

A Serendipitous Reappraisal of Jeju Culture

Serendipity as I, Here, Now, and the
Creation of Jeju Culture

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Contents

1. Research Background and Objectives
2. The Defining Features of 21st-Century Culture
3. Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — The Island's Character
4. Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — Natural Conditions
5. Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — Geopolitical Position
6. The Historical Transformation of Jeju Culture
7. Cultural Expansion through Empathy and Analogical Thinking
8. Serendipity and the Creation of Jeju Culture



Research Background and Objectives

This study reexamines the distinctiveness and transformation of Jeju culture, along with the possibility of cultural creation from the perspective of 'Serendipity.'
Approaching Jeju Island's unique social and historical context through existential and structural analysis, it seeks to propose approaches to cultural expansion applicable to contemporary society.



The Defining Features of 21st-Century Culture

- The 21st century is the age of culture: creating new cultures through encounters among diverse cultures
- Huntington's thesis that "culture matters" is now deeply embedded in our lives
- The essence of culture is a reflection of identity: only when one's own identity is fully expressed does it rise to a truly distinguished culture
- Cultural diversity and creativity are emphasized amid globalization, informatization, and advances in science and technology
- Jeju Culture: a distinctive identity that is both the same as and different from Korea, and different yet the same



Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — The Island's Character

Jeju Island bears the characteristics of insular isolation and voluntary disconnection. Once a place of exile, in the modern era a place to leave, it has now shifted in meaning to a "paradise" where people actively seek out culture.

Isolation

Passive character, an attitude of complaint and misfortune, the Jeju of the past

Disconnection

Active character, an attitude of gratitude and happiness, the Jeju of today

Once isolated like the Galapagos, Jeju is now reinterpreted in modern society as a valuable space where its natural environment and cultural distinctiveness have been preserved



Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — Natural Conditions

Distinctive natural features such as Mt. Hallasan, the oreum, and lava caves have shifted in perception from disaster to blessing. A harsh natural environment became the driving force behind communal spirit, self-reliance, and unique cultural assets.

- On a small island measuring 73 km east-to-west and 31 km north-to-south are distributed 368 oreum and some 160 lava caves
- Centered on Mt. Hallasan, diverse climate zones form with altitude, yielding a mild climate with an annual average of 14°C
- The harsh environment of dark-brown volcanic soil strengthened residents' ceaseless efforts and communal spirit

Mt. Hallasan

Mt.
Halla
san

Oreum

Ore
um

Lava cave

Lava
cave



Existential and Structural Analysis of Jeju Culture — Geopolitical Position

Jeju Island lies at the center of Korea, China, and Japan, and sits at the hub of East Asia's maritime routes.

- A strategic point connecting Russia and China with Japan and Southeast Asia
- Historically subject to the influence of various external powers (the Yuan dynasty, Japan, etc.)
- During the Japanese colonial period, it was used as a last line of defense to protect the Japanese mainland
- The geopolitical particularity of being the southernmost point of the Korean Peninsula became an important driver of Jeju's cultural development

 The geopolitical location of
Jeju Island



The Historical Transformation of Jeju Culture

Jeju Island has forged a distinctive cultural identity through a range of historical events. A history of hardship and ordeal is being reinterpreted today as a cultural asset.

Ancient-Medieval

From the era of the Tamna Kingdom to rule by the Yuan dynasty

Joseon period

Jeju as a place of exile; the Yi Jae-su Rebellion

Japanese colonial period

Japanese military base; forced relocation of residents

Modern era

The April 3 Incident; development of the tourism industry

Past

- An identity as an isolated island and a place of exile
- Perceived as a place abandoned by the outside world
- A place of pain and wounds
- An object of dark tourism

Present and future

- Rediscovery of its value as a world-class tourist destination
- Recognition of cultural distinctiveness and diversity
- Reborn as a place of healing and hope
- Cultural creation through stories of overcoming hardship



Cultural Expansion through Empathy and Analogical Thinking

Empathy

A value that modern society urgently needs, empirically supported by the discovery of mirror neurons in neuroscience

- A basis for grasping existence and structure
- A foundation for moral theory
- The central moral culture of Jeju's mutual harmony

Analogical thinking

Similar to correlative thinking in Chinese philosophy, a mode of thought through association and comparison

- Connected to Eastern modes of thought
- The parable (yuyan) mode of the Zhuangzi
- Analogical contrast between Jeju's nature and history

Storytelling and cultural expansion: empathy and analogical thinking play a central role in producing storytelling grounded in Jeju's history and geography, through which Jeju Culture can be expanded and shared



Serendipity and the Creation of Jeju Culture

What is Serendipity?

- A phenomenon that creates new value through unexpected discoveries different from what one was seeking
- A creative process combining chance discovery with insight
- In Jeju Culture, the process of sublimating historical ordeals and external influences into positive change



Key elements in the creation of Jeju Culture

- 1 Autonomous adoption of foreign cultures: creatively transforming historical external influences and sublimating them into a culture uniquely Jeju's own
- 2 Creative transformation of adversity: turning the disadvantageous conditions of isolation and barrenness into cultural assets
- 3 Reconstruction of identity: maintaining and developing Jeju's own distinctiveness and identity amid diverse external influences
- 4 Contemporary application: harnessing the serendipitous character of Jeju Culture as a model for creating new value in modern society



Conclusion and Implications

Rediscovering the value of Jeju Culture

- Jeju's existential characteristics (island, nature, geopolitical location) form its cultural distinctiveness
- A process of structural change that sublimated historical hardship into an asset
- The healing elements of Jeju Culture and the potential for contemporary use of its communal spirit

Directions for serendipitous creation

- Developing strategies for cultural expansion through empathy and analogical thinking
- Jeju Culture as a model of the autonomous adoption and creative transformation of foreign cultures
- The potential for sustainable growth as a global cultural heritage

"Jeju Culture can become a cultural model that, through serendipity from the perspective of I, Here, Now, sublimates the wounds of the past into assets of the present"



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