

# VISION AND SENSE OF STAGE

## THE VISUAL CREATION OF DANCE DRAMA THE BANQUET

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From time when the classic dance drama *Fen Mo* is introduced, we are seeking a form of art to reflect the Chinese classic aesthetics and to set up a way to convey the power of vision which possesses the spirit of Chinese classic art.

### Shaping the world of the Nantang Dynasty Emperor, Li Yu by stage design

The dance drama *The Banquet* describes the image of the last emperor of Tang Dynasty Li Yu in a particular perspective. Choosing this historical figure is because of his vividness. With the power of king and artistic sense coexisting in himself, his poems and Chinese Ci poetries are the most shining art works in the late Tang Dynasty. He opens the era of Chinese Ci

poetries. He is sentimental and romantic. He is frustrated, because he cannot tell his emotions to his people as an emperor. The people at that time regard him as "a coward and useless person". His loneliness and sadness, as we all know, is hardly known by anyone else in his time.

We focus on shaping his inner world in this drama. We use dance to create a space for describing the figure, Li Yu. Visual language needs a space that is ample and has intervals supporting the stage. So we use different ways of narration and expression compared with the old ways which are used in traditional dance dramas, in order to explore the depth of Li Yu's inner world. We use a unique language of dance, letting the figure switch

in different moods.

By applying the image of broken pieces of landscape and the cut of lights, we shape Li's inner world and present a unique dancing space. In the prelude of this drama, with the start of music *Yong Ge Yi Forever Separated by A River (Jiang Shui)*, the area lights with high color temperature value, bring the ice-cold glass cover out from the darkness. It is like a museum of time and space. The light avoids the dancers, making a blind visual effect, which leaves the audience more curiosity and expectation of this drama. It also gives a clear space for the upcoming story. The stone lamp tower persistently luminates in the front stage and the cold backlights glow in small angles in the backstage. With a



1 > Dance drama *The Banquet*'s stage photo. On the stage, Li Yu's inner world is constructed by using fragmented landscape, and a unique stage space is presented with the help of light cutting

2 > Dance drama *The Banquet*'s stage photo. The classical image elements and modern devices in the works achieve the separation effect consistent with the expression form and spiritual core of dance drama



far distance, it presents the depth of the palace of Tang Dynasty. The extremely simplified lights setting gives a visual effect of far distance between the dancers and the audience and it leaves a space for imagination. When the “frog” appears, the lights are out. The ETC lights cast through pictures forming the shade of tree leafs with warm feelings, using the lights and shadow to imply the change of spaces. When Li Yu shows up, diffused blue lights shoot from a high and side place, serving the solo dance and reflecting the struggling inner world of the figure. The quantity and angles of the lights casting provides a space for the figure’s inner world. In the dance chapter *The Raining (Yu Chan Chan)*, backlights does not appear in the most of the dance, and there is no main color tendency in the whole dance performance. In the contrary, the stage setting is only to put the image of pine trees cuts, the shade underneath the tree leafs and all three figures in a same space in order to bring the audience into an open thinking. In the upcoming dance *The Spring River (Chun Jiang)*, we uses the utmost saturation on the stage, forming a strong contrast between

1 > Dance drama *The Banquet*'s stage photo. The work uses a completely different narrative and expression from the traditional dance drama, so as to go deep into Li Yu's inner world and use a unique dance vocabulary to free the characters from the separated emotion





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the dancers and the pine tree image in the transparent boxes, which is another measure of leaving some blanks. In the dance *Paradise and The Mortal World (Tian Shang Ren Jian)*, we use the strong and simple backlights with high color temperature value as the main lights in the stage setting. The lights' strong contrast combined with the strong tempo of the background music implies the climax of this whole drama. In this chapter, as Li Yu is going to finish his life, the lights we use are very different with the lights reflecting his sentimental mood, loneliness,

cowardliness and his sorrow in the previous chapters. By using the area lights, temperature value and contrast, the lights we use gives a very dramatic presentation of Li Yu's space. It reflects the figure's characters and tragedy by precisely combining the environment setting and blanks.

We do not focus on describing the environment in the stage design and lights settings. In other hand, we find the support from the figure's inner world, which coincidentally matches the quality that the dance drama is going to show. We are going to

show the senses of coldness and distance to the audience in the whole drama. Meanwhile, we are going to exteriorize the inner world of the figure by vision.

**National elements are the starting point of creation**

No matter in what kinds of arts works, the most importance in design is to find the key elements coherent with the work itself. It is what I think, the most important thing in stage design. The elements and objects in my precious dance drama creations,

1 > The stage vision of *The Banquet* presents a landscape picture, but they exist in isolation. Together with the cut pine trees and screens, it presents a lonely temperament  
2 > The dance drama *The Banquet* sets off the character traits and tragic fate of the characters with a blank space

all effectively become the core elements in the visual conveyance, such as the sparkles and sword in *Huo Hua (Sparkles)*, the bamboo book in *Confucius*, the pillars and beams of roofs in "Nuo", the rock garden in *The Banquet*.

All these elements originate from our long history and traditional culture. The national elements are the source of our creation. Therefore, it is very important to collect materials in the beginning of creation. In this period, not only need we collect visual materials, but also need we pay attention to

the local culture and customs. So that we can take endless materials for design from the rich resource which we found from people.

The dance drama *The Banquet* takes the elements of rock garden in Tang Dynasty as its visual language and image. It reflects well of Li Yu's inner world. Stones are mountains, sand is the water, lines on it are the wrinkles on the water surface, and moss symbolizes the forests. All these objects are forming a landscape painting with blanks amid them. What presented on the stage is a landscape painting, but each

part of it, is isolated from the rest. Together with the image of pine tree cuts and the decoration screens, it gives a sense of loneliness. All these objects inside the transparent boxes bring the feelings of coldness and distance. The green moss under stones, the green branches at the top of the pine trees and the warm and gentle lights from the stone lamp tower are the symbols of life force even it is in the cold and distant places. The classic image formed by modern device, makes a contrast effect between the drama performance and spiritual core. Drinking the poison "Qian Ji Yao",

Li Yu finally finishes his life. The fog in the landscape screen begins to disperse and gradually shade the landscape at the end, which matches perfectly with the performance.

We only use the key objects in our creation and present the stage effect by simple visual language of the stage. The traditional and national culture shall not be superficially reflected in the original art works. It is not simply adding the tokens and symbols but finding the emotions and culture accumulation behind those and visualize them. This is the start of creation.



### Pursuit of the rules that the impressionism shall be with soulspiritual

With the measures of stage vision becoming more and more diversified, the stage techniques, multimedia and lightings devices all provide useful supports for the stage vision creation. However, too much many stage visual effects makes the dance performance become appear pale and hollow. It is more difficult to feel the voice of soulspiritual elements, as we choose vision over senses yet the senses are the soul of vision. The Buddhism advocates three stages of realmsperception: "lif you see a mountain, it is a mountain; if you see water, it is water."; "the mountain you see is not a mountain, the water you see is not water"; and, finally, "the mountain you see is always a mountain; the water you see is always water." It is the same with the stage vision. It is a design with life and sensesreal and sensory elements, that and if the design is felt with the senses, and it feels part of the same realms.

It is very hard to reach the realm of impressionism in art. Different with to that in modern dramas and operas, the language of stage vision in dance is delivered through impressionistic style. Dance is an art form that uses body language to express the

emotions. It extracts the original body gestures from life and makes it them like a dance. In a wordThat is to say, dance is arises completely from life. All the moves such as raising hands, kicking footfeet, bouncing and swirling, etc., are full of the sense of life. To Compared with real life, dance is abstractive and impressionistic. Therefore, after years of stage vision creation, the creators will unconsciously apply the impressionism into their design concept, and make this as where they should position their design concept. They collect life materials and use emotions as the original power in the designs.

Years of designing of stage lights settings gives theallows designers the recognition ofto recognize the importance of the harmony of stage aesthetics and stage vision. These two elements combine together, gives giving a better fusion effect of stage elements, reflecting the language of stage vision. A good designer shall be firstly a playwright and director. They should design out ofusing the form of literature art and the thought of a director, deeply with a deep understanding of the script and figure, so that they can create the space together with directors and complete the design work perfectly. Because the stage is the embodiment of a living creature as a whole.

>The *Banquet* selects the aesthetic elements of "dry landscape" inherited from the style of the Tang Dynasty in terms of stage visual language and image. The symbolic meaning of this image element also well interprets the spiritual world of Li Yu

