

Ways of seeing the forest: landscape image sketches in Japan and Russia

Hirofumi Ueda¹, Toshihiro Nakajima², Norimasa Takayama³, Elena Petrova⁴, Hajime Matsushima⁵, Katsunori Furuya², Yoji Aoki

Keywords: landscape image, forest, Japan, Russia, sketch drawing

This study investigated the ways of seeing the forest in Japan and Russia by using Landscape Image Sketching Technique (LIST). Identification of recreation needs is one of the most important tasks in natural area management. With the globalisation of tourism, the recreation needs are diversifying on the one hand whilst local culture and customs can become a new tourist resource on the other. Understanding culturally different meanings of forests will give a new insight into tourism promotion as well as natural area management.

For cross-national research, Japan and Russia were selected. Japan and Russia are neighbouring countries, however, the mutual communication has been not enough. This report is an interim report of the JAPAN-RUSSIA Joint Research Project since 2008 'Comparison of Natural Landscape Evaluation between Japan and Russia', which is financed by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and Russian Foundation for Basic Research.

Landscape Image Sketching Technique (LIST) is an empirical methodology to exteriorise an individual landscape image as a scene sketch by respondents. The 'landscape image' is defined as a medium between one's individual values and social construction as well as physical landscape and landscape representation. In related study areas, the human phenomenon of value has been explicated with gestalt principles (see Schroeder 2007, Fuller 1990). The visual data from one's perspective mirror the respondents' identification and symbolisation of the landscape and then reconstruction of the meaning in its composition as a figure-ground relationship. In other words, the sketching procedure can coordinate the inconsistent verbal accounts in a symbolic picture, which is the advantage of the scene sketch. LIST reveals 'what' people are looking at as well as 'how' they are viewing their environment, thus giving us new insights into the understanding of the public image through landscape perception (Ueda 2006, 2009).

The empirical data were obtained with questionnaires in Japanese and Russian language. The respondents were students of Moscow University, Irkutsk University, Chiba University and Hokkaido University. The site selection intended to diversify the forest images considering geographic position as well as vegetation of each research site.

About 50 respondents in each research site were asked to make a landscape image sketch of their spontaneous imagination of a 'forest' with some keywords and text. The visual data were analysed through three phases. Landscape elements were identified visually and linguistically and labeled first. View angle and distance were classified according to the visual appearance and combination of each landscape elements and viewpoint. Then, self-orientation in the represented landscape was classified in terms of the combination and structure of the elements and viewpoint. Finally, the meaning or motive of the landscape image sketches was interpreted comprehensively with relation to the labeled elements and verbal description.

¹School of Design, Sapporo City University, Geijutsu-no-mori 1, Minami-ku Sapporo, 005-0864 Hokkaido, Japan, h.ueda@scu.ac.jp

² Graduate School of Horticulture, Chiba University

³ Forestry and Forestry Products Research Institute

⁴ Faculty of Geography, Lomonosov Moscow State University

⁵ Research Faculty of Agriculture, Hokkaido University

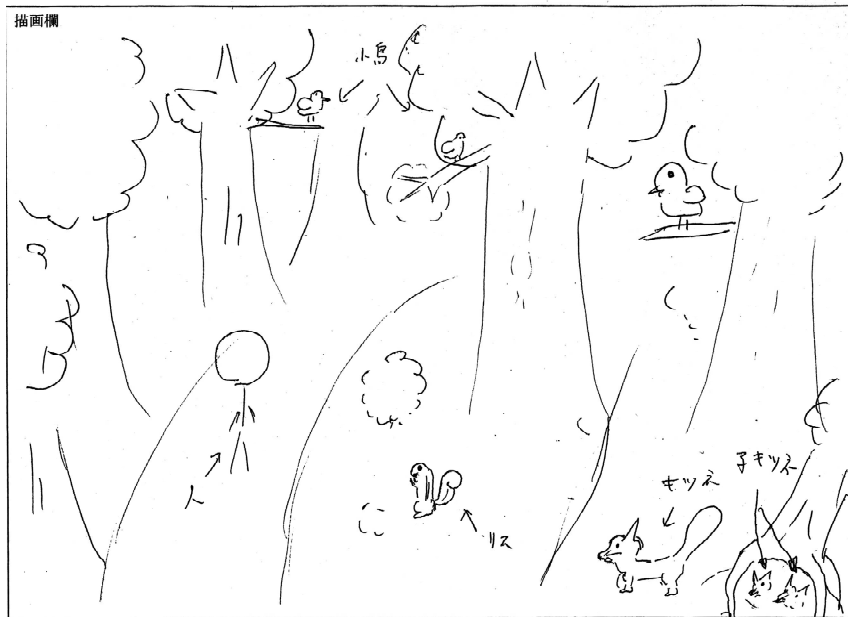


Figure 1 and 2: Example of forest image sketch in Japan (left) and Russia (right)

As results, landscape image sketches showed diverse variety in each research site, but different characteristics between Japan and Russia suggested the fundamental difference in the ways of seeing the landscape through cultural framework. The preference for broadleaf wood forest in Japan and mixed forest in Russia was main difference concerning 'what' they are looking at as a forest. While the description of 'forest ground' including underbrush, flowers, mushrooms and fallen leaves, 'water' and 'creatures' were commonly drawn frequently; 'trails' and 'people' in Japan and 'sun and sunlight' in Russia were remarkably more specific?. According to the view angle and distance, the view of the landscape image was categorised into four groups: 'close up view', 'sideways view (with distance)', 'bird's-eye view' and 'distant view'. The result also showed a contrast between the wide ranges of categories in Japan and the certain distance in Russia, which represents 'how' they are viewing the forest. Then, the objectification of the forest landscape and existence of viewpoint were further classified into four groups, respectively implying the objectification and accessibility of forests: 'objects', 'objectified scene', 'surrounding place', and 'scenic place'. The results implied locality-specific forest uses and accessibility of forests in each research site. In the Japanese sample, the viewpoints were seen in the sketches representing

scenes of their recreational uses in forest. In Russia, their romantic scenes were usually objectified describing the forests in detail. The results can suggest the different aesthetic norm in each cultural framework. In short, the research findings indicate different ways of seeing the landscape: a mere backdrop to one's experience in Japan and romantic and aesthetic harmony of forest landscape in Russia.

In this study, LIST revealed the different meanings of 'forest' in Japan and Russia. The research findings suggest the needs of different approach to the management of recreational activities and public relations, which will promote Japan-Russia tourism exchange.

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