

Sports Movie as Faction and Subaltern Mythology

Hee-Seung Lee*

Department of Journalism & Communication, Tongmyong University, 428, Sinseon-ro, Nam-gu, Busan/ 48520, Korea, Cinelog@tu.ac.kr

Abstract

Background/Objectives: This study focuses on the increase of materialization of real events from the sports history and tries to draw the sociocultural undertone from the sports movies produced after the 2000s. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** This study is conducted by discourse analysis of domestically produced sports movies based on true stories after the 2000s. This study is based on mythology, post-modernism and post-colonialism as the theoretical evidence to bring out the mythological discourse of the sports movies as historical description. **Findings:** Recent sports movies show a narrative strategy for a good box-office performance. They are attracted on the basis of true stories. They focus and foreground the epic tale of the main character and the simple and fierce life of sportsmen as subalterns with their accomplishments. Movies about the most influential sports games emotionally stimulate the collective memory of the audience and firmly take the role of promoting high self-esteem of the nation and feeling of solidarity among public. These factors could increase fun and emotional aspects in 'factional' sports movie. Restructured true events in sports movies build up the Korean hybrid narrative with true and sincere genre and dramatic emotional feeling of appellation of anonymous individual as historical agent. **Improvements/Applications:** Precedent studies about sports movies are still insufficient, while discussions about the media and sports have been increasing. This study tried to draw the subaltern mythology from the sports movies which will contribute to broadening the spectrum of filmic discourse.

Keywords: Faction, Mythology, Sports Film, Sports Movie, Subaltern

1. Introduction

In modern society, media has served to popularize sports by promoting mass production and mass consumption of sports. Also, media took the role of raising the value and meaning of sports to sociocultural dimension and produced sports culture discourse. Some of the categories that received great attention in the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games, such as curling, bobsleigh, and ski jumping, were accomplishments obtained from poor environment, and this is a representative case of increased public awareness due to refocus by the media. This kind of media influence is further expanding by cable TV, sports channel, and internet media. Popularity of sports is reconstructed by the media to rank different sports categories or affect rules of sports progress.

Physical culture and sport are essential activities of society for its preservation and transmission of cultural

values¹. Recently, public awareness has been increasing to diverse sports categories in Korea and people are more actively participating to be part of daily sports rather than simply being spectators. Media following this social trend is providing information of diverse sports categories and assisting in subordinate sports culture. This trend is also shown in domestic movie market as sports movie production has been gradually increasing in Korea, and this is contradicting to past movie production practice that avoided sports movie production due to low audience interest, massive investment costs, and poor realism for limited filming techniques. This contradiction could implicate that domestic movie industry has become more stabilized for producing domestic sports movies. As shown from the sports movies produced after the 2000s like YMCA baseball team(2002), Champion(2002), Fighter in the wind(2004), Rikidozan: A hero extraordinary(2004), Superstar Mr. Gam(2004), Malaton(2005),

*Author for correspondence

Crying fist(2005), Like a virgin(2006), Forever the moment(2007), Scout(2007), Lifting King Kong(2009), Take off(2009), A barefoot dream(2010), G-Love(2011), Perfect game(2011), As one(2012), Pace maker(2012), Mr. Go(2013), No breathing(2013), completeness and box-office records of those movies have been progressively improving since then.

This study focuses on the increase of materialization of real events from the sports history and its surrounding categories and sportsmen in domestic sports movie, and tries to draw the sociocultural undertone from the sports movies based on real stories produced after the 2000s. More specifically, it focuses on the event records of sports history and its subaltern agent, and deduce the connection between the realistic diegesis shown through the ordinary life of the characters and verisimilitude of the situation, and the cultural logic of modernization projected in modern society.

2. Methodology

Sports movies have been actively produced since the 2000s, but precedent studies about sports movies are still insufficient. Additionally, humanistic and socio-scientific studies are very rare, and majority of them only discuss about the fun factors and sociocultural functions of the sports movies. This study is conducted by discourse analysis of domestically produced sports movies based on true stories after the 2000s. More specifically, this study expects to show the difference from the precedent studies by considering the discourse of ideological and socio-cultural undertone(subaltern myth) revealed from the domestic sports movies as faction based on true stories. This study is based on mythology, post-modernism, and post-colonialism as the theoretical evidence to bring out the mythological discourse of the sports movies (as historical description) produced during this period.

3. Results

3.1 Subaltern as historical agent and faction

Actually, sports movie is a genre that can only be steadily produced in a stable movie industry environment such as Hollywood. Even in the United States where the movie industry is well supported by physical environment and human resources, only about 230 traditional sports movies have been produced². This proves that sports movie is

not a guaranteed genre for good box-office performance, and it has been avoided compared to other movie genres. Recent sports movie production in Korea explains that the domestic movie industry is advancing, and at the same time, it shows a narrative strategy for a good box-office performance. Korean sports movies clearly expose their intention of stably guaranteeing the performance by narrative strategy; the narrative strategy in sports movies portray the historical moments in sports as a tool and process of self-realization of the characters through self-training that can be easily recognized by the audience.

Recently produced domestic sports movies are attracted on the basis of true story. Movies based on true stories include the ones with historical events and real characters, and also the others having fictional factors added to the real stories. In the 1990s, Korean movie industry became sumptuous due to financial capital from venture capital companies, entry of conglomerate companies to theatre business, and introduction of new human resources capacity. Starting from the 2000s, Korean movie industry could be considered to have its heyday in terms of genre diversity and artistic completeness. Activity and completeness of sports movie production in the 2000s could be seen in the same context previously mentioned. Considerable number of movies produced at that time like YMCA baseball team, Champion, Superstar Mr. Gam, Malaton, Forever the moment, Lifting King Kong, Take off, G-Love, As one, Pace maker showed same or partially modified events, characters, and settings. They also focus and foreground the epic tale of the main character and the simple and fierce life of sportsmen as subalterns with their accomplishments. In more detail movies like, Malaton and Superstar Mr. Gam show how to overcome disability and emotionally deliver the individualized experience of the characters. Moreover movies like Forever the moment, Take off and As one portray patriot or nationalist discourse by recalling the historical events. Movies about the most influential sports games emotionally stimulate the collective memory of the audience and firmly take the role of promoting high self-esteem of the nation and feeling of solidarity among public.

Recently produced sports movies have been made based on the true stories due to public appeal. In both Korea and the United States, the sports movies based on true stories have a big share in the market, and they are based on true historical sports event and real characters. Korean sports movies based on true stories have been commercially successful due to the humane and touching characteristics³. For the box office success, the contents

of the events and information on films should be easily recognized⁴. The fun factors of sports movie could be the deeply touching human victory from challenging spirit to the limitations of human ability and its unpredictable progress. Sports movies are considered to be the tabloid version of worldly affairs, and it is a genre that can give both consolation and vicarious satisfaction by portraying positive sides of tough life⁵. Korean sports movies clearly expose their intention of stably guaranteeing the performance by narrative strategy; the narrative strategy in sports movies portray the historical moments in sports that can be easily recognized by the audience and the process of self-realization of the characters through self-training.

Movies based on true stories also explain that domestic sports movies have an additional role of recording the historical events in the movies. Sports movie that brought deep, touching feeling to the general public exaggerates the verisimilitude of the movie as a media to remind the public about the true story as 'faction' with fictional factors added to the true story - 'fact'. This process is similar to historical events being mythicized and aggrandized. Thus, movies emphasize their more realistic replicate character of true historical events that had been forgotten throughout time.

Traditionally, sports movies have depended upon the heroic narrative both domestically and internationally. The heroic narratives work as a strengthening and binding element of the society portrayed in the movies. On the other hand, domestic sports movies after the 2000s focus on materialized and anonymous categories and characters. Anonymous individuals by their own choice and eliminations are chosen as appellation means for subaltern myths seen from the domestic sports movies, and this concept is similar to mythicizing process discussed by Roland Barthes in 'a black soldier saluting the French flag'⁶. Subaltern sportsmen were designated as agents of the historical events, and the narrative strategy is embedded to build up nationalist mythology. It was seen that post-modernism was an artistic representation dealing with the development of capitalism, and explains that capitalist logic is repeated or strengthened in post-modernism⁷. Recently produced sports movies could be considered as a cultural portrait of post-capitalist Korean society with flexible accumulation of techniques and introduction of large capital as the Korean blockbuster movies. If Korean blockbuster, being a perfect duplicate copy of the Western, is considered to have Korean specificity that

show both technical and cultural universality, then subaltern mythology shown in domestic sports movies could be connected to the desire and expansion of Korean capitalist society. It portrays nationalist tone to boast economic and cultural accomplishments of post-capitalist Korean society like the nationalist desire embedded in the modernization projects, such as the Miracle on the Han River or the New Village Movement. At the same time, it is disclosing self-reflective character to admit the limitations of unconditionally chasing after the Western modernization process. This is historical event agent in the sports history that results from the contradicting combination of foreground, melodramatic feeling from difficult times and tough life and nationalist tone as of subaltern.

3.2 Female subaltern mythology

Topic selection is happening ironically considering the heroic narrative strategy of sports movies. Instead of materializing the historical events of publicly popular sports categories, such as soccer or baseball, the domestic sports movies continue to narrate about the other surrounding, marginalized categories and subaltern sportsmen. This goes against the previous domestic sports movies narrating about heroes, and it is also a bold attempt to focus on anonymous sportsmen in marginalized categories. 'Subaltern' narratives clearly show the fellowship of domestic sports movie genre that focuses on marginalized sports categories and anonymous sportsmen instead of heroic sportsmen. These factors could increase fun and emotional aspects in 'factional' sports movie. Restructured true events in sports movies build up the Korean hybrid narrative with true and sincere genre and dramatic emotional feeling of appellation of anonymous individual as historical agent.

Another characteristic of recent domestic sports movies is that sportswomen are also being selected as subaltern or anonymous sportswomen. This implicates that female participation has increased in politics, economics, cultural, and other areas in the society, and domestic and international accomplishments of sportswomen are being applied in sports. Sports movies frankly show the gender specific stereotypes that exist in the society, and this could have educational function to emphasize the importance of both genders through narratives overcoming these challenges⁸. YMCA Baseball Team, Forever the Moment, Lifting King Kong and As one are some of the recent movies based on true stories, and their main character are women. Especially, women are foreground

in *Forever the Moment*, *Lifting King Kong* and *As one that have always been only marginalized beings*, and this could be considered as an attempt to twist the codes and traditions of sports movies.

Women had been eliminated or marginalized beings in domestic sports movies. Sports movies are now focusing on women whom have been double-marginalized for being subalterns and women. Now, there is a difference in the narrative strategy from male sports movies with male subaltern narratives. This could be thought to expand melodramatic family with female solidarity or pseudo family melodrama by nationalist conjunction.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to focus that female narrative movies listed above have the possibility of receiving diversified female comprehension. Most of the real female characters in the sports movies belong to the less popular categories, which mean that they are marginalized from the social system. They solely make their voice to be heard from their subaltern positions, that⁹ sees their position as silent seen from the 'subaltern' concept of the third-World women. In other words, women have diverse positions, such as supportive role as a wife or a daughter assigned by the government and society, which frankly demonstrate personal desires, and enduring pain. Moreover, pain and experience of women are well represented in self-reflection or female solidarity. Conclusively, recent female narratives in sports movies show the tension between the two positions of mythologized historical agent within the closed circuit of nationalism and of activated potential of subaltern women having their own voice as an individual.

4. Summary and conclusion

Movie image is both iconic sign that records realistic movement of an object and indexical sign that indexes the existence of an object. This ontological character of movie explains that movie is the best kind of media to show the reality of sports. One of the pleasures that spectators receive from watching sports game is the efforts of a sportsman to surpass the limitations of mankind. Movies can realistically represent this process and has a magical spell to draw the attention of the audience to the position of a spectator. Additionally, sports is considered as the most appropriate material to be made into a movie as the growth process of sportsman overcoming his own limitations and achieving victory provides an analogy to the narrative progression of dramatically increasing stage in the movie.

This study discussed about the mythology of 'subaltern' witnessed in the sports movies produced after the 2000s. More specifically, as making a movie of sports history, the merging point of the emotion from the characters actions (personal biography) and nationalistic tone (nationalistic myth) from the reminder of historical events has been observed. This study also focused in female narrative as the recent trend in domestic sports movie, and reviewed differences from the traditional sports movies with male narrative. Thus, it is focusing on double-marginalized 'subaltern,' and discussing about the production of subaltern as a discourse matter and the crack of main agent in sports movie with foreground women.

Subaltern mythology recently shown in sports movies could implicate subaltern serving as both nationalist and anti-nationalist perspectives. Homi Bhabha thinks that colonial mimicry could be connected to the possibility of resistance or subversion¹⁰. 'Colonial mimicry' produces colonialist texts, a copy with ambivalence, that is similar to the original, but not identical, which could result from geographical character of colonized property; its hybrid character could perform subversion function. The relationship between the original and the imitation mentioned Bhabha is not restricted to the Western and the Eastern, or the colonizing and the colonized; but it could also be applied to the contradictory or paradoxical relationship of post-industrial society with nationalistic appearance and its hidden shade of calling oneself the original. Life and pain of subaltern scattered in the sports movies is a way of trying to break down the mythological process of distorted ambition and social structural contradictions that are covered under the post-capitalist sports industry. This attempt to break down the mythological process is to self-consciously show the distorted awareness embedded in colonialist desire and nationalist sublime in the post-capitalism Korean society.

5. Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Tongmyong University Research Grants 2015(2015A051).

6. References

1. Dobrynin IM, Narkhov DY, Narkhova YN. Research of specifics of advertising in the sports sphere: regional aspect

- and effect of collaboration. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*. 2016 May; 9 (20):1–9.
2. Choi JE, Lee RJ. The ideology of female sports in movie. *Journal of Korean Sociology of Sport*. 2003, 16 (2), pp. 447-463.
3. Jeong EJ, Chon BS. Comparative study on characteristics of sports movies between Korea and the U.S. *The Journal of the Korea Contents Association*. 2011; 11 (12):152_61.
4. Lee JH, Kim HN. A study of the effect of film content development of real events on psychological and behavioral characteristics of audience and box office. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*. 2015 August; 8(20):1–8.
5. Lee HJ. Reading sport in movie. *The Korean Journal of Physical Education*. 2006; 45 (4):41_8.
6. Barthes R. *Mythologies*. Editions du Seuil: Paris, 1957.
7. Jameson F. *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham:Duke University Press;1991.
8. Lee KC. An understanding of gender equity through sport movies. *Korean Journal of Sport Pedagogy*. 2006;13 (4):163_1.
9. Spivak G C. *A critique of postcolonial reason: toward a history of the vanishing present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 1999.
10. Bhabha H. *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge; 1994.