

# **A Study on the Symbolistic Characteristics of Costume**

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The purpose of this study is to examine characteristics of symbolism as an important trend of the end of centuries, by comparing the symbolic characteristics from two periods, modern(1880~1910s) and contemporary(1990s), based on the typical characteristics of symbolic art by Robert R. Delevoy. The specific aims of this study are to analyze in detail the relationship between dress and symbolism that appeared in Paris as artistic trend in the 1880s against realism and naturalism, and to clarify the meaning of symbolism reflected on fashion between the period from its birth in the 19th century to the present days.

As for the study method, the contents analysis is adopted to present an objective data analysis and interpretation accompanied by theoretical approach through literature survey.

Delevoy classifies symbolism into three categories such as mysticism, eroticism, and decorativeness. This study is developed based on the Delevoy's three categories.

The first characteristics of symbolism on costume from the modern era is mysticism, which is expressed by exotic theme and oriental mystery combined by fantasy for the ancient Greece and interest for the Orient, and this mysticism developed into costume as harem pants of Turkey, various variations of minaret style, brilliant jewelry like pearl and turkish jade, embroidery, oriental patterns, and vivid color. The second is eroticism based on emphasis and exaggeration on a specific part of human body to show(express) restrained sexual instinct against the bourgeois society and realism. The third characteristic is decorativeness, which is expressed by a flowing curve of Art Nouveau started against realism and naturalism to represent subjective world of human spirit.

The characteristics of symbolism expressed in costume in the contemporary era are as follows. First, mysticism moves on overcoming the atmosphere of the end of century through religion or spiritual philosophy. The form of 1990s' costume expresses psychological effects of religious images or myth in two-dimensional flat form and symbols of natural shapes especially developed by the themes like religion, oriental ideology, and myth. The form of costume shows structural silhouettes and geometrical

silhouettes without consideration of body shape to reveal various symbolic aspects of the inner world, and characteristically expresses through coloring and decorative presentation through endless lines.

Secondly, eroticism expresses sex in the present ages that reflects sexual instinct of human and moral standard, and paradoxically commercialized sexual expression. Eroticism shows the genuine beauty of the body, directly and sensationally and reflected in materials expressing the sexual symbolism by means of exposure of the body, concealment, see-through, exaggeration, variations, and avant-garde forms.

Thirdly, decoration reflected universal naturalism, and the longing for the aesthetic world, and reverberation against existing ideas and influenced expression of human body as a delicate and sensual curved form. Especially its main feature is the use of the color, patterns, decorative effects, and metaphor for things.

Result of current analysis revealed paradigmatic characteristics expressed in the costume from modern era, characteristic of symbolism for the costume appeared to regain humanity from mechanized world, distrust on existing ideology, and to oppose to bourgeois, showing off their economic power and prestige. With this respect, extreme expression of humanity initiated the symbolism in costume.

Therefore, symbolic costume reflecting systems of the society and the phases of the times, became to contain all aspects of functional, symbolic, and practical. Especially, the costume in contemporary era adopted a new approach, philosophical factors controlling human's sensibility, and a sincere and analytical attitude on progress of technology.

In summary, this study provide the fact that costume is a part to create aesthetic of self-expression as a field of formative art. Contemporary costume allows vital power for daily life of human by pursuing new aesthetic value, and it expresses inner world of human and moves on future-oriented to regain humanity. The symbolic characteristics will continue to influence various aspects of our society and play a main role in shaping the purpose of fashion design in the 21st century.