

Manufacturing the Authenticity of Dokkaebi's Visual Representation in Tourist Marketing

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Abstract : The dokkaebi, a beloved icon of Korean culture, is represented as an elf, goblin, monster, dwarf, or any similar creature in different media, such as animated shows, comics, soap operas, and movies. It is often described as a mythical creature with a horn or horns and long teeth, wearing tiger-skin pants or a grass skirt, and carrying a magic stick. Many Korean researchers agree on the similarity of the image of the Korean dokkaebi with that of the Japanese oni, a view that is regarded as negative from an anti-colonial or nationalistic standpoint. They cite such similarity between the two mythical creatures as evidence that Japanese colonialism persists in Korea. The debate on the originality of dokkaebi's visual representation is an issue that must be addressed urgently. This research demonstrates through a diagram the plurality of interpretations of dokkaebi's visual representations in what are considered 'authentic' images of dokkaebi in Korean art and culture. This diagram presents the opinions of four major groups in the debate, namely, the scholars of Korean literature and folklore, art historians, authors, and artists. It also shows the creation of new dokkaebi visual representations in popular media, including those influenced by the debate. The diagram further proves that dokkaebi's representations varied, which include the typical persons or invisible characters found in Korean literature, original Korean folk characters in traditional art, and even universal spirit characters. They are also visually represented by completely new creatures as well as oni-based mythical beings and the actual oni itself. The earlier dokkaebi representations were driven by the creation of a national ideology or national cultural paradigm and, thus, were more uniform and protected. In contrast, the more recent representations are influenced by the Korean industrial strategy of 'cultural economics,' which is concerned with the international rather than the domestic market. This recent Korean cultural strategy emphasizes diversity and commonality with the global culture rather than originality and locality. It employs traditional cultural resources to construct a global image. Consequently, dokkaebi's recent representations have become more common and diverse, thereby incorporating even oni's characteristics. This argument has rendered the grounds of the debate irrelevant. The dokkaebi has been used recently for tourist marketing purposes, particularly in revitalizing interest in regions considered the cradle of various traditional dokkaebi tales. These campaign strategies include the Jeju-do Dokkaebi Park, Koksung Dokkaebi Land, as well as the Taebaek and Sokri-san Dokkaebi Festivals. Almost dokkaebi characters are identical to the Japanese oni in tourist marketing. However, the pursuit for dokkaebi's authentic visual representation is less interesting and fruitful than the appreciation of the entire spectrum of dokkaebi images that have been created. Thus, scholars and stakeholders must not exclude the possibilities for a variety of potentials within the visual culture. The same sentiment applies to traditional art and craft. This study aims to contribute to a new visualization of the dokkaebi that embraces the possibilities of both folk craft and art, which continue to be uncovered by diverse and careful researchers in a still-developing field.

Keywords : Dokkaebi, post-colonial period, representation, tourist marketing

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