opera, some from the patterns of other dynasties, and some of the characters' costumes have no patterns and only retain the pure appearance. The costume design of the film *The Banquet* shows the classical beauty of traditional Chinese costume, but this classical beauty is not limited to the Tang Dynasty. The designer also pays more attention to show the inherent symbolism of costume when designing.



Figure 4 Queen Wan

The film *Monkey King II* is also a film with the historical background of the Tang Dynasty. The story is derived from the classic Chinese magic novel *Journey to the West*. Since the story of the film itself is fantasy, the costume design in the film also highlights the fantasy style, and different demons and ghosts are represented by exaggerated costumes. For example, the main costume of demon Bone is black and white, both of which are made of reflective fabrics. The fabric of the black costume is woven with silver thread to increase the texture of the costume. Both outfits were paired with heavy shoulder armor, and design details such as wide belts and high collar were used to highlight the character's strong and proud character. demon Bone's costume does not use design elements related to the Tang Dynasty, and her image is more similar to that of female villains in modern comics and games. The story of the film also took place in the Western regions of the Tang Dynasty, so many elements of the Western regions were used in the costume design, and many fabrics of the film costumes were bought from India. In the costumes of monk Tang, monkey king, Pigsy and other characters, the patterns of ethnic minorities in the western regions can be seen. Overall, the film's costume design is fantastical and ethnic, and has less relevant with the Tang Dynasty costumes worn by Han people of Chinese throughout Chinese history.

The Design Styles That Change with The Development of The Times

The design of Tang Dynasty costume in Chinese films also needs to consider The Times. It has been nearly 100 years since the first ancient costume film was shot in 1927 in China. Due to the constant change of people's aesthetic ideas, the costume design in films has also changed with the change of people's aesthetic ways. Take the film *Imperial Concubine Yang* (1992) and the film *Lady of the Dynasty* (2015) as examples. Both films feature the famous person Yang Yuhuan in Tang Dynasty. The costumes of Yang Yuhuan in the two films are very different in style, color, fabric and accessories (As shown in Figure 5). In the film *Imperial Concubine Yang* (1992), Yang Yuhuan's image is relatively plump, her costumes are fat and colorful, and her costumes are mostly printed in a realistic style, but the printing quality is poor, making the fabric appear a little cheap. The actress's head is full of gold ornaments to show Yang Yuhuan's noble identity. The clothing of the film *Lady of the Dynasty* (2015) is more luxurious, with high color saturation and less patterns, which integrates the characteristics of clothing patterns in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The makeup of actress is also more in line with modern aesthetics, and the jewelry on head is simplified. Some costume designs in the film have made great changes to the styles of costumes in the Tang Dynasty in history. For example, the upper Ru and lower skirts of the Ru skirts in the film are sewn together and made into a style similar to the modern high waist dress. The black clay gold printed large-sleeved shirt worn by the actress adopts black, which is very rare in Chinese ancient women's costume. The costumes in film also emphasize the curvaceous beauty of actress' bodies through modern three-dimensional tailoring methods. The



Figure 5 Yang Yuhuan's image in different films

two films present different visual effects in the costume design of the Tang Dynasty. In addition to the progress of modern dyeing and weaving technology, it is also closely related to The Times when the film was shot and the changes in the aesthetic way of the creators and the audience. For example, the differences in the tailor of the costumes and the differences in the makeup of the actors in the two films all reflect the changes in people's aesthetic style.

It is worth noting that with the progress of The Times and the continuous development of film and television digital technology, film and television special effects technology has also been widely used in Chinese ancient costume films, which also adds more possibilities to film costume design. For example, in the film *Monkey King II*, the costumes of demon Bone can be transformed into black and white smoke clouds, and the costumes of demon Bone are mainly black and white. In the film *Legend of the Demon Cat*, the young White Cranes transform into a human form from a crane in the sky. The young White Cranes' costume retains the design of feathers on the chest and sleeve. How to combine film costume design with film and television special effects technology to make it present better visual effects is also a problem that designers need to consider.

Epilogue

From the costume design of the Tang Dynasty in the above films, we can see that the costume culture of the Tang Dynasty is extensive and profound, and a large number of design elements can be excavated and used. In the film costumes that focus on the reproduction of historical style, through the pursuit of historical authenticity, people can feel the artistic charm of the costumes of the Tang Dynasty in history. The film costumes, which focus on innovative design of costume based on history, let us see that the costumes of the Tang Dynasty in the film can be presented in more diverse ways. Yang Shuyun, costume designer of the TV series *A Dream of Red Mansions*, once said that his philosophy for ancient costume design is: "First, is do textual research; Second, not confined to textual research; Third, we should also consider the aesthetics of people today (Cheng Yuejie,2014)." In the design of Tang Dynasty costume in the film, we must respect and base on history. The aesthetic of Tang Dynasty costume should not be uniform. The costume design of Tang Dynasty should also be innovated and redesigned according to the style of the film and the character. So that the appearance of Tang Dynasty costume in the film presentation way more diversified. It can make the audience feel the charm of Tang costume culture in different styles of Tang Dynasty costume design.

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