

# **A Study on symbols appearing on the personal ornaments - Centering around a nuptial ceremony -**

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## **I. Preface**

Along with the flow of our history, the endowment of significance to our nation's thoughts, philosophy and emotion is maintained in its cultural properties. Such endowment of significance emerges in a form of 'symbolism.' Since every language of our use is in the form of symbols, it can be safely said that all the peoples are using a symbol system every day without realizing the fact.

It is basic knowledge that symbolism is something to do with liberal arts including anthropology and religion. In practical sense, however, dresses and ornaments are also apparently constituted with many symbolic factors. Hence, this study is to discriminate symbols used in dresses and ornaments from those used in general practices. The symbols used in dresses and ornaments are classified into 'aesthetic symbols' used for the sake of ornamentation, and 'incantatory symbols' used to bring about good luck or contrariwise to evade bad luck. They are also classified into 'socio-psychological symbols.' In this study, the dresses and ornaments are limited to such as are used for the nuptial ceremony out of the four ceremonial occasions: namely, the ceremonies of coming-of-age, marriage, funeral and ancestor memorial. Moreover, emphasis has been put on the emblematic patterns and colors of the dresses and ornaments for the nuptial ceremony. The objects of this study are further limited to the official hat, the belt, the pigtail ribbon, and shoes.

· Strong symbolism is apparent in the nuptial ceremony. It is attributable to its nature as an artificial formality. Therefore, the wedding dress has to be endowed with philosophical and sociological significance through various symbols. Likewise, the ornaments used along with the dresses have also to be endowed with rich symbols.

## **II. Main Subject**

The effectiveness of nuptial dresses and ornaments are classified in broad sense into three categories in accordance with 'aesthetic effect,' 'incantatory effect' and 'socio-psychological effect.' Aesthetic effect is produced from the embellishing function of the dresses and ornaments. Incantation effect of the ornamental symbols is achieved for the purpose to bring about good luck or contrariwise to evade bad luck. Socio-psychological effect of the symbols has something to do with control of communal life or group activities. In line with these effects

of the dresses and ornaments, the colors and emblematic patterns of them are classified into three symbols' in this study. They are 'aesthetic symbol,' 'incantatory symbol' and 'socio-psychological symbol.

### **1) Incantatory symbol**

In most cases, the 'crown-like headpiece worn by a bride on a wedding ceremony' (referred as a headpiece for short hereinafter) is made of black silk with its lining of purple color. Black color symbolizes good luck. Therefore, black color is suitable to the headpiece of the bride on a wedding ceremony. Rarely red headpiece is also worn. It is surmised that the red headpiece symbolizes not only good luck but also evasion of bad luck. And the red color of the 'daedae' or the broad belt made of plain red color silk worn over 'wonsam' (or a great ceremonial dress worn by the queen and brides on wedding ceremony) and over 'hwaloss' (or great ceremonial dress worn by the princesses during Joseon Dynasty period) is also to symbolize good luck and an incantatory effect to ward off evil fortune. The face of the front pigtail ribbon as well as the rare pigtail ribbon is in black color but with its lining in red color, which are also to symbolize the effect of good luck and incantatory effect to forestall misfortune. It is probable that the black color of 'mokhwa' or the boots for a bridegroom signifies a happy augury, while the red color of 'danghe' or the shoes for a bride is also to stand for an incantatory effect.

### **2) Aesthetic symbol**

The bridal dress at a wedding ceremony is normally ornamented to an extreme brilliance. The personal ornaments decorated in gay colors and emblematic patterns with many jewels are made to emphasize stark aesthetic sensibility.

The 'jjokduri' or the bridal headpiece and the 'hwgwan' or the ceremonial coronet is gorgeously decorated with jades, pearls, corals and ambers. These precious stones are to be made into colorful ornaments with various emblematic patterns in remarkable aesthetic symbolism. The patterns are mostly conventional emblems such as phoenixes, cranes, butterflies, and bats.

The frontal pigtail ribbon and the rare pigtail ribbon are gilded in patterns of flowers and pomegranates. The foremost of the ribbons is usually decorated with ornaments made of 'seokunghwang' or a precious mineral, and a 'milhwa' or a yellow-billed grosbeak, with a cicada to link the gap in the center of the ribbon. The head of a 'binyeo' or an ornamental hairpin is usually decorated with a gorgeous emblematic pattern of a phoenix or a dragon and such made of precious stones.

### **3) Socio-psychological symbolism**

The 'dae' or the belt worn over the official attire of the bridegroom and the 'daedae' or the broad belt worn over the bridal dress of 'wonsam' or 'hwaloss' mean to demarcate the upper garment from the lower garment in good order, suggesting the constant love and fidelity.

The patterns gilded over the surface of the broad belt are to stand for the social status of the

wearer. The patterns of the broad belt over the 'hwangwonsam' worn by the queen is decorated with gilded 'ojoyongmunyang' or a pattern of a dragon with five claws, while that of the 'jajeokwonsam' worn by the royal concubines is decorated with gilded phoenix. However, the patterns for a bridal 'daedae' belt are mostly flowers. The brides have different flowery patterns in accordance with their respective social status.

The black color of the 'mokhwa' or the boots of the bridegroom is decorated with emblems to indicate the social status of the wearer

Those patterns of phoenix, crane, butterfly and bat gilded with various stones decorating the 'jjokduri' or the headpiece and the 'hwgwan' or the coronet are to stand for the following significances: Phoenix is usually to symbolize the queen, whereas it also means supplication for sexual union and prosperity at a nuptial ceremony; the pattern of butterfly means supplication for conjugal harmony; the pattern of crane connotes longevity, and that of bat (or pyeonbok in Korean), the pronunciation of which has meaning of happiness, (insinuating from the translation of the Chinese characters. The pronunciation of 'bok' in Chinese character of 'pyeonbok' has identical pronunciation of the character 'bok' which has meaning of happiness.)

The pigtail ribbon is gilded with patterns of flowers and/or pomegranates. Pomegranates symbolize prolificacy. Likewise, the phoenix pattern gilded on the head of the bridal hairpiece one of the representative conventional patterns symbolizing conjugal harmony.

Thus these emblematic patterns of good omen are endowed with wishes for happy conjugal life.

### **III. Conclusion**

The dresses and ornaments of the nuptial ceremony are worn with wishes for good luck. They are all made to have colors and patterns as common symbolic constituents. Symbolic effect specifically emerges to the colors more than to the patterns. The colors of the personal ornaments are also to mean good luck as well as an incantatory wish to ward off evil fortune. Various jewels and precious stones are used to augment their decorative effect by emphasizing their aesthetic effect.

The Personal ornaments are worn to put forth 'aesthetic effect,' 'incantatory effect' and 'commanding effect.' Diverting from the conventional interpretation of the personal ornaments in terms of aesthetic effect, this study has placed emphasis on the 'symbolic effect' of the dresses and ornaments. The meaning of a personal ornaments varies in line with the dress it decorates, to symbolize mainly an incantatory effect in this case. However, it is easily recognizable that an incantatory symbol will not emerge without being linked with a psychological symbol is rooted to a psychological effect for wishing a matrimonial happiness. An aesthetic symbol is to give an effect of beauty to the incantatory symbol and the psychological symbol and thereby to help stand out the meaning of the symbols.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the personal ornaments used together with dresses will give a supporting effect to the meaning of ceremonial performances.

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