

The Locality of Jeju Island and Planning Visual-Image Contents

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Abstract. A policy for developing local culture has been magnified these days. has served as the backdrop for a number of visual-image content thus far by utilizing its own characteristics, such as its natural environment, its myths, and its living culture. This study attempted to discuss Jeju's strategy, which plans to integrate visual-image content with its local culture. *My Mother the Mermaid* used the strategy of adding its thematic meaning based on a good understanding of the symbolic spatial representation of Jeju. It is important to find any connection with the story from the spatial materials used in the film and apply special meanings to them

Keywords: Local Culture, Visual-image Content, OSMU, Space, Jeju Island, *My Mother the Mermaid*.

1 Production of Visual-Image Content and Regional Revitalization

The economic and social influence of culture is very powerful in the era of the creative economy. Even from the community's perspective, culture is an important element used to create the community's identity and image. The quality of the local residents' cultural life could also be enhanced through the active development of such a community culture.¹ For that reason, a political strategy, which aims to develop the community's culture, has been magnified these days. Visual-image Content especially plays a central role in developing OSMU in Korea, and so local governments actively support this field.

In this regard, Nami Island could be the benchmark model, for it became a famous tourist attraction for foreign tourists due to the influence of Korean drama. Individual local governments actively utilize the filming of local TV dramas as a means of promoting their own communities, or they plan for continuous profits by developing drama location sets as part of their tourism package. Lately, each local government also performs various activities by organizing its own film commission. They try to attract filmmakers by providing the environment and the tools that are

¹ Jong-Youl Hong, "Cultural industry and local culture policy in a creative economy era", Seoul: *Journal of Korea Culture Industry*, Vol.13 No.2, 2012, p.70.

required in order to shoot the visual-image content and they also hold screenwriting contests based on their own communities. As for cities, several, including Seoul, Busan, Jeonju, Bucheon, Gwangju, and Jecheon, hold international film festivals.

Jeju has also actively attracted filmmaking by supporting locations and equipment through the Jeju Film Commission in 2010. The Commission made an effort to establish Jeju as the optimum place, using the slogan: "Island of Film Industry".² Jeju has served as the backdrop for a number of visual-image contents thus far by utilizing its own characteristics, such as its natural environment, its myths, and its living culture. This study attempted to discuss Jeju's strategy, which plans to integrate visual-image content with its local culture. For this paper, the film, *My Mother the Mermaid*³ was selected. In most cases, it is regrettable that Jeju has been utilized as merely a spatial backdrop and a visual element. This movie used the strategy of adding its thematic meaning based on a good understanding of the symbolic spatial representation of Jeju. As such, this study attempted to examine the most effective method to incorporate regional characteristics into the planning of visual-image content.

2 Symbolic Representation of the Sea

Above all else, Jeju's meaning as the backdrop for a visual-image content results from the island's geographical condition. That is, the island is totally surrounded by the natural environment of the sea. Nature is the space where archetypal motifs directly reveal their forms in the common myths shared by all people, no matter their age. For example, symbolic representations of water myths could easily be expressed as sea, river, or lake. Such natural 'backdrops' are less noticeable than characters or incidents and, therefore, they tend to be accepted unconsciously in many cases. However, it could be said that this 'unconsciousness' is intended by the writer.

Bachelard studied materialistic imagination using the following four elements: water, fire, air, and earth. He regards that objects provide us with images as 'materials', not merely as 'forms'. That is, images are not created by external forms but by the substances' own attributes. The materiality of the image has a universality that transcends ages and cultures due to its attributes. According to Bachelard, visual images could change with age but the materialistic images of individual substances are mental images that never change.⁴ Therefore, the materialistic imagination could be caused not only by the natural components of the four elements expressed into direct form, but also by various metaphorical materials. Archetypal images of natural backdrops are connected with other images that have similar meanings and that further differentiate their symbolic representations.

² Jeju Film Commission official homepage, <http://www.jejuafc.or.kr/Default.aspx>

³ This film was produced by Now Film in 2004. Its running time is 110 minutes. It was written by Park Hong-shik and Song Hye-jin and directed by Park Hong-shik. The film starred Jeon Do-yeon, Park Hae-il, and Go Du-shim. This fantasy melodrama genre film is set against the backdrop of Jeju and tells the story of a heroine who returns to the innocent and romantic period of her parents. The film earned directing and acting awards from various film festivals.

⁴ Myeong-Hee Hong, *Imagination and Gaston Bachelard*, Seoul: Salim, 2005, pp. 30-34.

Water symbolizes the most universal maternal instinct or regeneration, which simultaneously includes life and death. In *My Mother the Mermaid*, the reason why Jeju's blue sea has more significant meaning is due to the character's job as a *haenyeo* (female diver). The job of *haenyeo* exists only in Korea and Japan. In the boundless sea, they swim and fish for seafood, using no supporting fishing implements. So, *haenyeos* are mentally very strong and have a strong ability to maintain their livelihood. In the case of Mara-do, where most *haenyeos* live, females are ranked higher than males.⁵ This movie utilizes the symbolism of water as its spatial backdrop and it uses the *haenyeo* as its material.

Yeon-sun (the film's heroine) has lived as a *haenyeo* since she was a teenager and she has the strong ability to maintain her livelihood. Now she is middle-aged and earns a living as a professional scrubber in the public bath. Water connects these two jobs. Yeon-sun swam and fished for seafood in the vast sea when she was young, but now she swims in the public bath. In spite of her difficult job, water is the material that provides her with vitality. Therefore, the small public bath is described as a mysterious space. Water simultaneously symbolizes death and life's amniotic fluid. So, the mysterious combination of contradictory materials exists. This movie is representative of the fantasy genre with its story of a daughter who is transported back to 1975, to the time when her mother and her father had first met and fell in love. It could be said that such narration becomes possible through the mysterious characteristics of Jeju's watery environment.

In the movie's present time, the relationship between Yeon-sun and her husband is chilly and quite different from the pure days of their first love. Yeon-sun is full of life and energy but he is calm and timid. There is a financial problem as well. Due to his gentle nature, he lost his money by guaranteeing his friend's debt. Yeon-sun gets angry at everything concerning him and he hides his head whenever she expresses her anger. Finally, he dies of cancer and Yeon-sun is obliged to maintain her livelihood. Her tough character is revealed through her outspoken Jeju dialect and by the behaviors she spits at the public bath. But, this is also a representation of the strong ability to maintain her livelihood and meet her maternal obligation to raise her children. The sea, which is used as the backdrop of the movie, reveals its symbolic representation in this type of maternity.

3 Island, Utopian Space

What kinds of images are used to describe Jeju Island in the visual-image content? First, Jeju is located away from the land. Between the mainland and the island, water is placed, which symbolizes the mystery. That is, Jeju Island is definitely an outer and unknown space. So, new images could be shown to the viewers that differentiate this place from the more familiar space of the mainland. Rothmann focused on the possibility that 'space' might model nonspatial elements, which are semantic or

⁵ Young-don Kim, *Jeju Residents' Life and Culture*, Jeju: Jeju's Culture, 1993, p. 157.

axiological systems in the artistic text. He defined literary works as semiotic texts that are available to be understood based on their meanings, and he suggested that the world suggested in creative work should have clear objectives and meanings.⁶ First, every story has its own spatial conflicts in terms of its structure. One of the most universal subjects in oral literature is the contrast between 'dom' and 'antidom'. The separation of the main character's world and from the external environment is basically in antithesis. The implicit meaning between a penthouse and a basement room is definitely different, and this is frequently used in the movie. Likewise, the same differentiation of meaning can be made between a city's forest of buildings and the quiet countryside.

Land reflects our daily lives, which are routine and familiar. In general, land is shown as a realistic and desolate image. In this way, the conflicting image of Jeju tends to be suggested as a very utopian space. The backdrop of the story is shown not as a physical space but as the space that is added with special values. In *My Mother the Mermaid*, Jeju is the pure space of first love. This contrasts with the current life, which is reflected in the backdrop of Seoul. Na-young leaves Seoul for Jeju to look for her father who ran away from home. Through the amazing sorcery of Jeju's space, she moves into the period in which her parents were young. This helps her understand her parents in a new way. Through Na-young's persuasion, Yeon-sun also comes to talk with her husband in Jeju, thereby tearing down the walls that separate them. That is, Jeju is the space where the value of pure love is recovered and the family's reconciliation is possible as a utopian space.

In *Architecture 101*, Jeju is also expressed as the space for first love. This film tells the story of a man who builds a house for his first love who appears unexpectedly 15 years later. Through the process to restore her old house in Jeju, they recall the memory of their first love. They understand the past when they parted from each other due to a certain misunderstanding. When the house is completed, their first love becomes beautiful memory. In the film, *A Love Story*, the love of a couple (the main characters) is nurtured under the backdrop of a house called 'Il Mare (the sea)'. In this film, the sea is used as the spatial material that simultaneously isolates humans and helps open their minds to realize love.⁷ That is, it is the symbolic element that embodies both death and reproduction. That movie was remade in US in 2006 as *The Lake House*, and, based on that title we can understand that the material of nature, called water, plays an important role. In *A Love Story*, depicting Jeju as the heroine's hometown has something to do with this as well. The man builds a house for his woman by the sea and names it as 'transcendental love over time'. In this way, Jeju is described as a place that is remote and unfamiliar from the mainland, and suggests a utopian image for love and reconciliation.

⁶ Yuri M. Lotman, "The Composition of the Verbal Work of Art", *The Structure of The Artistic Text*, Tr. by Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1977.

⁷ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Contents Plan through Storytelling*, Seoul: HUFPS Press, 2010, pp.68-70.

4 Conclusion

To reproduce historical facts as they are or to display tourist attractions by enumerating them with visual elements form the foundation of the planning stages of visual-image content. So, it is important to find any connection with the story from the spatial materials used in the film and apply special meanings to them. That is, the space is naturally melded into the story as an important element, and it is closely connected with the other elements in the story. This is the only way that empathy is successfully achieved through storytelling and the way that the film's content becomes memorable to the audience.

My Mother the Mermaid successfully utilizes materials, such as Jeju's *haenyeos*, dialectic language, and living culture and expresses the symbolic meanings of Jeju in a very effective way. As a result, a filmmaking location in Udo became one of the most popular tourist attractions. Tourists visit the place because they can reproduce the story in the film by themselves. The petite Chinese restaurant that the couple in the film visits frequently has now become a famous restaurant on the island. In the inn where the couple in the film stayed while the film was being shot, a special room named for the main characters was built, and the place where they fished was made into one of the tourist attractions. This suggests and implies that the connection of the story with cultural content and regional spaces could have an influence on regional development.

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