

# Symbolism on the Process and the Costumes in Korean Traditional Wedding Ceremony

**Cho, Woo-Hyun**

Dept. of Fashion Design & Textiles, In-ha University

## 1. Introduction

In the traditional Korean culture, the wedding ceremony was perceived as the way for a young male and a young female to form a family and also to celebrate their ancestors and continue with their line of blood by producing offspring. A marriage was a union between two individuals and furthermore the way to bind two families in marriage. That is why a marriage has been expressed as 'The ethical origin of mankind and the root of all happiness of man.'

The wedding ceremony of ChoSun was based on '6 steps manner' where '6 steps manner' is being the main ceremonial model in the modern six procedures. It is composed of Yeu-hon, Nap-chaeh, Yeon-Gil, Nap-Pae, Chin-Young and Hyongugorae (Pae-Baek) and out of those six, it has been simplified to the following four, excluding the one not suitable to Korean situation, Yeu-Hhon, Nap-Chae(yun-gil), Nap-Pae and Chin-Young and it has been practiced by the nobles and general commoners.

## 2. Traditional Korean wedding costume

Korean traditional wedding costume was developed strongly influenced by the community, climate, political and religion. In ChoSun Dynasty, the wedding costumes differ depending on their classes and can be largely classified as one for royal families and one for commoners. By the end era of Chosun, the wedding costumes were settled into simplified form. On their wedding day, general commoner wears Korean style pants, top and robe basically and on top of this, they wear a navy blue overcoat (Kwan-Bok) with a belt (Gack-Tae) and shoes (Mock-hwa) and put helmet (Sa-mo). A bride wears basically a skirt with a petticoat and top, and on top of these, a bride puts on overcoat (Won-Sam) or a robe (Hwal-Ot) and headgear (Jock-Do-Ri) or tiara (Hwa-Kwan) with a pigtail ribbon to represent her maturity.

### 2-1. Costumes of bride

Hair styles of Korean women were strictly restricted by their age, social status and position within the families. Married woman put their hair up as soon as they get marry placing the peak on top head or at the back of head. Style with hair up after braid (Ye-Yoe-Meri) is called Kun-Mori and it is decorated with the cotton tiara (Jock-Do-Ri) and Ok-Pan and Hwa-Jam. Zhok

hairdo can be created by placing a hair at the back of the head fixing with the hair stick called Binyo and put up the Jock-Do-Ri on top of it completing the look of wedding costume. Wedding costume goes with the big hair piece (Dang-Gi). It was made with the blackish purple silk or the black thread padded with the red thread to create the blackish red color. Generally, married woman wore the more stylish hair pieces than single woman as their hair pieces were more readily available. Korean woman's hair styles displayed the stylish balance between the beauty of moderation and naturalism.

At the wedding, a bride wore a three-piece (Sam-Jack) top. Firstly, a linen inner wear was worn and on top of another inner wear was put on. After that, an outer top was worn calling it all together as 'Jeo-go-ri Sam-Jack' for the wedding, pink linen inner wear was used. It was even worn at the winter time in order to keep the stomach cool. Inner wear which was placed just below the Jeo-Go-Ri is smaller than Jeo-Go-Ri and instead of Go-Rum, knob was used. Outer Jeo-Go-ri had a cotton padding inside even at the summer time especially around the collar for little amount. Its reason is wishing for a bride to bear a difficult and hard life ahead with in-law families and for prosperity like cotton. At the wedding, yellow or green Sam-Hoe-Jang Jeo-Go-ri was worn with the red skirt outside and navy blue skirt inside. As the outer red skirt is designed to be shorter than the inner skirt, inner skirt meant to be seen at the bottom. Yellow Jeo-Go-Ri represents the land soil and creation of all things on earth while the red skirt represents the producing many offspring and prosperity of the house. Inside the outer skirt, Dari-Sok-Got, Sok-Sok-Got, Nu-rum-Baji and Dan-Sok-Got were worn to puff up the bottom part. Sometimes those were worn in the color of rainbow. Won-Sam is the most popular wedding gown called Dae-Ye and it was also used at the shroud. In Chosun, it was worn by queen and ladies inside the palace as the gown for the big ceremony. Commoner only could wear it at the wedding in green color. Green won-sam for wedding is smaller than the one worn at the palace in size and front end is longer than back by 1 'Ja'. Sleeve is decorated with navy, yellow, pink, light blue and red strips where its end is attached with Han-Sam. Pattern with a good fortune such as flower, Su & Bok character, children, and pomegranate are embroidered with the gold thread or gold plated. Bong-Whang-Heug-Bae in the square frame was attached at the chest and the back. Hwal-Ot was also called 'Hong-Jang-Sam' decorated with the stylish embroidery in red clothes while the inner piece is in blue. The basic design is same as the Won-Sam but differ in color and it is used as a wedding gown with the stylish embroidery. In Chinese Yin-Yang philosophy, blue is for male and red is for female and to reflect that inner skirt is in blue and outer is in red wishing for the balance. The pattern with a good fortune such as lotus flower, peony, phoenix, butterfly, 10 long life animals, children etc were embroidered for all the goodness. Specially, "Chinese phrase" was embroidered back and front to emphasize the meaning of wedding. Won-Sam and Hwal-Ot is carrying the philosophy of the Sam-Gang-Oh-Reon.

The red and blue contrast showing Yin-Yang harmony represent the idea of BuBu-Yoo-Byul and the hemming around the back and shoulder seams into one suggest Il-Bu-Jong-Sa and specially the pattern with the children reflect the wish for the wealth and the producing of a son

for the succession.

With the Won-Sam, Jok-Doo-Ri was used while Hwa-Kwan goes with Hwal-Ot. Jok-Doo-ri made of black silk and it has the round bottom and hexagonal shape top. There is also the one decorated with the jewelry. The basic material for Hwa-Kwan is paper or silk with the decoration in the shape of butterfly or flower then fixed with two small Bi-Nyeos. The wedding costume is finalized with the white socks (Beo-Sun) and flower decorated shoes.

## **2-2. Costumes of Bridegroom**

In early 19~20 century, Korean traditional wedding gown for a bridegroom is composed of Sa-Mo, Dan-Ryung, Hyuk-Dae and Mock-Hwa. However in early Chosun Dynasty, only the one with the official position was allowed for the Sa-Mo and Pum-Dae while a bridegroom without a title has to go only with the hat (Gat) and belt but that changed later not to discriminate between the commoner and the nobles as wedding is the one of the important ceremony.

A bridegroom may come in full dress up or initially come with the normal dress with Joo-Yi and get dressed later. After the wedding ceremony, a bride and a bridegroom help each other to get undressed. They took off the Sa-Mo-Kwan-Dae and changed into blue Do-Po and Bok-Geon with Cho-Lip that were prepared by a bride side. The details on a bridegroom costume are described below. The collar of Dan-Ryung gets more rounded and lowered and became the outer gown from the middle wear. Generally, blue gowns were worn as the wedding gown with the Gack-Dae and also the different cheat pattern could attach depending on the class and noble title. Chest pattern with two cranes was also allowed to the commoners. Sa-Mo was used since the era of King Woo, Koryo, initially used as the funeral hat of all officials and changed into the part of wedding costume. Sa-mo is made of bamboo thread and horse hair covered with the silk. In some of the pictures around time of western civilization, it can be seen that Sa-Mo worn on top of Poong-Cha (winter cap) and Bok-Gun. Mock-Hwa is the one used for the officials dress and had a black long neck lined in velvet and sole in leather with the red trim. The Poom-Dae originally to indicate the position is later used as the part of the wedding costume. Its materials indicates the level of position and at the wedding the Poom-Dae same as the official at the 1st rank was used for the wedding which changed into the Heuk-Gack-Dae. Inside the Dan-Ryung, a bridegroom wore the basic dresses such as pant and top (Jeo-Go-ri). As the inner wears, Jeok-Sam and Go-Yi were worn even at the winter wishing a bridegroom to stay cool for their life specially made of the linen. On the top of pants and one gown was worn out of Jeo-Go-ri, Chang-Yi, Joong-Chi-Mak, Do-Po and Ju-Yi where blue Do-Po was for the wedding.

## **3. Conclusion**

Chinese phrase, 'Yi-Sung-Ji-Hap' means two surnames join to form a family, in other word, a

marriage. The wedding ceremony is the most joyful event among many ceremonies along our lives. Korean people considered the wedding ceremony very importantly and tried to keep up their best formality and manner within their financial and social conditions when it came to a wedding ceremony. That's why even a commoner could enjoy on his/her wedding day the luxury of wearing the silk hat (Sa-Mo), belt (Kwan-Dae), robe (Hwal-Ot) and head piece (Jock-Do-Ri) which were only available to the nobles and noble ladies or government officials.

The talk of marriage proposal, exchanging of birthday certificates, checking out their harmony by fortuneteller, a bridegroom sending wedding gifts to a bride a night before a wedding, performing a pre-wedding ritual at the wedding hall with wild geese, and finally a post-wedding ceremony called Pae-Baek after coming back to the house where a bride will live her whole life are the steps involved in the wedding ceremony and carried out with their best sincere manner to reflect their mind wishing for the ever after happiness of a newly-wed.

There are many more meanings and symbolism bestowed in the wedding ceremony. It can be mentioned one after another. New household goods for a new bride like cutlery wrap, needle case and pillow for a newly-wed were embroidered with the charms like Bu-Ghu-Da-Nam, Man-Sa-Hyung-Tong, Soo-Bok-Gang-Ryung, Jang-Sang-Baul-Sa, Byung-Sa-Dae-Gil. The main bedroom decorated with bat, butterfly and fish expresses such hope and mind. As we have seen here, Korean traditional wedding ceremony is a good cultural heritage where you can examine the point of view of Korean people. The wedding ceremony closely following rules and procedures of society and individuals is to build the strong union and belongingness felt among a bride, bridegroom and families of both side.

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