The Symbolic Meaning of Women's Costume and Hairstyle of the Rococo Period in Visual Media

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Abstract

The Rococo period is symbolically associated with splendid and elegant clothes of women and large and high hairstyles. Clothes and hairs that belong to the Rococo clothing culture are interrelated and remembered by symbolic meaning, which is perceived by symbols of grace, nobility, elegance, romance, wealth and power. By analyzing how the symbolic meaning of clothes and hairstyles from the Rococo period is represented in contemporary fashion as a total coordination, the general role of clothes and hairs as clothing culture is established. It is meaningful to define the image map of hairstyle consistently expressed according to clothes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to consider socio-cultural background of the 18th century Rococo period, examine the morphological meaning of the Rococo clothes and hairstyles, and analyze the symbolic meaning of the Rococo clothes shown in visual media.

The Research method was conducted by literature review, and the result of this study is as follows. As a result of analyzing clothing culture of the Rococo period focusing on hairs and clothes, the symbolic meaning deduced includes wealth and power, sensuality, and femininity. Sensuality and femininity were images of the Rococo clothes shown in visual media. Sensuality was expressed by low-cut neckline revealing shoulders and silhouette that exposes slender waistline. Femininity was shown as an elegant and romantic image. Elegance is symbolized by graceful, noble and mature female image, and romantic image is symbolized by lovely and cute female image. As such, The Rococo clothes are reproduced or transformed in fashion shows, films, dramas and music videos and are used according to the concept. They were found to be applied as elements showing aesthetic standards and characteristics of individuals. In the modern society where coordination must be performed according to T,P,O (Time, Place, Occasion), use of symbolic images from the past can provide an opportunity to settle a fashion culture with consistency and communication in the clothing culture diversified by the era of new media.

Keywords: Rococo, Symbolic Meaning, Visual Media

1. Introduction

With development of digital and media in the new media society, the 21st century allows people to share global trends at home. Subordinate cultures that had been mixing up and imitating in the post-modernism era are now expressing individual characteristics within diverse trends. As such, it is extremely important to find an orderly image map in the midst of community with diverse tastes. Accordingly, in the modern society where coordination must be performed according to T,P,O (Time, Place, Occasion), establishment of symbolic image map can provide an opportunity to settle a fashion culture with consistency and communication in the clothing culture diversified by the era of new media. Koh, Yoonjeong (2009) reported that the era of new media is shown in fashion by collaboration and that this era has existing things and new things coexist as various tendencies are shown instead of pursuing a single style, due to dismantling of fields and dualism with coexistence of hybrid convergence and double-sidedness.

Clothing culture is a general product that includes psychological, material and social products, and it is one of visual expressions that show overall characteristics of a society. Likewise, clothing culture has symbolic meaning and is learned, accumulated, selected and succeeded from ancestors (Han, Sangbok et al., 1986). Accordingly, the clothing culture of Rococo is still being succeeded and selected in the present. Han, Jiseon (2012) explained that the fancy beauty culture of the Rococo period becomes a
good theme in films, dramas, music videos and fashion industry because of feminine and ornamental elements. It seems meaningful to establish an image map that consistently expresses clothes and hairstyles according to clothes by analyzing what symbolic meaning exists in the Rococo clothing selected in the era of new media and by what image it is represented as a total coordination in modern fashion. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to consider socio-cultural background of the 18th century Rococo period, study the literature to find out symbolic meaning of clothes and hairstyles from the Rococo period, analyze the symbolic meaning, and deduce the symbolic meaning of the Rococo clothes accumulated and succeeded by the contemporary clothing culture.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Background of the Rococo Period

The Rococo period is a style of French court during Louis XV and Louis XVI that pursues asymmetric balance where delicate and soft curves stand out. The origin of the term Rococo came from rocaiille, an ornament made by arranging seashells. Since this period had immoral ideas with the royal family and elites fallen into entertainment, the amusement culture was developed to vitalize hunting, operas, masquerades, and theater plays. During this period, anthropocentric ideology went to extremes, and the corruption of the French court led to revolution by the enlightenment and social reform (Kim, Minja et al., 2010).

2.2. Clothing Culture of the Rococo Period

In the 18th century Rococo period, the French culture was the center of Europe. Economic stability, abundance and development helped increase the cultural standard and artistry. In addition, the Industrial Revolution that occurred in England brought mechanical development and technological power to greatly affect development of clothes. France imported diverse fabrics based on active trade with Central Asia and Far East Asia. Elaborate and light-weighted materials were used for bright fabrics with mystical colors (Kim, Minja et al., 2010).

The Rococo culture was centered on salons with women as the main subjects and showed vitalization of literature and art. This period emphasized softness and decorative beauty by using feminine and beautiful curves and pastel colors (Kim, Soongu and Eunju Yoo, 2010). During early Rococo, watteau gown associated with rural and pastoral background having natural atmosphere was in vogue. In the middle of this period, clothing style stressing charming, polished, artistic and graceful senses was in vogue focused on the upper class and court clothes (Kim, Minja et al., 2010).

2.2.1. Clothes

For clothing forms during early Rococo, natural silhouette with Baroque style was in vogue. After the middle stage, waists were tightened using corset and broadened the width of skirts exaggerated by panier, emphasizing femininity. Also, pleasure-seeking lifestyle of women in the court was reflected to have a vogue of low-cut neckline exposing breasts.

As the period had a surge of ostentation that extravagance symbolizes high social status, embroideries made of gold thread, silver thread and laces were prevalent. Elegant atmosphere was directed by using spangles and foils with embroideries in an attempt to satisfy antique taste (Kim, Juae, 2011).

In the Rococo period, soft colors with high brightness were often used to show the desire for gracefulness. After Isaac Newton discovered the spectrum color system in 1720, harmony of diverse tones and soft shades led to refined colors with pastel tone having feministic feelings. Light rose, light blue, faded green, violet, and yellowish amber colors were popular (Kim, Minja et al., 2010).

In the Western culture, red which became popular in the 18th century was regarded as a noble color along with violet. Tyrian purple was the color of prince received from ancient Mediterranean culture (Kim, Juae, 2011).

Thin fabrics were used, and gentle patterns using flower shapes and stems created soft image with feministic and curved feelings. Rocaille arranged by placing seashells attached to Baroque gardens was delicately expressed as a decorative element in fabric patterns, and floral pattern was the symbol of the Louis XV era. Also,
flower patterns, leaves, fruits, connection of flowers, flowers on ribbons, and rural landscape patterns were in vogue. Mystical and bright fabrics from the Eastern culture were favored (Kim, Minja et al., 2010).

2.2.2. Hairstyles
Hairstyle is a part of clothing and cannot be interpreted separately. As a symbol of social status and wealth, royal women played a leading role in showing malignant ostentation by large and high hairstyles. In addition, hair was displayed to emphasize sexual appeal and showed the symbol of sensuality, which conflicted with the morality of the time (Lim, Rin and Eunjeong Kim, 2007). Women in the Rococo period were highly interested in hairstyles and widely used wigs. Big hair ornaments were used to symbolically show wealth, honor and social status of not having to do any labor (Kim, Soongu and Eunju Yoo, 2010). Most hairstyles were lifted up, and Fontange style was popular. High and large hairstyles were not only used as a means to show off aesthetic beauty of women but also symbolized authority and social class (Kim, Heuiseon and Jinheui Yang, 2008). As such, hair in the Rococo period was large and high since 1760s and was decorated by objects such as vegetable basket, birdcage, fruit and pear. Cushion and wire were used as tools to decorate hair, and wigs were used to lift up the hair. As a result, women could not wash their hair often, which led to back scratcher intended to resolve itchiness (Kim, Minja et al., 2010). Gray hair color was preferred and gray-brown color was used most often. It was etiquette to sprinkle white powders on hair (Kwon, Gujeong et al., 2006).

Gigantic and splendid hairstyles often used wigs, preferred white color, and were stood up straight by applying starch. Wire frame, horsetail cushion and wire were used as foundations for hair. Women dusted their hair and polished it using oil every day, but they did not wash their hair frequently, which caused the problem of cleanliness and bad smell. Perfume was sometimes used to resolve this problem. (Kim, Chundeuk, 2002), (Jeong, Seon Joo, 2006).

2.2.3. Shoes and Accessories
Leather or velvet was used for women’s shoes, and slippers and high heels with jewelries and embroideries were in vogue. Wooden shoes were worn to protect shoes. Popular accessories included gloves, parasols, small bags, folding fans and binoculars. Shoes were splendidly decorated using laces, ribbons, feathers and jewelries. Since there was a tendency to avoid exposure of social status by sensual clothes, beauty patches, folding fans and masks were widely used. Both men and women preferred muff in the form of arm warmers for warmth and symbol of wealth (Kim, Yeongok et al., 2009). Jeong, Hong Sook (2007) described that they have a decorative concept rather than external form, using many curves for gracefulness, femininity and nobility and lines with anti-natural and artificial characteristics.

3. Symbolic Meaning of the Rococo Clothes
Clothes are silent visual language used for communication and perform the role of providing social clues such as social status, role, and occupation using symbols (Park, Gilsun and Chunja Oh, 1996). Kim, Juae (2011) explained that tightening of the waist by corset, extended skirt and gigantic hairstyle allude to a social status which does not require labor and they were used as the medium to symbolize wealth. Also during this period, extravagance symbolized high social position. Lim, Rin and Eunjeong Kim (2007) emphasized that expanded hairstyles had an ostentatious role of expressing social status and wealth. Kim, Heuiseon and Jinheui Yang (2008) argued that hairstyles and make-up showed off aesthetic beauty of women and symbolized their authorities and social class. Kim, Minja et al. (2010) suggested that the Rococo clothes were sensual and pleasure-seeking. Lim, Rin and Eunjeong Kim (2007) saw expanded clothes and hairstyles from the perspective of sexual appeal as sensuality that conflicted with the morality of the Rococo period.

Koh, Yoonjeong (2009) said that women’s clothes symbolize femininity, social position of family, and healthiness of fecundity. Kim, Juae (2011) reported that the Rococo clothes tightened the waistline using corset and broadened the width of skirts by panier, emphasizing femininity through abundance.

Kang, Yeon Gyu (2012) explained that hairstyle has become an important means along with clothes and makeup to express personality and image as total fashion began to stand out in the 20th century, and added that hairstyle is being reinterpreted in the modern times. Likewise, clothes in the Rococo...
period have symbolic meanings of the time and communicate by being succeeded, accumulated and selected. Symbolic meanings of the Rococo clothes deduced from preceding studies are as follows.

3.1. Wealth and Power
Clothes in the Rococo period showed off wealth using splendid colors, exaggerated skirts, large hairstyles, and embroideries based on gold or silver thread. Expanded clothes were worn to implicitly show that the person wearing them is in a social class that does not require labor.

3.2. Sensuality
Underwear such as chemise, chemise gown, drawers and under petticoat was worn. On top of underwear, panier was worn on the lower body and corset was worn on the upper body. The complex procedure included wearing of a robe on top of panier and corset. Exposure of breasts by low-cut neckline with decolletage became so intensified that it received criticisms. Ideal beauty of body during this period was composed of extremely thin waist pressured by corset and abundant lower body exaggerated by skirt. Shoulders tilted to the back and ample bosoms showed pleasure-seeking and sensual characteristics.

3.3. Femininity
Women during the Rococo period wore clothes emphasizing femininity from hairstyles to clothes, shoes and accessories. Delicate and weak femininity was stressed out by tightening the waist using corset, and softness and femininity were revealed by white muslin gown and laced underwear showing abundant wrinkles. Splendid embroideries, flower and stem patterns, and bundle patterns on ribbons in particular expressed in materials represent cute femininity. The form of abundant and long skirt based on panier symbolizes graceful femininity.

4. Aspect of the Rococo Clothes Shown in Visual Media
In the era of new media, clothes of celebrities exhibit strong influence on the general public through visual media. Advertisers pursue economic profit by connecting such influence with commercial value of celebrities. Focusing on the clothes worn by Girls Generation in their 3rd album with romantic image and based on wealth and power, sensuality and femininity deduced as symbols of the Rococo period, forms, colors, materials and patterns will be analyzed to examine how the Rococo clothes are shown in visual media.

4.1. Form

Looking at forms, [Fig. 1] shows women’s clothes from the Rococo period with low-cut neckline, extended skirt, ribbon ornament, splendid flower pattern and gentle pastel colors. Lovely curves and feminine beauty stand out with sensuality created by emphasizing the waist and breasts using corset.
Extended skirt, sleeve ruffles, and fancy ornaments symbolize wealth and power. The hairstyle put up on both sides represents cute femininity. [Fig. 2] is the concept of the 3rd album of Girls Generation. The neckline revealing shoulders, extended skirt, and emphasis of the waistline and breasts reminds of gracefulness and sensual femininity found in the Rococo clothing. [Fig. 3] is similar to the Rococo clothing that showed off wealth by exaggerating shoulders and sleeves. The hairstyle was elegantly put up to show mature femininity, and the long hairstyle put down shows sensual beauty.

### 4.2. Color

Women’s clothes during the Rococo period widely used diverse colors with pastel tone such as light sky-blue, green, gold, light beige, and light purple. As shown in [Fig. 1], [Fig. 4] and [Fig. 5], background color has delicate, fancy and mystical feelings with lace ruffles in the sleeves and flower patterns standing out. Royal families and elites wore clothes with fancy colors. Wealth and power, nobility and soft femininity are shown. The white dress of Girls Generation [Fig. 2] symbolizes innocence and cleanliness to connote pure femininity. [Fig. 3] is the princess concept included in the 3rd album of Girls Generation, where beautiful silver color reveals mystical and graceful feminine beauty. [Fig. 6] has a concept of romantic and cute femininity. Femininity of the Rococo period is found in pastel pink skirt and lace decoration.
4.3. Clothing Material and Pattern

As in [Fig. 1], [Fig. 4] and [Fig. 5], women’s clothing in the Rococo period used light-weighted and splendid fabrics such as muslin, flax, and saraca. Mystical and oriental fabrics were widely used. In addition, fancy embroideries, flowers and stems, and ribbon bundles decorated clothes to stress out femininity. [Fig. 2], [Fig. 3] and [Fig. 6] have elegant and romantic styles showing graceful and beautiful curves of the Rococo period from flower decorations, patterns and sleeve ruffles. Sensuality and femininity can be found in water drop patterns and materials of [Fig. 6].

As a result of examining forms, colors, clothing materials and patterns in women’s clothes of the Rococo period and clothes introduced in the 3rd album of Girls Generation, ostentation of wealth, sensuality and femininity appeared as morphological symbols. Femininity was expressed by color, and sensuality and femininity were expressed by clothing materials and patterns.

5. Conclusion

As a result of analyzing clothes of the Rococo period, the time during which delicate and soft beauty of curves stands out with pursuit of asymmetric balance, using the style of French royal court during the times of Louis XV and Louis XVI, wealth and power, sensuality, and femininity were deduced as symbolic meanings. Popular group Girls Generation was analyzed to examine what image is used to symbolize the Rococo clothing succeeded and selected in the era of new media. In terms of form, ostentation of wealth, sensuality, cuteness, gracefulness and femininity were shown. Soft femininity was found in color, and sensuality and femininity were found in clothing materials and patterns. Though it is difficult to see the Rococo clothes worn in the modern society as a symbol of wealth and power, they were used as an image map to perform image consulting with a romantic and elegant concept for emphasizing femininity.

As explained above, use of the Rococo clothing was carried out by reproducing or transforming it in fashion shows, films, dramas, and music videos according to the concept. The Rococo clothing was found to be applied as an element that shows aesthetic standards and characteristics of individuals.
6. References

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