

## Korean Myth and Folklore on Game Character Design

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**Abstract.** This study dissected the visual aspect contained in Character design of Ahri's Champion in League of Legends game with her classic skin to find the perception framing that transform nine tailed fox imagery from Korean myth and tales. League of Legends is a game that offers player an arena to fight, survive and win the game. This studies on Ahri's character, which designed from Gumiho myth and tales, the concept that can intrigue curiosity and addiction from players. The study is a qualitative research by describing Ahri's character based on it's narration and other story about nine tailed fox, then dissect the character based on Manga-matrix principle that dissect character by it's form matrix, costume matrix and personality matrix, analysis on similarity or relations among the theories as well as element that formed perception, and interpretation to the character. lastly design theory about ideology and culture that implemented on character design. The analysis shows that Ahri's skin contains imagery framing that each element formed a new perception of nine tailed fox image. The costume is focused on featuring her charm and the color mostly white and red show that champion Ahri characteristic is not dark and evil but innocent and passionate. Ahri's character design is an evidence that Gumiho image has shifted from symbols of evilness caused by people paradigm and the changes of social value in society.

### 1. Introduction

Myth and it's character has been an important part of human society since ancient times, Egyptian and Greek societies made statues of the god that visualize their god in real life. The emergence and spread of myths or legends have inspired society for centuries with characters that can incite people's deepest feelings Error: Reference source not found. League of Legends is one of the online digital games that uses multimedia in its distribution, by creating a factor of satisfaction and interest of players towards game characters with different skin (costum), changing the visual character, and animation when played by the players. According to Smardon, the notion of character in general is one of the attributes or characteristics that make objects can be distinguished as something that is individual. Characters whose emphasis is on visual characteristics or uniqueness that are seen or felt visually Error: Reference source not found. An image needs to be observed in relation to the patterns of basic elements through diversity, continuity, dominance, and so on. League of Legends has 150 Champion characters in August 2020, consisting of several types with their own weaknesses and advantages. There are five champions role in League of Legends game Error: Reference source not found. First,

Support is always there to support damager, which is in the lane bot (below), usually have crowd control skills (snare, stun, grab, slow, shield, or heal). Second, Attack Damage Carry (ADC) acts as a provider of great physical damage to the enemy. Third, Mid-laner/magic champion whose role is to put pressure on all enemy lines. Fourth, Top-laners/tank champions whose role is to withstand as many enemy attacks as possible with their large health points. Fifth, Jungler/fighter/assassin whose role is to get farming levels and money by killing forest monster. League of Legends is an arena team battle, see figure 1. each team consist of five player.



**Figure 1.** Illustration of five character as a team ready for battle.

Many studies has been done relating game character with culture, psychology, ideology, and many other subjects. But this studies goes around phenomena of formation of myths Error: Reference source not found. Aryani, Santosa, and Zpalanzani discusses game as a representation of culture medium wrapped in digital culture studies, which according to him character design studies can be investigated from storyline, gameplay, environment, and elemen of character design Error: Reference source not found. Supandi, Mansoor, and Ramadina discussed that character design can be interogerated by manga metrix design method, they said that character's personality and story background define the character form, costume, and role in the game Error: Reference source not found. Lankoski have different design approach and it's foundation in character engagement, his research show that people react to human-like entities (e.g. game character) as if they were people, including empathizing with characters, and he integrate dramatic writing insight for theatre to the character design studies Error: Reference source not found. In the other hand Liang discussed the phenomenon of trending style in character design, according to his research there is a modelling pattern in the game art design from traditional culture art elements Error: Reference source not found. Yan as well discussed traditional culture characteristics in the design of game character, according to the research applying the elements of traditional culture into design of the game characters on the basis of respect history, traceability and evidence Error: Reference source not found. This studies differs from any previous research which is to uncover the image framing of mythical character by it's visualization as game character. Other studies has shown a lot of subject related to game character design, but none of them has studies the imagery transformation that has done to the mythical character.

League of Legends is a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena game that has advantages in the form of cultural meanings and symbols on each character or avatar design, not apart from the gameplay that is built in the game. The Character contain many values that are displayed not directly or are semiotic Error: Reference source not found. This study will examine visualization of local myth character into a character design of game League of Legends, to reveal the purity values, and the values that has been transformed. Relating to the value of modern society behind the medium itself such as story and artifact especially in the case of character design.

This research, use descriptive qualitative to encompass the aesthetic studies, and uncover the culture that formed in the game character design. Second, use character design studies to interrogate the element in the game character and it's function. In expectance, this method can be applied to other

character design especially other game character design, to uncover the knowledge of digital culture that formed in present days.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Descriptive Qualitative*

First, This descriptive qualitative research encompasses aesthetic studies with the aim of understanding the meaning of nine tailed fox imagery transformation so as to develop theoretical assumptions about context and time as an aesthetic assessment of the occurrence of a specific communication of Ahri character design Error: Reference source not found. Second, Creswell's explanation about the qualitative approach in a study, in this case Ahri character design become phenomenon that can be learned by it's narration, game description, and outer appearance as a process to the design itself Error: Reference source not found. The studies is done by gathering detailed information about nine tailed fox story from Korea using various data collection procedures as long as the case exists and occurs. Identifying the character (avatar) description of Ahri's in League of Legends game to gain the basic information of game character design.

### *2.2. Character Design Studies*

Tsukamoto proposed the manga-matrix method used to study game characters with unlimited references. Tsukamoto's matrix of characters includes: form matrix, costume matrix and personality matrix Error: Reference source not found. Form matrix is matrix method of character using form parameter, analyzing character by it's outer appearance. Costume matrix is matrix method of character by outfit that weared, analyzing costum to find identity of the character. Lastly, personality matrix, is a matrix method of character using role, narration, and speciality skill of character, it's analyzing character by it's special attribut, weakness, role, origin story, and behaviour. Darmaprawira suggested the theory of the study of the use of color factors including understanding the meaning of colors symbolically and psychologically Error: Reference source not found. Ahri's visualization is interesting to study because it comes from the character of myths that already exist. So, the community has had a prior experience of the characters. There is a need to study the change in character and its visuali zation from old stories and new stories about gumihō, the nine-tailed fox.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Ahri's character comes from an Asian myth known as nine tailed fox spirits. This myth of fox spirit varies each age and each country such as China, Japan and Korea. Every country has their own story about the myth of the fox spirits. Based on Korean folklore, this fox demon is female dominant and is always evil Error: Reference source not found. Fox spirit often appears in horror stories so that it has a reputation as an evil demon that tempts and eats men. However, recently many works have changed by retelling and adapting existing stories. Folklore or narrative prose, represents the ideas, beliefs, and symbols of intelligence from humans at a certain time Error: Reference source not found. Storytelling system continues to evolve, people begin to create unreal creatures that at this time inspire and influence the younger generation and society.

### *Narration*

The character description of Ahri, "Once upon a time she met a dying human, as the last breath of the essence of life came out of his mouth. Ahri absorbed the essence of life and his form changed into a

beautiful woman with her fox ears and tail. In the end Ahri fell to her desire to become a human and killed many humans. However, Ahri intelligence and development into a humans made her realized that her behavior and actions were inhumane, so her consciousness mixed with human morals. Her consciousness of human morals stopped her from achieving his goal of becoming a perfect human being so that her form was imperfect human, still having a fox's tail and ears”. So there are two characterizations of the nine-tailed fox spirit as a character, namely the characterization found in mythology or old literature and the characterization found in modern stories or new creation. First, the characterization of a fox spirit (gumiho) in an old literature, most of them are horror genres story produces a scary and evil characterization of a fox spirit Error: Reference source not found. The feature of gumiho from old literature:

- Gumiho has ability to change its form into both inanimate objects and living things. Gumiho can still move even when its form mimics inanimate objects.
- Gumiho is often told as a beautiful woman that lure, deceive, and enchant the target or victim.
- His favorite food is male organs, carnivores as his native animal is a fox that eats meat.
- Gumiho absorbs human energy to ascend to heaven, energy is collected in the form of gems.
- Has a long life and superhuman strength?

Different characterizations are made in adaptation or modern stories, such as in the Yobi animation movie (see figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox film poster that visualize the nine tailed fox as an innocent child.

This movie bring new perspective to the nine tailed fox feature and characteristics, a creature that has reason and thought like humans. As shown in League of Legends game, see figur 3. Ahri’s visualisation is look gracious and beautiful, not visualized as demon or evil with it’s dark and horror feature as told in old stories Error: Reference source not found.

### 3.1. Personality

Ahri is a magic type champion that is a champion who has a basic magic attack and usually positioned in the middle lane. Ahri is one of game character with mythical motif Error: Reference source not found. Ahri described as a creature of nature that close to spirit being, it is the same as fox as an animal believed as spirit being that has spiritual power like magic beyond the logic of human. Most of her skill is charm, magical energi, movement speed. Table 1. explain the specific skills of champion Ahri compared to fox spirits abilities.

**Table 1.** Champion Ahri’s Skill Analysis

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No.

**Comparison Ahri Skill on Game and Folklore**

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1.



**Vastayan Grace**

When Ahri's spell hits the enemy twice in a row, increase her moving speed.

**Gumiho skill in Folklore**

Zong 18-20 "*The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue*",  
"...killed his ninety-nine school fellows by sucking out their human energy."

2.



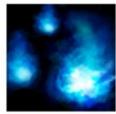
**Orb of Deception**

A straight orb attack that will return to Ahri. Resulting in True and Magical Damage. Resulting in the stolen essence of the captured enemy And restore Ahri's health.

**Gumiho skill in Folklore**

Zong 18-20 "*The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue*",  
"...suck the boy's energy by rolling a jewel back and forth between his mouth and her own,"

3.



**Fox Fire**

Release 3 fireballs that will attack the nearest enemy or prioritize the attack on the enemy that is hit by charm.

**Gumiho skill in Folklore**

Ji Yun's *Random Jottings at the Cottage of Close Scrutiny*. "*The Fox Victim's Revenge*".  
"The fox spirits takes revenge on humans by burning down houses and burning people who hurt their families."

4.



**Charm**

Exhaling kisses results in a heart-shaped attack that produces magical damage and enchants the enemy to walk toward Ahri harmlessly.

**Gumiho skill in Folklore**

Zong 171-4 "*The Fox Girl and her Brother*",  
"...after many prayers, a daughter is born, and she becomes the favourite child."  
Zong 18-20 "*The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue*",  
"...he encountered 'a pretty young woman selling wine' in a new shop there."

5.



**Spirit Rush**

Move forward for a distance, and shoot the essence of electricity at the closest enemy. Ahri can do the "spirit rush" three times

**Gumiho skill in Folklore**

Sunwoo entertainment & Yellow Film "*Yobi, the Five-Tailed Fox*"  
"...Yobi keeps dashing in and out changing between the adult and child forms..."

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It was clear that Champion Ahri's skill is similar or even created based on nine tailed fox story and folklore. The form of skill and its description shows the ability of champion Ahri is movement, charm, and magical orbs attack. These skills are the same as ability of nine tailed fox in literature titled as "The Jewel of the Fox Tongue", "The Fox Victim's Revenge", "The Fox Girl and her Brother", and animation movie "Yobi the Five-Tailed Fox". The message of the story has been shifted, transforming her from object to subject, and the message of the story is demonstrating that humanity is evidenced by behaviour, not by social privilege and race Error: Reference source not found. Based on the analysis Ahri's character design is inclined to the new perspective of Gumiho story which is not naturally evil.

### Form

Character design development study that depicted as cultural symbols, Kim Yong-sik and Kim Hong-san (2008) have categorized the character's important attributes as identity, communication and entertainment value Error: Reference source not found. Ahri form is half-human type, that is mostly her bodies still human but some feature is animal, as shown on her form that she has ears and tail of the fox, see figure 3. Ahri outer appearance is half-human, even her height is the same as human typically, and then her silhouettes shows that her bodies is slim and light.



**Figure 3.** Champion Ahri analysis by head length proportion and silhouettes form.

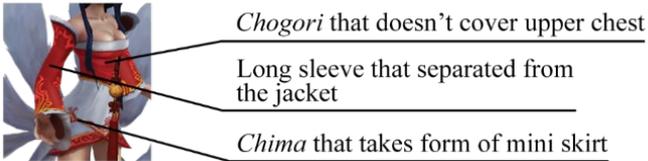
The shape of the character that shows a lot of body curves and clothes that barely covering gives the impression of agile and charming. Visually, Ahri is depicted by a beautiful young woman dressed in sexy clothes, has fox-eared and nine-tailed. Each of her skills is aimed at increasing the speed of her movements, the gesture during her ultimate skill (figure 4) show that she is an agile character. Ahri jumps to a certain direction and releases a blue flame at a nearby enemy. Ahri's gesture that her body leaning forward showed fast movement and agile figure. This nimble and agile impression is supported by her costume and slim figure.



**Figure 4.** Champion Ahri gesture analysis while moving. Her gesture is the same as runner athlete, and any other movement gesture with high mobility.

Ahri's costume is Korean traditional clothes known as Hanbok. Hanbok is a traditional clothing worn by all ages in Korea Error: Reference source not found. Traditionally, female hanbok consist of chogori or famously known today as jackets, and chima that is a long skirt that covers the upper body till legs. The hanbok in Ahri's costume is different which is has chogori that doesn't cover the upper chest area and chima that take shape as miniskirt, as a table 2 explained, other than implying the modern form the costume shows her beautiful body as identity and suitable costume to move swiftly as personality of Ahri.

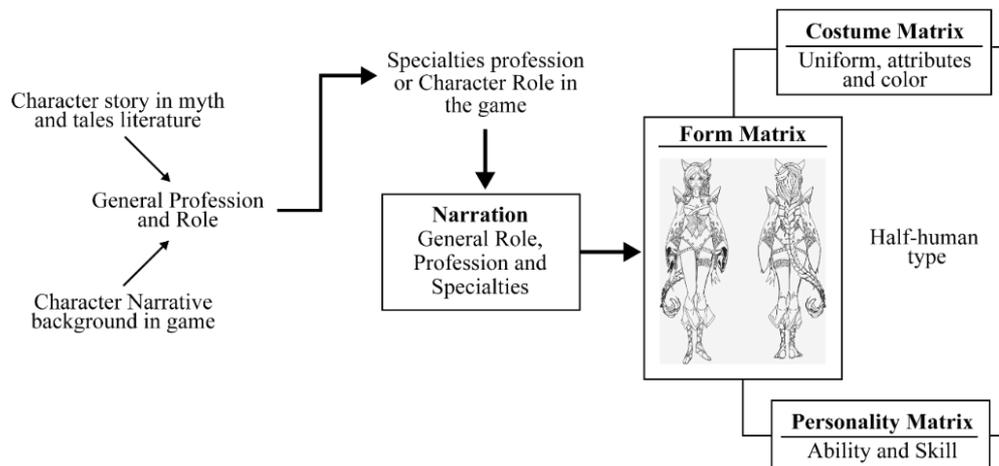
**Table 2.** Visual study of Ahri's clothes design

Character	Hanbok (Korean Traditional Clothes)	
	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Modernized</i>
	Traditionally, hanbok is featured by long-sleeved jacket called 'Chogori', and long skirt that cover from the body to the feet called 'Chima'.	Modernized hanbok is a modified form, combined with some feature of other clothing.
	Ahri's clothes is one of modified hanbok, combined with new feature that is mini skirt, long-sleeved that separated from main clothes, and Chogori that doesn't cover the upper chest area.	

The design attempted harmonous color, to appear so the color related to each other as a split complementary and analogous colour Error: Reference source not found. The dominant color is red and white, red as dynamic and passionate color symbolizes love, rage, courage, and in chinese social paradigm red color means happiness. White means perfection and pure color symbolize purity, innocence and virginity, white usually has positive connotations.

Based on the form, characters or avatars in League of Legends can be divided into four type: Human type, half-human type, half-animal type, animal type Error: Reference source not found. Character have unique characteristic and expression as distinct subjects. They can stimulate the human emotion and make people feel a level of intimacy. Character require identity as main subject that have personality. Familiarity is the main reason for mythologies and folklore to be adapted to the game. This also has advantage of bringing people's attention and interest.

Character become representation of culture and social value, as creation contains the creator ideology, the way of thinking Error: Reference source not found. The game character that become phenomenon of cultural change and social transformation, stressing the social value that represented in the creation of game character. These phenomenon influence the form, personality, and costume of the characters during development (see figure 5). Figure 5 show the process scheme of Ahri's character design analysis, started by comparing both narration from folklore that already exist and new tales that created by League of Legends to find the general profession and role of character, then narrative analysis to describe Ahri and nine tailed fox special feature, and finally analyzing the form, costume and personality that related to each other.



**Figure 5.** League of Legends character design process scheme that adopted mythical character, specifically champion Ahri character design that represented Gumiho myth from Korea.

The characters game that adopted mythical characters have the following conditions and transformations. First, The character background narration must be represented it's entirety by the appearance of the character. Second, general appearance, ability, and identical feature of mythological character can help player or people to realize and relate game character to myth or tales that they know. Third, color can be important to emphasize character diversity, as well as attributes and clothes can relate character to it's original myth, in Ahri character case, this help player relate to Gumiho as Korean myth, not Chinese or Japanese.

#### 4. Conclusion

Champion Ahri is visualization of Gumiho the nine tailed fox spirit folklore from Korea. Matrix method is a method to analyze character design, such as manga matrix by Hiroyoshi Tsukamoto. Form matrix analysis showed that champion Ahri's form is not as evil as described in folklore but designed as an natural being that lived by their instinct. Costume matrix analysis found that champion Ahri outfit is modernized hanbok or not original hanbok (traditional korean clothes), and the color mostly white and red show that champion Ahri characteristic is not dark and evil but innocent and passionate. Personality matrix analyze that champions Ahri skill and role in the game is based on her ability in the folklore of the fox spirits. This is a phenomenon of cultural change over time corresponding to the change of social values that believed by society. Gumiho the nine tailed fox is a horror creature according to the folklore and they even called the fox demon in Korea. Modern stories change the image of Gumiho to be more friendly mythical character, not a horror character to be affraid and symbols of evilness. The character design not only focus on the function of each characters in the game, but also regard the interaction between player and character that is mythical and folklore character used to relate character more closely to the player. Local content can attract player and richen the values of the game as one of digital culture.

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