

# Storytelling Strategy Based on Locality of Jeju Island

Jeong-Hee Kim and Jong-Youl Hong\*

*SunMoon University, GalSanRi 100, TangJungMyun, Asan, Korea*  
*HanKuk University of Foreign Studies, ImunRo 107, Seoul, Korea*  
*savie11@sunmoon.ac.kr, herr\_hong@hufs.ac.kr*

## Abstract

*A policy for developing local 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. Jeju 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 examine the most effective method to incorporate regional characteristics into the planning of visual-image content. 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:** *Locality, Film, visual-image content, Storytelling, Space, Jeju Island, My Mother the Mermaid*

## 1. Visual-Image Content and Regional Revitalization

### 1.1. Urban Regeneration in an Era of Creative Economy

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. For that reason, a political strategy, which aims to develop the community's culture, has been magnified these days. The key of today's urban regeneration is not to redevelop cities physically but to improve the quality of local people's lives by reviving local community. That means urban regeneration is about integrating society, economy, and environment on the premise of voluntary and active engagement of local people. Furthermore, the necessity of establishing a strategic and systematic urban regeneration plan tailored to regional characteristics is arising along with urban projects implemented at a national level.

In the process of urban development in a post industrial society, the cities facing obstacles tried to implement a revitalization project in various ways. Its direction was to renew urban images and introduce numerous cultural events as a cultural strategy. In other words, urban development was about changing its model centering on the service industry, especially tourism, not on the manufacturing industry. Cities cannot expect further development only with great industrial locations and abundant jobs, which were the key of urban development in the past. Now cities are competing fiercely to attract residents, the main consumer, and tourists as labors in an industrial society did intensely for limited jobs, naturally leading to urban growth.

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\* corresponding author

This is directly related to the word and concept of Creative City. The Creative City is part of creative economy paradigm, which has been emerging as a new strategy of urban regeneration since the mid-1990s. This term was first used by Jane Jacobs, an American urbanist, but the discussion over it has been sparked since the mid-1990s. The concept of the Creative City drawing attention as agenda of urban development comes from creative industry or creative economy. Charles Landry, a leading scholar, defines the Creative City as one which nurtures distinctive arts and culture and has ability to create a new industry through development itself. In other words, the Creative City is a city with a creative, innovative, and flexible economic system. Richard Florida, an American urbanist, defines it as a city with an environment that the creative class wants. That means the Creative City is a place where technology, talent and tolerance, called 3 T of economic development, are integrated, and individual ideas play an integral role in economic activities.

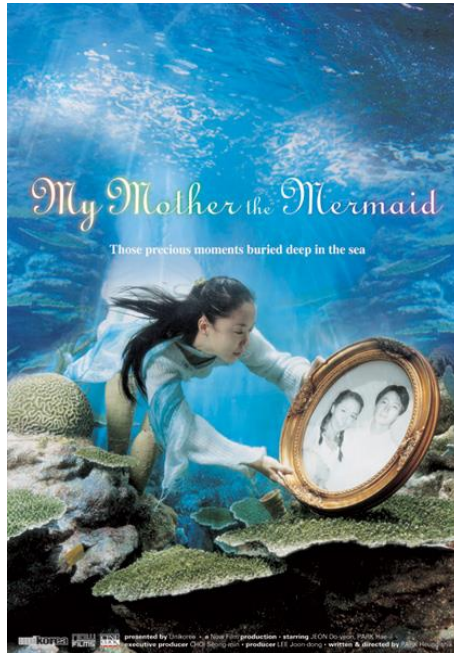
UNESCO created the Creative Cities Network in 2004. Edinburgh of the UK, Popayan of Colombia, and Bologna of Italy were designated as UNESCO cities. As for Asia, UNESCO designated Shenzhen of China and Nagoya of Japan. Cities joined this network focus on developing their unique creativities and promoting cultural diversity which is an important value of UNESCO. In Korea, Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs opened Korean Urban Renaissance Center (KURC) on January of 2007 and had made investment of 150 billion won in R&D until 2013. As a result, KURC found a way of vitalizing depressed areas of cities, and it is expected that KURC will invest in urban renewal of 8 major cities in the next 5 years, which will amount to 200 trillion won.

## **1.2 Jeju's Local Culture and Visual-Image Content**

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 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 Island is trying to make it as an "island for film industry" as becoming the best place to film. That means Jeju Free International City is nurturing the film industry as an attractive and representative industry. Jeju creates an environment where producers can make works, including its history, culture, and natural resources by supporting content production of films or dramas and script writing and it also promotes locations. Jeju Film Commission backs up filming and supporting service and attracts production in one step.

Established in 2003, Jeju Film Commission set up media center in 2006 and it opens classes, rents equipments, and releases graduates' films. In 2008, the commission made a website for location database and it categorizes locations as 26 sectors, including river, lighthouse, breakwater, sea, mountain, historic site, and park. Users can search locations directly through the website and apply for permission. Furthermore, the commission attracts location shootings by providing content producers with accommodation support to 2 weeks and grants. In addition, Jeju Film Commission helps writers upload their scenarios directly and mediates between film studios and writers in copyright by opening Scenario Market. And the commission holds national content competition featuring Jeju's unique culture such as stone, straw thatched houses, women divers, water, and horses.



**Figure 1. Poster of the Movie "My Mother the Mermaid"**

As Jeju Island has unique characteristics, including natural environment, myth, and living culture, the island has been the background of numerous films. Jeju with dynamic vitality has attracted love and attention continuously as an open filming site which provides distinctive and unique locations compared to other domestic and foreign areas. 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*<sup>2</sup> 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. Cultural Archetype of Jeju Island**

### **2.1 Sea, the Space for Regeneration**

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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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. 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.

Water has symbolized the root of life or a maternal instinct. Water is considered as spring of all things in the universe like amniotic fluid in the womb protecting the fetus. Gaston Bachelard said all liquid is water and all water is an origin and source. Choi Hye Sil analyzed basic symbols of temporal and spatial backgrounds on dramas. In particular, she found the basic image of "water" in *Gongmudohaga*, Korean classical poetry, and linked it to modern dramas. The poetry is the first song dealing with "water" as the main source and embodies lover's death with the source. In other words, in this poetry, "water" is the source symbolizing farewell and perfect love. Prof. Choi said the ending of a Korean drama *Autumn in My Heart* is similar to the verse in this poetry that narrator's husband gets into the water and the verse leads to the image of water connoting love and death. This is the motive of a Korean drama *Stairway to Heaven* in which a heroine dying young at the seashore and her lover appear. Lots of culture and arts content recreates water as a mythical space, transcending time.

## 2.2 Island, the Space of Utopia

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.

Lotman focused on the possibility that 'space' might model non spatial elements, which are semantic or 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. 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 *Architecture 101*, Jeju is 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. 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.

### 3. Analysis on Storytelling of <My Mother the Mermaid>

#### 3.1 Character

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. Yeon Sun, the main character, has worked as a woman diver since she was a teenager and made a living to support her family. She supports and sends her uncle to school at an early age and earns a living, and she is strong because she was orphaned at an early age.



Figure 2. Figure of Haenyeo

Yeon Sun's personality is revealed through dramatic characterization. The signs categorizing behavior, form and content of language, appearance, and environment are as in the following. Tough language and behaviors show her strong character and she matters substance, which shows she is very practical.

**Table 1. Characterization of the Heroine**

<b>Indirect presentation</b>	<b>indices</b>
action	Spit on a bathtub
	go to the bathroom while opening the door
	pick up old furniture
	eat bibimbap in a large bowl
	eat unsold eggs
	drink soju well
	unclog a toilet by herself
	tussle with consumers
speech	speak Jeju Island dialect
	shout away noisily
	swear
external appearance	wear no makeup
	have curly perm
	wear a Red Devil T-shirt
environment	have much old furniture

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. Her husband's personality is shown through his behaviors like smoking heavily without any words, and through an expressionless face, and Yeon-Sun directly speaks about his personality like "naïve", or "kind".



**Figure 3. Figure of Heroine**

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.

### 3.2 Plot

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.

**Table 2. Story of the Movie**

Sequence	Content
1	Na Yeong's family loses her tuition for guaranteeing other's debt.
2	Na Yeong gives up entering college and works as a civil servant at post office. Her mother works at bathhouse.
3	Her father runs away, leaving a note he wants to take a rest.
4	They know father's illness, but mother doesn't want to find him.
5	She resents her parents and says she will never get married to her boyfriend.
6	She gives up New Zealand training and leaves for Jeju Island. (Jump to the past) She meets with a 20-year-old mother.
7	Yeon Sun (mother) and Jin Guk (father) have affectionate emotion.
8	Jin Guk promises he will teach Yeon Sun Korean.
9	Yeon Sun begins to study Korean.
10	Yeon Sun's language skill is improved.
11	Yeon Sun moves to second grade.
12	Jin Guk is transferred to the office on land.
13	Yeon Sun gets hurt when working as a woman diver./ Jin Guk nurses her devotedly.
14	Yeon Sun writes thank you letters to Jin Guk.
15	(Jump to the present) Na Yeong invites her mother to Jeju and makes her to meet father.
16	Na Yeong starts a family and raises her daughter.

This film starts a scene that Na Yeong gives up entering college because of financial difficulties and goes through a family feud, which shows her lack of affection. Na Yeong says that she does not have happy memories at all with her parents and she will never have a family. The plot of the film is about the process of making up with her parents through an event in which Na Yeong meets her parents by jumping to the past. Na Yeong is unhappy about her mother's strong character, but she finds mother's purity in her early days by jumping to the past and understands her mother who had to be lonely and stand

on her own feet because she was orphaned. Na Yeong's change of heart is revealed in the ending that she says "a good person" to her mother. As Na Yeong plays cupid for her parents when jumping to the past, she persuades her mother to last meet her father. In an epilogue of the film, Na Yeong gets married and raises a young daughter. In this film, a critical event, jumping to the past, happens in Jeju Island which is portrayed as a fantasy space and leads the whole story.

### 3.3 Space

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.

This movie utilizes the symbolism of water as its spatial backdrop and it uses the *haenyeo* as its material. Yeon-sun has lived as a *haenyeo* since she was a teenager. 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. The characteristic of water is shown in an episode in which Jin Guk draws "mysterious water" to recover Yeon Sun. Furthermore, in a scene where Na Yeong goes in and out the fantasy space, it showers. This stands out water's mysterious characteristic.

## 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. This film deals with a woman diver, Jeju's unique culture, as its main source and makes the main character with it. It also creates the plot of fantasy genre by utilizing symbols of water related to Jeju's culture. In this process, island's spatial specificity is magnified. 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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## Authors



**Jeong-Hee Kim**, She received PhD degree in cultural contents from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 2009. She is a professor at Sunmoon University, Department of Cultural Contents. Her current research interests include storytelling, visual art, contents planning, locality and cultural contents.



**Jong-Youl Hong**, He received PhD degree in culture contents from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 2011. He is a professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Minerva College. His current research interests include cultural policy, European Union studies, interculturalism, creative city, space and storytelling.

