

Title:

Clothes Grace the Dance

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510

Summary:

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Keywords:

Chinese new year, Chinese culture, dance, cloth, Chinese costume, NTDTV, spectacular, ancient, Divine Land

Article Body:

The dazzling costumes in NTDTV's Chinese New Year Spectacular are as much a part of each dance as the dance movements themselves. They are, in many ways, the palette on which the dance is performed. Clothes, hair, colors—this is what transports us to the Divine Land of ancient China.

The Spectacular's wardrobe designers put great effort into creating just the right effect. A costume starts with a concept of the dance. The dance may have a powerful story or be found in a specific dynasty. Designers pore over paintings, frescoes and even statues to find the right look. Accessories then come into the design—hair, shoes, hats, belts. Next come sketches. Designers must consider not only how an outfit looks but also its flexibility for dance movements and whether it is durable enough to withstand over eighty performances.

Then the sketch goes to the sewing workshop. Here garment makers select just the right fabric, make the pattern and produce a sample. If it's not just right, the whole process starts over. If the sample is approved, the task of making the clothes begins. Multiply this countless times. A single dance in this year's Spectacular, the dance drama of General Yue Fei, required more than 100 costumes and accessories.

For Amy Lee, the principal designer in New York, this effort is well worth it. "When I came to the United States, I saw it was very difficult to find any expression of traditional Chinese culture. Through this show I see the hope of being able to preserve my culture for the benefit of my daughter and the next

generation.”

Ms. Lee has worked in the fashion industry for more than twenty years. She was a professor of fashion design and fashion history in China. Although her costumes take inspiration from different dynasties and ethnic regions, her favorite dynasty is the Tang. She says the Tang Dynasty reflects the zenith of Chinese culture—artistically, economically and politically. During this time China was very open-minded. Prosperous and peaceful, the Tang Dynasty drew on influences from India, the Middle East and Europe.

According to Ms. Lee, all this is reflected in the clothes. “The clothes were rich and confident. They were uplifting,” she said. “Women wore large, open sleeves, sometimes up to two and a half feet wide. They wore see-through materials and gowns with high waists that were decorated with large, open flowers.”

Each dynasty had its own characteristics that were likewise reflected in the clothes. In general, Ms. Lee says everything can be found in the clothes—even the ancient people’s morals and values. “Clothing isn’t just a way to cover the body. It also reflects a person’s thoughts, culture and respect for the gods.”

Ms. Lee and her team use costume design to make ancient Chinese culture come alive today, to help the audience understand that traditional Chinese culture has much it can teach us today. Ms. Lee knows that through her efforts with NTDTV, these positive aspects of ancient China will not be forgotten.