

# Symbolic Capitalization of Marine Character Content Intellectual Property: Regional Identity, Community Engagement, and Place Branding

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By combining cultural symbolism with practical value, the marine character intellectual property (MCIP) created from regional maritime resources is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset for coastal communities. In this study, we investigated three representative South Korean cases—Dokdo Guard Kangchi in Ulleung County, HOBOT in Yeongdeok County, and Padossi in Pohang City—to understand their contributions to regional identity, community engagement, and sustainable development. A qualitative approach was adopted, integrating a literature review and multicriteria case studies, with selection criteria emphasizing cultural and educational values, creativity and innovation, community engagement, and long-term viability. MCIP acts as symbolic capital, transforming local heritage, ecological values, and community narratives into accessible forms through media, merchandise, and public initiatives; it enhances environmental literacy (particularly among children and adolescents) by embedding ecological themes in culturally resonant storytelling. Simultaneously, it stimulates the local economy by attracting tourists, generating licensing opportunities, and strengthening regional brand recognition. Such IP fosters cultural resilience, promotes ecological stewardship, and creates scalable opportunities for global dissemination. In sum, MCIP represents an effective model for integrating cultural heritage into the contemporary content industry, offering coastal communities a sustainable pathway to preserve their identities while engaging with both domestic and international audiences.

## 1. Introduction

“We do not cross the sea—we live with the sea”. This observation by French anthropologist Michel Serres captures a growing reconceptualization of maritime space. No longer viewed solely as a site of commerce or transportation, the sea is increasingly

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being seen as a cultural landscape layered with stories, symbols, and emotional memories. Coastal regions, particularly in East Asia, are undergoing cultural reevaluation, with growing attention paid to sensory, historical, and community-based dimensions embedded in littoral environments.

Amid this shift, the emergence of marine character intellectual property (MCIP)—such as Dokdo Guard Kangchi (Ulleung-gun), HOBOT (Yeongdeok-gun), and Padossi (Pohang-si)—has garnered increasing attention. Such IP not only functions as a branding device but also involves emotionally resonant and culturally embedded figures that embody local identities and values. This IP serves as an effective mediator between communities and the sea, reconfiguring coastal ties through visual storytelling and symbolic representation.

In this context, I explored how MCIP operates as symbolic capital<sup>(1)</sup> within regional cultural systems, contributing to place-based identity formation, imagined community cohesion,<sup>(2)</sup> and “glocal” branding strategies. I also examined the extent to which such IP can transform local maritime resources into sustainable content assets with educational, economic, and ecological functions.

In South Korea, the development of character-based content IP is supported by policy frameworks that foster the animation and character industries.<sup>(3)</sup> What was once confined to children’s media has evolved into a multipurpose cultural economy; MCIP now delivers educational messages, generates tourism revenue, and raises ecological awareness. This aligns with broader global trends in which the content grounded in maritime heritage is increasingly employed to stimulate the local economy, reinforce environmental values, and promote cultural resilience.

Several case studies have demonstrated the cultural efficacy of regionally adapted marine content. Yeh and Cho found that the coastal content integrating folklore, environmental values, and tourism narratives has the capacity to preserve both ecological integrity and cultural specificity in shoreline communities.<sup>(4)</sup> Such projects represent more than aesthetic enhancement; they are part of a growing movement to revitalize local economies and deepen communal identity through strategic content development.

In South Korea, examples such as Jeju’s Dolhareubang stone figures,<sup>(5)</sup> the Mongni female diver character,<sup>(6)</sup> and Busan’s Ggodeunggeo (Mackerel) mascot<sup>(7)</sup> exemplify how localized MCIP reflects natural landscapes and cultural narratives, supporting regional branding and tourism-driven economic circulation.

These characters, rooted in distinctive coastal ecologies, have become symbolic representations of community values and identity. Their implementation is not limited to entertainment but extends across education, environmental advocacy, and public diplomacy. As such, MCIP functions not only as an effective and visual marker of a place but also as a strategic cultural interface through which local stories are communicated both domestically and globally.

MCIP can be understood as a story drawn from the sea, an embodied representation of the sound of waves, the scent of salt, and the lived experiences of coastal communities.

Rather than serving as mere promotional devices to attract tourists, these characters reflect a distinctive communicative mode through which a region's emotional texture and cultural sensibility can be expressed to the wider world.

Composed of the natural environment, cultural heritage, and fragments of everyday life, this form of IP encapsulates the sensibilities of those living in coastal regions. To outsiders, such IP offers an unfamiliar yet alluring cultural landscape; for locals, it provides a sense of joy and pride in seeing their own stories projected outward into the global sphere.

MCIP has thus moved beyond industrial products and tourism branding tools; it encompasses narrative forms through which communities reclaim their voices, carefully transmitting memories and emotions. Through such content, culture drives industry, and the past is recontextualized as a strategic asset for the future. In this process, even a single character becomes imbued with a place's time, affect, and identity, symbolizing regional distinctiveness.

Moreover, this kind of IP—rooted in unique marine ecology and cultural assets—offers stories and symbols that are difficult to replicate. This originality grants them strong potential in the global content market. Beyond conventional local content, this character IP delicately weaves nature and culture, resonating with both local authenticity and glocal sensibilities, thereby boosting its international competitiveness.

Accordingly, I sought to uncover the multilayered impacts of MCIP on local communities and to identify strategic pathways for using them in regional development. Specifically, in this study, I aim to analyze how marine character IPs function as symbolic capital across cultural, educational, and economic dimensions, drawing on three representative South Korean cases. Focusing on three representative South Korean cases—Dokdo Guard Kangchi (Ulleung-gun), HOBOT (Yeongdeok-gun), and Padossi (Pohang-si)—I explored how such content functions as a medium of community engagement, identity formation, and sustainable development grounded in marine cultural heritage.

Moreover, I investigated how regionally embedded character IP may become a globally competitive and enduring cultural asset. As such, I aim to offer an integrated understanding of the expansion-related potential of MCIP and its cultural, ecological, and economic significance.

## **2. Theoretical Frameworks for Cultural and Symbolic Capital in MCIP**

In this section, two theoretical perspectives on MCIP are presented: (1) symbolic capital theory, which highlights its role in expressing regional identity, and (2) Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, which explains the IP's educational and commercial values. Together, these frameworks guide the analysis of the IP's cultural and developmental impacts.

## 2.1 MCIP as symbolic capital of coastal identity

MCIP serves not only as visual content but also as symbolic capital that visualizes the shared emotions, identities, and cultural narratives of local communities. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital is a form of power and legitimacy acquired when cultural or social assets are socially recognized in a given field (in this case, coastal regions). As Bourdieu noted, “Capital becomes symbolic when it is perceived and recognized as legitimate”. In this sense, MCIP acts as a cultural artifact through which regional communities visualize themselves and their distinct identities, simultaneously reinforcing internal solidarity and projecting those identities externally.

This symbolic function aligns with Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”, which posits that nations are socially constructed through shared symbols and mediated narratives. According to Anderson, a nation is imagined as a political community based on a deep, horizontal comradeship, often fostered by mass media and print capitalism.

In this context, the politics of the collective imagination also determines the social legitimacy of exceptional public policies. As Han noted, the legitimacy of national identity plays a crucial role in shaping the public acceptance of exceptional policies, such as military exemptions for athletes, thereby illustrating the political dynamics of imagined communities.<sup>(8)</sup> Similarly, MCIP (when diffused through media and cultural platforms) has become a mechanism through which residents of maritime regions envision their communities and cultural coherence, even without direct interpersonal interaction.

These characters act as both “cultural mirrors” and representational devices that foster emotional attachment and cultural cohesion. Residents do not passively consume the characters; rather, they actively participate in the symbolic construction of place and belonging. Through visual storytelling, MCIP serves as a vessel for regional identity, strengthening one’s internal sense of belonging and broadcasting symbolic meaning externally. In this dual role, character IP accumulates symbolic capital that serves both cultural and strategic functions in community development.

Moreover, marine character IP exhibits “translocal” and global potentials. Because it incorporates unique marine resources and reflects region-specific cultural heritage, it offers authenticity and distinctiveness in the global content marketplace. These cultural narratives, rooted in genuine locality, can attract external interest while fostering internal pride and identity. This potential is amplified by global digital platforms such as YouTube, which mediate the transformation of cultural capital into symbolic capital. As Kim argued, these platforms have accelerated conversion and sometimes distort cultural value into symbolic capital, offering regional IP opportunities for global recognition.<sup>(9)</sup>

In this regard, MCIP can be understood not only as a local branding tool but also as a strategic cultural asset. Visually reconstituting regional narratives through digital mediation enables participation in the broader cultural economy. Deploying it on global platforms facilitates the dissemination of symbolic meaning and expands the reach of local cultural identity.

Additionally, MCIP operates as a content syndication<sup>(10)</sup> node in the digital age. Content syndication involves redistributing and reformatting media to reach a wider audience across multiple platforms. As such, the marine IP produced by local creators, influencers, and media producers is continuously remediated.<sup>(11)</sup> This remediation boosts the IP's symbolic value and enables its expansion into the global market. Remediation, as conceptualized by Bolter and Grusin, posits that all media are derived from and reinterpret previous forms; thus, all new media are inherently hybrid and historically layered.

Ultimately, MCIP acts as a cultural interface that links the embodied meanings of regional communities with the broader symbolic economies of digital platforms. In doing so, the IP realizes the digital transformation of symbolic capital, providing a strategic pathway from local heritage to global relevance. This transformation is both cultural and economic as symbolic capital; when the IP is successfully recognized on digital platforms, it can be monetized and integrated into strategies for sustainable regional growth.

## **2.2 Learning, creativity, and commerce: A Vygotskian approach to MCIP**

The MCIP developed in coastal regions plays diverse roles in education, social cohesion, and commercial applications, contributing positively to both local communities and regional economies. Rooted in maritime resources and cultural elements, character IP globally disseminates the uniqueness of local marine contexts while promoting regional economic revitalization.

In educational settings, MCIP has significant pedagogical potential. Drawing on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, this IP encompasses both audiovisual aids and cultural tools that foster cognitive development. Vygotsky stressed that cognitive development is a dialectical process internalized through social interaction, language, and cultural contexts. Symbolic systems, such as character IP, can extend the learner's zone of proximal development.<sup>(12)</sup> This means that MCIP helps students understand complex ecological or environmental ideas more easily and interactively.

More than a mere vehicle for information, the IP catalyzes learners' metacognitive growth by supporting the development of higher-order thinking skills. Metacognition—the awareness and regulation of one's own cognitive processes—includes both the knowledge of cognition and the ability to control it.<sup>(13)</sup> Accordingly, MCIP stimulates learners' engagement, enhances creative problem-solving, and encourages autonomous participation in ecological education programs. For example, interactive educational platforms can present learners with challenges (such as marine conservation tasks), allowing them to operate near their developmental limits and expand their cognitive capacity.

Furthermore, the animated or game-based educational content grounded in MCIP reinforces learners' comprehension through narrative structures and symbolic visuals. These formats align with Vygotsky's emphasis on learning as a socially mediated, culturally contextualized process of internalization. As such, MCIP has expanded beyond supplemental teaching aids to become a mediator of developmental growth, environmental ethics, and civic responsibility. This IP can be used in formal classroom settings or local initiatives (such as workshops and campaigns related to marine protection), reinforcing both affective empathy and cultural imagination.

Vygotsky highlighted the role of semiotic tools in mental development, particularly those that support peer interactions.<sup>(14)</sup> In this regard, MCIP facilitates collaborative learning where students engage in shared activities and discourse, fostering deeper understanding and social motivation. This makes marine IP especially effective for children and adolescents, increasing their motivation and fostering a positive attitude toward environmental responsibility.

In addition to education, MCIP has a strong commercial potential that can contribute directly to local economic expansion. According to Michael Porter's competitive strategy theory, businesses gain advantages through cost leadership, differentiation, or focus techniques. MCIP provides regional businesses with unique brand identities that are difficult to imitate, thereby strengthening consumer appeal and market competitiveness.<sup>(15)</sup>

Character-based merchandise (which includes plush toys, apparel, and accessories) transforms regional narratives into tangible consumer products. These items embody the local identity and serve as souvenirs that foster emotional ties among tourists. Licensing such IP creates direct revenue streams and enhances regional branding.<sup>(16)</sup> Additionally, the creation of locally themed products and services surrounding character IP encourages innovation, supports new business models, and boosts regional employment and financial autonomy.

MCIP also demonstrates strong potential in global content markets. Characters grounded in distinctive maritime environments and regional cultures have the authenticity and narrative power necessary to distinguish themselves on the international stage. Through animation, games, and transmedia storytelling, such IP can achieve broad appeal and generate cross-border economic impact; its commercialization facilitates economic growth at the local level and supports national cultural exports as well as global brand-building.

In sum, MCIP serves as both an educational asset and a strategic commercial resource; it bridges cultural identity and economic development, offering scalable models for sustainable growth and meaningful regional storytelling.

### **3. Methodology and Criteria for Selecting Cases**

I adopted a qualitative approach to examine the multifaceted effects of MCIP's development on regional economic revitalization, environmental awareness, and the reinforcement of local identity. The methodology combined a literature review and case studies, focusing on three representative examples in South Korea.

First, I performed a comprehensive literature review to establish the study's theoretical foundation. This included the conceptual definition and functional roles of MCIP as well as its documented effects on local economies, cultural identity, education, and tourism. The key theoretical frameworks incorporated into the analysis included Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, Anderson's concept of imagined communities, Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, and Porter's theory of competitive strategy. I employed these frameworks to structure the cultural, educational, and commercial dimensions of marine IP and to derive analytical criteria for case evaluation.

Second, for the study's empirical component, I focused on three case studies: Dokdo Guard Kangchi (Ulleung-gun), HOBOT (Yeongdeok-gun), and Padossi (Pohang-si). I selected these

sites of character IP on the basis of their clear association with local marine environments and cultural assets, their development through collaborative public–private partnerships, and their verified application in the educational, environmental, and commercial domains. The selection criteria emphasized the symbolic expression of regional marine identity, the evidence of educational value and cognitive engagement, the potential for media syndication and IP diversification, and alignment with environmental and sustainability practices. I analyzed each case using multidimensional indicators, including the character’s role in educational programming, its economic impact through tourism and merchandise, and its contribution to symbolic cohesion within the community. I also reviewed the content, implementation strategies, and stakeholder involvement in each project.

The scope of my study is limited to the MCIP developed in South Korea, which has a strong regional identity and a focus on community engagement. I chose the regions of Ulleung, Yeongdeok, and Pohang owing to their active development of marine-themed IP and their integration of local heritage into character-branding initiatives.

By employing this methodology, I aimed to provide a strategic analysis of how MCIP functions as a cultural asset that generates tangible and intangible values for coastal communities and derives implications for sustainable regional growth through cultural content.

#### **4. Findings and Case Analyses: Development of MCIP**

I selected three major cases to analyze the development and use of MCIP and character-based content in such IP. These cases focus on the character IP developed in Ulleung-gun (Dokdo), Yeongdeok-gun, and Pohang-si in Gyeongsangbuk-do, addressing central themes such as the convergence of marine culture and technology and environmental protection. My examples illustrate the diverse applications of MX IP and the educational and commercial outcomes it can achieve.

I chose these cases on the basis of the following criteria:

First, from the perspective of cultural and educational impacts, I assessed the extent to which each character conveys educational messages and promotes cultural values within local communities.

Second, in terms of innovation and creativity, I focused on how each character integrates marine science with technology and how this creates new opportunities for MCIP.

Third, regarding community engagement, I investigated how each character becomes part of the local community and contributes to the local economy.

Fourth, from the perspective of sustainable development, I evaluated whether a given character and its associated content constitute a viable model for long-term growth and how they contribute to environmental conservation and regional expansion.

On the basis of these criteria, I selected three forms of character IP—“Dokdo Guard Kangchi”, “HOBOT”, and “Padossi”—as the subjects for case analysis, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

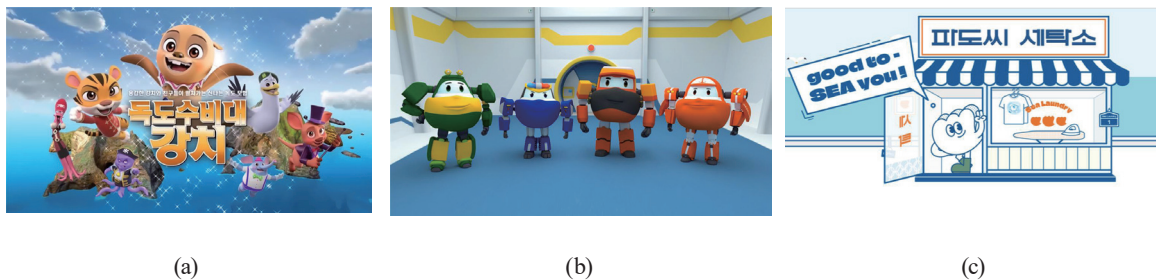


Fig. 1. (Color online) Case examples of marine character IP. (a) Ulleung-gun's "Dokdo Guard Kangchi", (b) Yeongdeok-gun's "HOBOT", and (c) Pohang-si's "Padossi".

Each case provides concrete examples of the successful development of MCIP and offers important insights into the theoretical and practical directions of such initiatives. With my findings from these case studies, I aim to inform more effective strategies for the development and application of MCIP.

#### 4.1 Case 1. "Dokdo Guard Kangchi": Cultural sovereignty and education on the sea

Ulleung County's Dokdo Guard Kangchi is a regionally rooted character content IP developed to raise awareness of the nature and history of Dokdo. The IP was produced in 2016 as a 3D animation series through a collaboration between the Gyeongsangbuk-do Cultural Content Agency and Pixel Planet Co., Ltd. The storyline follows Kangchi and his friends as they defend Dokdo from the villainous Amur gang, ultimately restoring peace on the island. Through this child-friendly narrative, the animation delivers educational messages about Dokdo's geography, ecology, and historical significance.

Kangchi was designed as an iconic symbol of Dokdo and serves not only as the protagonist of the animation but also as a cultural ambassador. The series consists of five main episodes, along with supplementary educational videos, making it a valuable audiovisual resource for use in schools and public awareness campaigns.<sup>(17)</sup>

Such content functions as a cultural public good that simultaneously fosters regional identity and reinforces maritime sovereignty. As a platform for education and public awareness related to Dokdo, Dokdo Guard Kangchi offers a meaningful model of character-based IP deeply rooted in place-specific cultural values and narratives. Beyond its symbolic representation, the content embodies educational significance, creative expression, and community-driven participation, serving as a medium through which local identity and cultural pride are shared with broader audiences. Its influence extends across multiple dimensions, encompassing cultural and educational contributions, stimulating creativity and innovation within local industries, actively engaging regional communities in content development and dissemination, and pursuing long-term sustainability and continuous growth. Table 1 shows integrated analyses of these interrelated aspects.

Table 1  
Analysis of the “Dokdo Guard Kangchi” character IP.

| Analytical Dimension                     | Findings   |
|--|--|
| Cultural and Educational Impact          | - Promotes awareness of the ecological and cultural values of Ulleung County (Dokdo)   |
|  | - Aims to deepen understanding of Dokdo and raise environmental consciousness among children and adolescents                   |
|  | - Used as educational material in schools and in public workshops and campaigns  |
| Creativity and Innovation                | - Helps to preserve and transmit regional cultural heritage  |
|  | - Develops characters and storylines based on the natural environment of geographically unique regions such as Ulleung (Dokdo) |
|  | - Engages young audiences through animation and character storytelling, moving beyond traditional education                    |
| Community Engagement                     | - Combines fiction and reality to present Dokdo’s history and ecology in a narrative format                                    |
|  | - Created in close collaboration with Gyeongsangbuk-do Province and the Gyeongbuk Cultural Content Agency                      |
|  | - Used to promote Dokdo through cultural events and tourism, becoming a symbolic local character IP                            |
| Sustainability and Development Potential | - Positively impacts the local economy and strengthens community ties  |
|  | - Raises public awareness and visibility of the regional culture   |
|  | - Planned expansion into a TV animation series (scheduled for 2025) as part of long-term content development <sup>(18)</sup>   |
|  | - Promotes nature and environmental conservation through animated media  |
|  | - Supports regional cultural sustainability and economic self-reliance via character merchandising and licensing strategies    |

Note. This table shows the multidimensional roles of Dokdo Guard Kangchi as a character IP encompassing cultural, educational, and sustainability-oriented character functions.

## 4.2 Case 2. “HOBOT”: Marine safety, technology, and youth engagement

The HOBOT character IP, developed by Yeongdeok County in Gyeongsangbuk-do, is a convergent cultural product centered on marine safety and disaster prevention. Designed as a humanoid marine robot, HOBOT integrates marine science with robotic imagination, evolving beyond a simple mascot into an experiential educational tool targeted at children and adolescents.

The content focuses on practical and socially relevant themes, including maritime accident prevention, water rescue training, and awareness of ocean pollution. By addressing these topics through interactive media, HOBOT helps cultivate a regional culture of safety-based education while raising public awareness of marine environmental issues.<sup>(19)</sup> This character also successfully stimulates scientific curiosity among young audiences and fosters a strong sense of environmental responsibility.

I examined this IP comprehensively in relation to its multifaceted roles and effects within the relevant regional and cultural contexts. I focused on four interrelated dimensions that collectively illustrate the significance and potential of the IP: its contribution to cultural and educational

enrichment, its ability to foster creativity and innovation in content production, its function as a catalyst for active community participation, and its orientation toward long-term sustainability and continued development. These interconnected aspects provide a holistic understanding of how the IP operates as a creative asset and drives cultural value and regional growth. Table 2 depicts the findings of this analysis in detail.

### 4.3 Case 3. “Padossi”: Environmental awareness and coastal community branding

Padossi, a character IP developed by Pohang City, serves as a symbolic ambassador of regional marine culture and environmental awareness. It highlights the importance of preserving the marine ecosystem through various public campaigns and educational programs. Additionally, the character is monetized through a range of goods that link environmental advocacy to local economic value.

Table 2  
Analysis of the “HOBOT” character IP from Yeongdeok County.

| Analytical Dimension                     | Findings  |
|--|---|
| Cultural and Educational Impact          | - Delivers core messages on marine safety, water rescue, and environmental preservation                     |
|  | - Raises public awareness of real-world issues such as maritime accidents and marine debris                 |
|  | - Serves as a hands-on educational tool for children and youth in schools and at local events               |
| Creativity and Innovation                | - Effectively engages young audiences in science-based learning   |
|  | - Combines marine science and robotics to develop a futuristic, tech-inspired character                     |
|  | - Moves beyond conventional educational formats through animation, simulation, and interactive storytelling |
| Community Engagement                     | - Offers immersive educational experiences that integrate fiction with practical marine knowledge           |
|  | - Developed as part of Yeongdeok County’s identity as a “City of Safety Education”                          |
|  | - Used in public campaigns, festivals, and school-based safety education programs                           |
| Sustainability and Development Potential | - Enhances local engagement by linking marine character branding with civic education                       |
|  | - Boosts the county’s cultural visibility as a leader in marine safety <sup>(20)</sup>                      |
|  | - Potential for long-term development as a marine safety education platform                                 |
|  | - Adaptable for various formats, including TV animation, digital games, and public exhibits                 |
|  | - Supports environmental education and safety awareness in regional tourism and policy campaigns            |
|  | - Offers potential for commercialization through character licensing and education                          |

Note. This table highlights how HOBOT integrates marine safety education, technological imagination, and community-based engagement.

By participating in community events and providing engaging content for both children and adults, Padossi deepens public understanding of marine conservation. It also integrates everyday environmental practices into cultural education and fosters emotional ties with the local marine environment. The character's strategic use illustrates how a regional mascot can evolve into a multifaceted vehicle for education, communication, and sustainable development.<sup>(21)</sup>

I comprehensively examined the application of this character-based IP to capture its multifaceted role within the broader framework of regional culture and content development. I explored several interrelated aspects that collectively reveal the cultural and economic significance of this IP. I paid attention to its contribution to cultural and educational enrichment, its capacity to encourage creativity and innovation in character design and storytelling, its effectiveness at fostering active participation and engagement within local communities, and its orientation toward long-term sustainability and continued development. By investigating these interconnected dimensions, I learned how this character IP operates as both a cultural symbol and a practical strategy for regional branding and sustainable growth. Table 3 provides a detailed summary of the findings.

Table 3  
Analysis of the "Padossi" character IP from Pohang City.

| Analytical Dimension            | Findings   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Cultural and Educational Impact | - Raises awareness of marine protection and publicizes Pohang's marine culture                         |
|                                 | - Targets both children and adults through educational programs and public campaigns                   |
|                                 | - Emphasizes practical, everyday approaches to marine conservation integrated with cultural messaging  |
| Creativity and Innovation       | - Redefines the traditional marine character by directly addressing environmental values               |
|                                 | - Actively featured in local festivals and events as a symbol of regional environmental responsibility |
|                                 | - Positioned as a cultural icon representing the East Sea and Pohang's coastal identity                |
| Community Engagement            | - Encourages participation in local events related to environmental education and marine awareness     |
|                                 | - Fosters residents' involvement in conservation messaging and community dialogue                      |
|                                 | - Raises collective awareness of marine cultural values through public participation                   |
|                                 | - Supports strategies that align local economic growth with environmental responsibility               |
|                                 | - Functions as an educational and promotional tool for sustainable marine tourism in Pohang            |
|                                 | - Recognized as Pohang's flagship MCIP   |

Note. This table illustrates how Padossi functions as an environmental advocacy-driven character IP aligned with coastal branding and sustainable tourism.

## 5. Discussion and Strategic Implications

In this section, I interpret my findings considering the theoretical frameworks and case analyses presented earlier. I examine how the observed cultural, educational, and economic outcomes of MCIPs align with the broader concepts of symbolic capital and sociocultural learning while also identifying practical pathways for sustainable regional growth. By synthesizing our empirical results with theoretical insights, I highlight the strategic role of MCIPs in linking local heritage with global content markets.

### 5.1 Cultural, educational, and economic implications

On the basis of my analysis of three representative MCIPs—namely, Dokdo Guard Kangchi from Ulleung County, HOBOT from Yeongdeok County, and Padossi from Pohang City—I identified several key implications concerning the cultural, educational, and economic influences of MCIP development within local communities.

First, MCIPs significantly enhance educational value, particularly for children and adolescents. These characters serve as effective tools for conveying knowledge about marine environments and raising awareness of environmental conservation. Through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, such character-based learning—which is grounded in social interaction and cultural contexts—fosters deeper engagement. The visual appeal and narrative structures of characters increase accessibility and interest in educational content, thereby supporting sustained learning outcomes.

Second, the development of marine character content stimulates local cultural revitalization and the creation of economic value. These characters become symbolic assets within their communities, reinforcing regional identity and a sense of belonging. Related merchandise, festivals, and events create new commercial opportunities and contribute to local economic growth by attracting tourism and encouraging civic participation. For example, the Padossi character has not only raised environmental awareness but also functioned as a promotional tool for sustainable marine tourism in Pohang.

Third, by achieving public recognition and visibility, MCIPs can help build a sustainable ecosystem for the content industry. Through diversified media platforms and strategic licensing, MCIPs gain traction beyond their regions and contribute to long-term strategies for content development. This visibility supports the creation of secondary industries and facilitates ongoing educational campaigns, as exemplified by Padossi's involvement in environmental initiatives and educational outreach.

Fourth, MCIPs play a vital role in promoting marine science and education. In the case of HOBOT, the integration of marine technology and robotic design has stimulated scientific curiosity and problem-solving skills among young learners. This interdisciplinary approach fosters innovation in educational contexts and improves the quality of science education in the region.

These implications collectively indicate that MCIPs extend beyond mere entertainment; they meaningfully contribute to multiple domains, including education, community development,

cultural branding, and environmental sustainability. Moreover, such IPs represent strategic assets that support sustainable local expansion and enhance competitiveness in the global cultural content market.

## 5.2 Strategic pathways for sustainable MCIP development

MCIPs have emerged as pivotal instruments for imbuing local marine resources with cultural, educational, and economic values. As seen in the case studies of Dokdo Guard Kangchi, HOBOT, and Padossi, these IPs do more than deliver entertainment; they function as hubs for regional growth, raising environmental awareness and reinforcing local identity. However, to realize their full potential and ensure long-term sustainability, a strategic and systematic approach is required across multiple dimensions.

A core prerequisite for successful IP development is grounding the character and narrative of a region's unique natural environment, cultural heritage, and historical significance. By anchoring character design to a place-based identity, local governments and creators can build symbolic content that reflects and strengthens regional distinctiveness. The Dokdo Guard Kangchi IP is a compelling example that has transformed Dokdo's ecological symbolism into a culturally resonant narrative while simultaneously contributing to tourism and economic activity in Ulleung County.

In addition to symbolic representation, MCIPs have substantial educational value. Such content offers accessible pathways for disseminating marine knowledge, environmental ethics, and scientific literacy. Their use as pedagogical tools aligns with sociocultural learning theories, such as Vygotsky's, which emphasize the importance of cultural context and social interaction in the learning process. Vygotsky emphasized the pivotal role of psychological tools in human cognitive development, viewing them as essential mediators between individuals and their sociocultural environments.<sup>(14)</sup>

Through character-driven storytelling, abstract concepts such as ecosystem preservation or maritime safety are rendered engaging and relatable, supporting a sustained educational impact across age groups.

Along with cultural and educational objectives, the commercial potential of MCIPs should be strategically nurtured to ensure long-term sustainability. The development, production, and licensing of character-related goods (including educational kits, interactive games, and themed merchandise) can provide a practical model for revitalizing local economies. For example, the HOBOT character, created in Yeongdeok County, has been successfully integrated into science education materials, illustrating how well-designed commercial strategies can enhance both the visibility and functional value of character IPs while stimulating regional industries.

Ecological sustainability is another critical consideration in the development process. Content must be designed with environmental ethics in mind, not only as a narrative theme but also as a guiding framework for IP application. When a character embodies environmental values, as in the case of the Dokdo Guard Kangchi, it becomes a cultural agent that promotes long-term conservation goals. Such environmentally embedded storytelling raises public awareness while supporting local efforts toward ecological preservation.

To expand the impact of MCIPs, it is essential to consider their scalability beyond domestic borders. Content rooted in a unique regional identity has inherent potential for global differentiation. According to Porter's theory of competitive advantage, such cultural specificity can function as a strategic asset in global markets. Expanding MCIPs to global audiences not only promotes regional culture but also opens new channels for cultural diplomacy, cross-border collaboration, and global content licensing. Realizing this potential requires proactive efforts in international networking, multilingual distribution strategies, and digital platform integration.

Taken together, these insights indicate that the development of MCIPs should follow a multidimensional approach that harmoniously integrates local identity, educational value, commercial strategy, ecological responsibility, and a forward-looking global perspective. When managed within this comprehensive framework, marine character content can evolve into a strategic asset that contributes to sustainable regional growth, fosters cultural and creative innovation, and promotes the responsible stewardship of the marine environment.

## **6. Conclusions**

I have explored how MCIPs contribute to regional revitalization through their educational, environmental, and economic influence. By examining three representative examples—Dokdo Guard Kangchi in Ulleung County, HOBOT in Yeongdeok County, and Padossi in Pohang City—I investigated the diverse ways in which MCIPs shape and enrich local communities. The results suggest that when these IPs are firmly grounded in regional identity, they not only enhance their educational and commercial values but also serve as effective vehicles for raising public awareness of marine and environmental conservation.

Notably, this study highlights the economic ripple effects of MCIPs. Beyond their role as cultural products, these characters have substantial potential to boost local economies. For example, the Dokdo Guard Kangchi—initiated in 2015 as part of a policy effort led by Gyeongsangbuk-do Province and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries—has been used across educational programs and diverse commercial fields. By 2020, the character expanded to toys, publications, and lifestyle goods, thus strengthening its market competitiveness. Similar to Momma Ggatouri's success, which generated substantial royalties through licensing agreements, the Dokdo Guard Kangchi expanded its influence through educational merchandise aimed at children. These examples illustrate the economic viability of MCIPs and underscore the need for more systematic regional development strategies that incorporate such assets.

My findings have several implications for future research. MCIPs, when aligned with local cultural identity, can generate not only educational and social outcomes but also tangible economic benefits. Regionally tailored characters offer effective tools for enhancing tourism and strengthening regional branding. To maintain and expand the impact of character IPs, it is essential to systematically assess their economic influence and develop policy frameworks that support their continued growth. Furthermore, global competitiveness requires international collaboration, joint branding strategies, and sustained public–private partnerships to extend these IPs beyond domestic markets.

Despite these contributions, this study has some limitations. The analysis was confined to three specific regions (Ulleung, Yeongdeok, and Pohang), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should incorporate comparative analyses that include other parts of South Korea to expand the scope and depth of understanding. Moreover, I primarily employed a qualitative approach. To more objectively assess the economic value and regional impact of character IPs, it would be advantageous to integrate quantitative methods. Comparative investigations encompassing international examples, along with long-term empirical assessments of economic performance, are essential for advancing scholarly understanding in this field.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that MCIPs are not only culturally symbolic but also function as multidimensional assets across education, environmental stewardship, and economic expansion. Future research may expand this analysis through quantitative assessments of economic impact or through international comparative studies to further examine the scalability of marine character IPs. The findings are expected to enhance theoretical perspectives and support the practical implementation of future advancements in regionally based content industries through character IP development.

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