

# Visual Reception of *Ainu* Folklore *Hima Na Konabe*

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**Abstract**—*Ainu* people live in Hokkaido archipelago, Northern Japan and Southern Russia. *Ainu* are the Japanese indigenous people sustainably maintaining the local wisdom in their folklores. The folklores carry information on their predecessors' social life and knowledge. *Ainu* folklores contain the local wisdom preserved by the supporting society. The local wisdom of the *Ainu* people is their belief on the God of Bear. Each of things possesses soul (*kamui*) and every offering ritual is the effort to protect the nature. This study is aimed to reveal how an illustrator comprehends the story and interprets it into visual reception. The illustration is the process of depicting the object or visualization from the process of text reception to make the content or the message of the text clearer. The visual representation here is the form of the text reception and understanding toward the story of the God of Bear and the God of Pan on the *Ainu* folklore entitled *Hima Na Konabe*. The study applied the method of aesthetic reception and visual semiotic analysis. The result shows that the folklore illustration is determined by the beginning of the paragraph and the summary of the story. The visual production as the interpretation result of the story is more dominant than the understanding on the cultural reference of the story. In fact, the tradition of reception is a two-way dynamic process between text and context. Besides the whole understanding on the text, good illustration is also influenced by the cultural context of where the folklore is from.

**Keywords:** *visual reception, folklore illustration, Ainu people*

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Ainu* people are the indigenous Japanese who can be detected living in Hokkaido Archipelago, Northern Japan and Southern Russia. These people have been, from a generation to another, maintaining their local wisdom which one of the ways is through their folklores. Most of their ancestors' social life values and knowledge information are told and kept in these folklores. These social life values and knowledge form local pearls of wisdom that have been being preserved and sealed so well by *Ainu* people in *Ainu* folklores. *Ainu* cultural revitalization is most connected to the cultural preservation or restoration for recovering what has been lost [1]. The local wisdom of the *Ainu* people is their belief on the God of Bear. Each of things possesses soul (*kamui*) and every offering ritual is the effort to protect the nature. Japanese *Ainu* are indigenous people known as *Kyuudojin* (*aborigin*) or *Dojin* (*natives*). They hunt and collect food to earn their living [2].

The bear in the folklore *Hima Na Konabe* is told as one of the highest *Kamui* (God) for *Ainu* people. The God must go down to the earth every several years to receive various giving

such as *inau*, the stick for the sake giving. The God of Bear wishes to come to an *Ainu* which is in the upstream of Ishikari River and meet a little kid. The little kid is in fact the God of Pan (*Konabe*) who is good at dancing. The story in the folklore is received in the visual form by the illustrators.

Hans Robert Jaus states that visual reception is determined by aesthetic experience, subjectivity and the reader self-evident [3]. There are three phases of artistic transformation in the aesthetic reception. First, sign and meaning come while reading; Second, social history and third, aesthetic. The aesthetic reception – in the art history – can be understood by the person him/herself, the creative process and the producer. The aesthetic reception depends on the inter-phenomenon contextual in the “sense for relationship”.

The relationship among the phenomenon meets in a certain context. The actualization of the aesthetics reception is considered as an aesthetic process [3]. The aesthetics matter is not only understood in the self-actualization. The aesthetic quality is the function of a sign structure. Thick aesthetic value predicates such as balanced, serene, dynamic, graceful, vivid, tragic and delicate quality [4]. The implication of the aesthetic matters is the first reception of the work including the aesthetic values in the comparative works being read. The aesthetic reception depends on the active parts of the past aesthetic experience of the reader. Aesthetic experience depends on emotion, affect, ideas, and impression [5]. The production of aesthetic reception in the text realization is on the reader reception, reflective criticism, and the author in the context of sustainable productivity. The reception of the text interpretation considers the context of experience on the aesthetic perception. The questions on the interpretation subjectivity and the reader's taste distinction or the reader's signifying level, trans-subjectivity and the understanding condition is influential to the text. The illustrators' aesthetic reception depends on the self-evident (masterwork), the aesthetic experience, and the illustrator subjectivity. The beautiful form of a work becomes a self-evident and an indisputable eternal signification [3]. The reception and interpretation as the process of meaning construction focus on the interaction among texts [6]. Veronica M.F Adamson divides it into six approaches of studying reception, they are: theme, politics, area, channel, temporality and geography [7].

In doing the interpretation of art works, there is an intersection between text and context. The text has dialogue with the context. Text becomes the sign determined by two things; representation and composition. The working process of

an illustrator is making signs in a composition. An illustration is a text in a certain context so that the dialogue between text and context emerges on an illustration picture.

The relation is seen on the diegesis. Diegesis is a distribution of actor on a canvas in a space of perspective, position, gesture, and visual contact. It is how the character is depicted in the space. On the *Ainu* folklore, it is how the God (*Kamui*) is depicted visually in the space of perspective, position, gesture, composition, and how the illustrator subjectivity is constructed. Perception or art reception involves both activity and passivity [8]. The Form of perception and experience are objects, persons, scenes and events [8]. The following is the picture of the aesthetic reception:

<p><b>Art work</b> (<i>how art works?</i>)</p>	<p><b>Artistic Transformation</b> (<i>how artistic matters are transformed?</i>)</p>
<p><b>PERCEPTION/ART RECEPTION</b></p>	<p><b>Interaction between criticism and production</b> (<i>how is the interaction between art production and art criticism?</i>)</p>

Source: Adapted by the writer [9].

Fig. 1. Design of the aesthetic reception.

II. METHODS

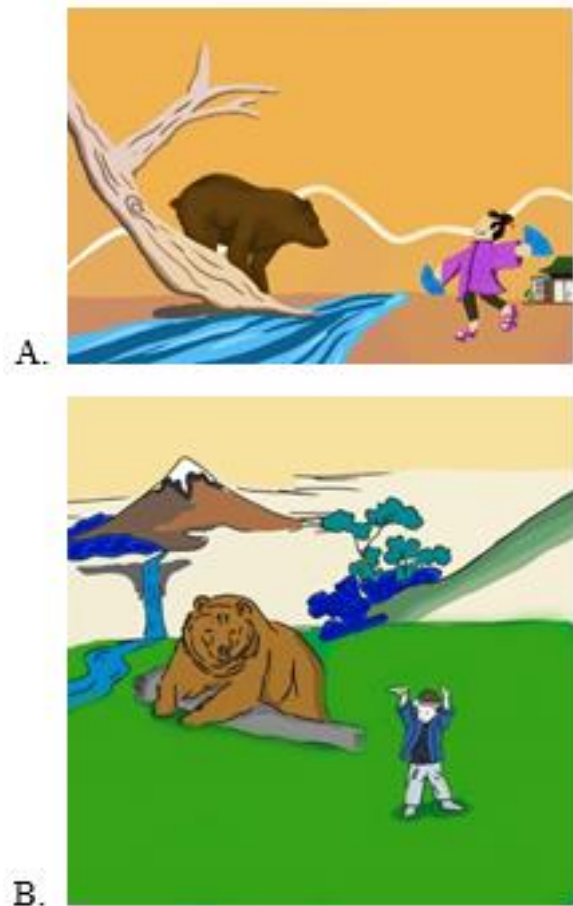
The study applies visual reception and the analysis of the aesthetic reception. Reception analysis focuses on the meaning-making “decoding” practices of readers [10]. The process of aesthetic reception is as follows. First, the HE students read the folklore *Hima Na Konabe* for several times to establish their reception as the dialectics process. Second, the HE students looked for references about *Ainu* and the visual style of Japan arts. The references led them to have assumptions on the concept of visual works to be made. Third, the HE students were given 7 days to make illustrations from the *Ainu* folklore *Hima Na Konabe*. Hans Robert Jauss states that there are three analysis categories: a. Poiesis or the aesthetic productive experience, b. aesthesis or the reception independence, c. catharsis or the communicative aesthetic experience [3]. From the process of the aesthetic reception, the HE students re-defined and made assumptions of the story being read. From the process of reading the *Ainu* folklore, the students gained spontaneous pictures or visualization on their mind. The picture was then visualized into an illustration form. On the reception process of *Hima Na Konabe* folklore, there was an interpretation from the context of the aesthetic reception experience of the students. The text identification by the students was related to the context they had never known before. This would influence the visual picture of the story.

The visual reconstruction of *Ainu* folklore was received by the illustrators when they listened to the *Hima Na Konabe* folklore and the individual re-read the folklore to give them understanding on the object they would make. The reception

received by the students when they read had already formed the meaning they gained and was then followed by making the illustration to establish the aesthetic reception on the illustration being made.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The bear character was pictured with different color compositions; brown, black, and blue. The postures of the Bear character are standing, crawling, and sitting on the outside realm of the nature, for instance, in the forest, and there is a mountain from the far sight.



Source: Research Result, 2019.

Fig. 2. The color compositions of the illustration background.

Both pictures A and B have similarities on how they depict the Bear. The character of the Bear is depicted on a tree trunk beside a river with blue water flowing from the mountain. The domination of brown and blue color on picture A with a white waving line that seems like a mountain and a man in purple holding fans on his right and left hand. Unlike figure A, figure B is dominated by green, blue and brown color. From the far sight, there is a mountain with white peak. There is a male character in blue beside the Bear.

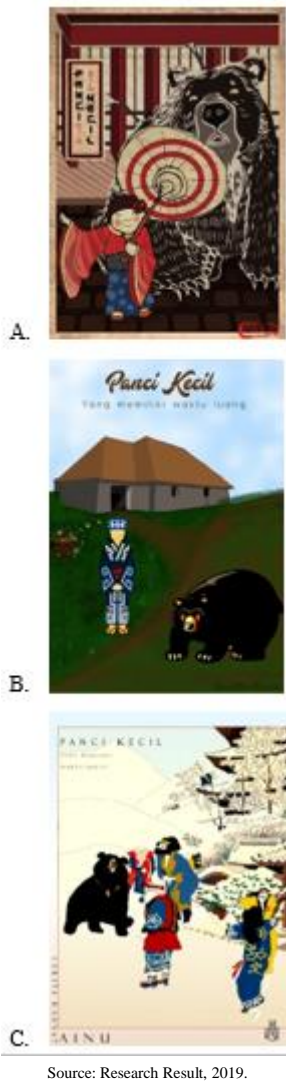


Fig. 3. The black bear.

The Bear character is depicted black on figure A, B, and C. Unlike picture A and B, on picture C the Bear is depicted together with a group of people dancing. Picture A and B depict the Bear character with a female kid in kimono. The kimono is with the *Ainu* characteristic motif.



Source: Research Result, 2019.

Fig. 4. The brown bear with a male kid

The similarity of depicting the Bear character and the male kid can be seen in the figure 4a. The figure 4A depicts the Bear who is sitting with the male kid in blue T-shirt and crossing his legs. The color of the t-shirt is the same as the figure B. The character of the male kid is wearing blue t-shirt. This is the same color as the background color behind the characters. The tree in the figure A is depicted tenaciously with rings on the trunk signing that the tree has been thousands years old. Meanwhile in the figure B, the tree is depicted smaller and on the trunk there are green buds. The figure A depicts various meals in a pan in front of the both Bear and the male kid. Unlikely, the figure B depicts the position of the kid beside the stone and leaves in the middle of forest. A pan is being hold by the Bear behind the kid.



Source: Research Result, 2019

Fig. 5. The brown bear with a female kid.

The Bear character is pictured sitting with a girl hugging him tightly in a room. The way of the figure A and figure B pictured are almost the same. The bear and the girl are standing in a dancing position in a room. The brown colors used are almost the same on both figures. Moreover, the attires worn are also the same, the red legging and the red outfit the girl wears.



Source: Research Result, 2019

Fig. 6. The blue bear.

The blue Bear was pictured behind the main characters of the story who are wearing colorful kimonos. Picture A shows the light blue Bear on the cloud, while picture B depicts the dark blue Bear standing behind the three characters who are wearing red, yellow, and green kimono. The Bear character in picture A is shining with yellow lines over His head.

The icon of “bear” and “mountain” exist almost on all pictures because the word “bear” and “mountain” are written on the first paragraph of the story. The second paragraph adds the visual element of “human” or *Ainu* in the story, however not the whole pictures depict human. The fourth and fifth picture show visually “residence”, “house”, “hut”, and “hill”. The following paragraph shows “tree”. The word “*konabe*” (small pan) is written in the title, the middle part of the story, and the conclusion of the story, so that there are no many pictures depicting pan in the visualization. It shows that first, the illustrators made the visual concepts based on the icon they found from paragraph first to sixth. Secondly, the illustrators made the visual concepts based on the reception of the title of the story, the first to sixth paragraph, the middle paragraph of the whole story, and the summary or synopsis of the story. The context of the story which is “the japan art” and “*Ainu* culture” is not yet firmly focused on the visualization made. This stimulates the recommendation for other researchers to give a lecture on the subject of Japan art and *Ainu* culture before illustrators visualize the *Ainu* folklore. On the other side, there are not a lot of reading references on the *Ainu* culture in Indonesian language.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The sentences or the first paragraph determine the visual background of the story. The Bear and the Mountain can be seen almost on the whole pictures drawn. The second sentence adds the visual elements of “human beings” or *Ainu* in the story. However, not the whole pictures depict a place that shows “residence”, “house”, “hut”, and/or “hill”. The next sentence is “tree”. The word *konabe* or small pan is written in the title, the middle part, and the synopsis of the story so that not many pictures depict the picture of a pan. It can be concluded that, first, the students merely made the visual concepts based on the icon they met from the first to sixth paragraph. Second, the visual concepts were made based on the reception of the story title, the first to sixth paragraph, the sentence on the middle part of the story, and the synopsis.

This present study recommends next researchers to conduct some research on “Japan art” and “*Ainu* Culture” due to they

are not mainly presented on the visuals given above and in order to support illustrators visualizing the *Ainu* Folklores by attaching these materials on the visuals. Moreover, references on *Ainu* Culture in the Indonesian Language are not a lot and easy to find.

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