Application of Chinese National Elements to Fashion Design

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Abstract: Based on “the national look” of the fashion design field, this paper analyzed in detail how to make use of Chinese national elements to design modern fashion collection by a case of “the rainbow dream”, focusing on the selection of the source of inspiration and how to design modern fashion by using national color, pattern (line), and other items of costume. It emphasizes that the Chinese designers should pay more attention to the modernity of the fashion in national style and some suggestions about it is given by some typical examples. Finally, it summarizes the rules and the prospect of the fashion design about the national look.

Keywords: Chinese national elements; fashion design; peking opera; facial make-up; the water sleeves

1. Introduction
Along with the boom of the clothing economy and the information society, the people in the world are eager for the individual fashion increasingly. A human is not only dependent on the traditional culture and curiosity for exotic culture, so the more and more people are keen on the national style, and more and more fashion designers draw inspiration from Chinese national elements to design. This paper analyzed the way to apply Chinese national elements in modern fashion design by a case of the fashion series of “the rainbow dream”.

2. The Analysis of Source of Inspiration
2.1. Facial Make-up
Chinese economy is developing rapidly, many countries concern about China, and the world people are “looking at” huge China change, Chinese national culture is so profound and metaphysical that it isn’t understood so much by many foreigners yet. So the designers should collect the familiarly Chinese national elements as the source of inspiration for the fashion design when they face lots of material, for example, Chinese painting, silk, bellyband, peking opera, etc.

The fashion collection—“The rainbow dream” was inspired by peking opera that is in the foreigners’ favor since the peking opera master, Lanfang Mei played the several opera in the United States in 1930. As one of the Chinese national treasures, peking opera is characterized by the euphonious tune, the impressionistic make-up, the sophisticated costumes, and the beautiful accessories, the spontaneous action, etc.

Then it is important to analyze the source of inspiration and collect a few of design points for a fashion designer. If the designers choose the typical characters or the most individual elements as the points, they will be motivated to generate new ideas more easily and be successful in finishing the design work rapidly.

Jiarui Yao, who designed “The rainbow dream”, chose the facial make-up that is the one of the most typical features in peking opera as one of the points. The match on color and the patterns of the facial make-up are so exaggerative, beautiful and attractive that it has stuck in the world people’s mind deeply and forever, and it is understood and enjoyed as a folk art by foreigners.

It is the key for the designer that color and pattern are also the vital elements of fashion. This make the experienced designer apply the points in creation smoothly and achieve the more “understandable” fashions. Whereas, the un-visual symbols or even abstract characters, such as the tune of peking opera, was selected as design points are too unintelligible to be accepted and applied easily.

Bright and garish color, such as red, white, green, blue and black, is one major feature of facial make-up of peking opera, and the balance of color directly shows traditional Chinese aesthetic and taste. The freehand patterns, especially lively lines, cover the whole actor’s face to intensify Chinese nationality. In addition, the different patterns and different colors reveal the different actors’ insistent characters. (Figure 1)

2.2. The Water Sleeves
Jiarui Yao chose the water sleeves as another design point that is the impressive component of costumes. The shifting moods and impulses in the characters’ inner world are richly presented by waving the water sleeves being long and wide. The facial make-up expresses the static beauty of peking opera by color and patterns, and the water sleeves express active beauty by dancing the sleeves being natural and spontaneous.

The water sleeves, the inspiration for “the rainbow dream”, are easier to inspire the designer to create more enjoyed clothes because the sleeves are also the important part of the clothes. (Figure 1)

3. How to design
How to apply Chinese national elements to modern
fashion design successfully is a fiendish problem that many China designers and a few foreign designers who are interested in Chinese national art try to solve. In fact, it is the difficulty with application is that the designers should smartly embodies both tradition and modernity and the good creation should fully reflected the characteristics of modern fashion, is not an imitation of traditional costume or a “artful” creation that is stiffly pieced together by some national elements.

“The rainbow dream” successfully mixes the facial make-up (color and lines) and the water sleeve, so it looks very fashionable and is praised perfectly.

Firstly, the designer extracted the main colors of the facial make-up, and selected some preference of colors as the colors of design work—white and red were the main color elements and yellow, pink, and brown were the subsidiary color elements—match on these colors are capable of spreading Jiarui Yao’s design idea: more sweet, more pleasure, more free and so on. (Figure 2)

Secondly, the use of lines embodies the designer to the good taste. There are two commonly ways to design the national lines, one is “freehand” application, and another is imitation or copy. Of course, the former fascinated by oriental is difficult but better than the latter.

Jiarui Yao made the fluent lines create the colored areas, small or big, long or short, sparse or dense; those put together flexibly and form some visual focuses. This is very similar with facial make-up in spirit, not in appearance. In addition, the clothes are rich with the layer and stereoscopic feeling because colorful areas are joined with the large white area or both of them are overlapped artfully.

Thirdly, how to apply the water sleeves to “the rainbow dream”.

The costumes of peking opera are plane structure and the loose garment with a large girdle. Today, the generality of fashionable clothes are the three-dimensional structure and contour design. So the clothes having the characteristics of flatness, simple type H and especial looseness are associated with out of date. This requires great attention in modern fashion design.

Basic on the special and deep analysis of costume structure, we find that the water sleeves are not only loose and long but also one piece of bodice, that is to say, the sleeves and the bodice are cut in one. This is also the most typical sleeves in Chinese traditional clothes. So these features are used as the main points of the design in four suits of fashionable clothes of “the rainbow dream”—the longer sleeves of the first suit and the bodice are cut in one; similarly, the shorter ones of the second suit and the bodice are in a piece of cloth, although they are to short to be noticed; the third suit own a piece of extremely long decorative cloth on the right arm that looks like the water sleeves; the last one is very creative that the collar and the left sleeve are cut in one and none of the right sleeve.

Last but not least, how to show the modernity of design works. It is the weakest link to the China designers. In fact, there are many ways to solve this problem. For example, using stylish silhouette is an efficient method. Except for color, the silhouette is the most important factor of fashion design and attracts people’s attention easily. Type X, O, A, S and so on are usually used in modern design, whereas the H-type is the most classic silhouette in Chinese national costume.

As well as, the three-dimensional constitute, not the plane structure remind us of modern or western something; contour design is more suitable with the modern life-style; the fashionable material, e.g. the knitted fabric, is able to fulfill the functional and aesthetic requirements of the modern people. The main fabric of “the rainbow dream” is the white knitted one that has the following features: soft, strongly elastic, crease-resist, fashionable. Another, the designer knitted some parts of the clothes, e.g. the hat, the sleeve, the vest, the skirt and so on by colorful wool. The mixing of knitted fabric and the manual wool basketwork made the clothes richer layers and more artfully causal style that is very popular in the whole world right now. The manual wool basketwork also stands for the desire for freedom, personality, and return to nature, so it fits into the popular countryside or
nostalgia look.

It is also the good idea to design the styles currently in favor that are rarely seen in the national costume. Following are some typical examples of this: the midriff baring coat, the large-crotch pants, the low trousers or skirt, underwear outside, the short skirt, leggings, and the match of the longer inside clothes and the shorter outside one—these fashionable styles can be seen in “the rainbow dream”.

Moreover, the accessories can also heighten the fashion style, even the modern style—too national fashion can be amended by matching various modern accessories. Many fashion designers prefer to design the exaggerative headwear to outstand the theme. It is noticed that the too national headwear is not easy to mix the modern fashion and express the modern style. Therefore the headwear design of “the rainbow dream” is too fashionable to be associated with the peking opera, and the modern, young and sweet style is represented by the curly hair, the fluffy hair-ball and the pink or red ornaments. (Figure 3)

Figure 3. The fashion sketch of “the rainbow dream”

The good fashion sketch should not mean the good design. Dressmaking is more difficult and important than drawing. Whether to make the real clothes according the fashion idea poses a severe challenge for the designer. Except for rich experience, the designers should be able to change the details of the design works in the light of actual conditions. For example, Jiarui Yao changed the skirt length of the forth suit because the fabric is too heavy to destroy the model. (Figure 4)

4. Conclusion

It is the best to choose the familiarly Chinese national elements as the source for the fashion design about the national look now. With the development of the variously national culture communication, the designers can happily choose the unusual national elements understood by the foreigners, e.g. the wax painting of Miao nationality, the tie dyeing of Bai nationality, the traditional silk of Uygur nationality and so on to do themselves justice and reflect a personality.

Figure 4 The skirt length of the forth suit changed because of the fabric

The fashion design includes Color, silhouette, structure, fabric, and accessories design; it does not mean to simply add these elements together yet. The good designers should integrate smoothly them into the whole design. The worst design about the national look is that the national elements are posed mechanically in modern fashion.

Every Chinese designer should remember that the modernity of fashion is the most important thing and the national look is only a look. Any design should meet the aesthetic or functional demand of modern people.

Today, the original design is the focus of the fashion design and the burning question, and every people have themselves thought about this. It is no doubt that the good way to apply the national elements to fashion design.

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