Constructing Haenyeo:
Defamiliarzation and Sensemaking
in the Game Design Process

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INTRODUCTION

Serious Games support learning through experiences designed to elicit fun. We explore serious games and the work of designers and artists, by developing the game *Mermaids of Ieodo,* which represents, in an analog card game, the traditional cultural practices of the Korean *Haenyeo*, diving women of Jeju Island. Game elements intend to capture themes in *haenyeo* practices, including meditative engagement with nature, cross-generational interaction, historical influences on the community, ecological preservation practices, and ethical attitudes towards technology. By defamiliarizing ourselves, (Bell et al. 2005) and making strange the process of creating a visual cultural artifact, we deconstruct how serious games are made. By participating in the process of creating a visual culture artifact and cataloging our design choices, we interrogate the construction of an East Asian cultural experience. Situating this traditional practice in an analog card game allows the game to engage with the both the technological and traditional imaginaries that Korean culture operate in.

We use an interdisciplinary methodology to examine the interpretative process that happens when creating a ludic experience of a cultural practice. Insights from design-based research provide further insight into the overall process of visual culture interpretation. The presentation would catalogue design choices and the rationale behind these choices to understand sensemaking in the development of media.

During the past 100 years South Korea, (hereafter Korea) has undergone an immense shift from an agrarian pre-modernity to the heights of technological integration, this compressed modernity (Chang 1999) has had a variety of unforeseen circumstances upon Korean society. As Korea advanced into its position as a post-modern techno-society it began to eschew and jettison activities that had once been commonplace. The government recognizing the need to preserve its cultural practices for future generations created an advisory board designed to identify and secure not only

tangible historical artifacts, but also the intangible practices, performances, and craftwork of Korean history. CedarBough Saeji notes that the audiences of intangible practices, such as traditional performance has been decreasing as it struggles to attract newer younger audiences, and as such preservation techniques have struggled to overcome the fundamental shift in values and interests for newer generations (Saeji 2016). It was with the aim of preservation of traditional culture that we began to design a game that explored an intangible Korean heritage, the *Haenyeo* of Jeju island, groups of female free-diving fisherwomen who have seen in an incredible decline in participation since the 1970's. In this presentation, we discuss the process that goes into making a serious game, accounting for the design decisions and cataloging the process-as-a-whole. Through the process of making strange, a defamiliarization tactic (Bell et al. 2005), and abstraction, we isolate aspects of development intended to create connections for the players and emphasize elements of cultural awareness, nostalgia, ecological conservation, and meditation characterized by the concept of slowness. We aim to explore the process of game development for serious games, implicating the manner in which culture and heritage can be accounted for and incorporated throughout the process.

The Haenyeo of Jeju Island
The *haenyeo*, which roughly translates to ocean women or mermaid, are groups of community-organized diving women of the Korean island of Jeju dating back to the early Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). While originally a co-ed practice, since the 17th century only women have fished by diving (Ko et al. 2010). These fisherwomen would spend an average of 4-6 hours daily diving during warmer months, with the number hours decreasing during the winter. In addition to the physical labor of swimming, a large portion of time was used for managing their harvest and maintaining their fishing equipment. As Korea's economy has advanced, participation in diving has decreased from 14,143 in 1970 to 5,659 in 2002; additionally, the demographics of the community likewise shifted, from 4.6% of divers over 60 to 52.5% of divers (Gwon 2005). This subsequent decline has been counter-balanced by the push towards modern labor practices and urbanization drives. Lee and Myong refer to the *Haenyeo* as "emancipatory pioneers and voluntary economic agents" due to their struggle and popular resistance movement during Japanese colonization from 1910-1945 (2018). Therefore it is useful to look at the preservation of the *Haenyeo* as part of the push towards feminist thought in Korea (ibid.).

In looking at the *haenyeo* we felt that there was a rich opportunity to develop a game that would raise awareness of their cultural practices, as well as a host of other meaningful applications; nostalgia, environmentalism, and slowness. Exploring these facets helps to resist against Korean social anxieties that came about due to compressed modernity, namely *bballi bballli* culture, the Korean cultural practice which prioritizes speed above all other qualities. We felt that a game was a useful application for addressing these issues, drawing upon the work by Mortara et al. (2014) who explored how digital games incorporate cultural awareness, historical reconstruction, and heritage awareness as means of highlighting educational objectives within the genre of serious games. In the same vein, our game addresses cultural awareness, nostalgia, ecological awareness, and slowness in the context of the Korean *haenyeo*.

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