Ainu Representation in Japanese Contemporary Popular Literature: An Examination of the *Golden Kamuy* Manga Depictions of Ainu Culture

Kanto orwa yaku sak no arankep shinep ka isam [*Nothing comes from heaven without purpose*]

By

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Introduction

In Japan, the myth of ethnic homogeneity was promoted for over a century. Ethnic minorities such as the Ainu people and the Ryukyuan people faced discrimination and a dire lack of legal recognition for centuries in Japan. The Japanese House and Diet adopted resolutions that requested the government to recognize the indigenous nature of the Ainu people in 2018. Finally, in 2019, the "Act on Promoting Measures to Realize a Society in Which the Pride of the Ainu People Is Respected" was adopted, which officially recognized that Ainu people are indigenous to the northern part of Japan and discrimination against the Ainu is to be outlawed. Beyond the legal realm, the Ainu people's depictions in media and culture are based on racist tropes (exotic, primitive, foreign), contrasting them with the supposedly cultured, refined Japanese people.

Along with legislative changes, Japanese contemporary popular literature is also changing in regards to Ainu representation. While Ainu depictions were overwhelmingly racist, stereotype-driven, and othering, recent literary works such as *Golden Kamuy* are employing positive, research-based Ainu representations. A significant body of academic literature has been written on the Ainu depictions in the Edo, Meiji, and Showa eras literature, but contemporary Japanese popular literature has thus far remained unexplored. Considering how popular and widely beloved, well-researched, and educational the *Golden Kamuy* manga is, this thesis will analyze how the Ainu are represented in Japanese contemporary literature in light of the historical, cultural, and social background of such depictions. Moreover, it will examine how the Ainu spirituality and worldview can be presented to raise ecological awareness, while also dispelling Ainu-related myths. It will explore tropes and misconceptions, and ultimately raise awareness about the Ainu people who continue to face discrimination (and, thus, often hide their ethnic background) despite over a century of legal citizenship in Japan. Thus, this thesis' main research question is: to what extent does the *Golden Kamuy* manga accurately depict the Ainu people and their ecological worldview?

In Chapter 1, an outline of the Ainu peoples' history and the Japanese colonization of their lands will provide the historical background of this thesis. The colonial practices and their impact throughout time described in this chapter contextualize the case study examples that take place during the late Meiji period.

Chapter 2 tackles the Ainu identity formation and resilience, as they are inextricably linked to the Japanese history and identity-building process (particularly during the Meiji era). A brief history of Ainu depictions by Edo and Meiji era Japanese sources highlights how the Japanese internal strifes produced various socio-economic factors that led to the inclusion or exclusion of the Northern Territories (Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands, and Karafuto) and their inhabitants from the Japanese influence sphere. This chapter emphasizes how, due to external pressures, the various cultural groups occupying Ezo (modern-day Hokkaido) underwent a homogenization process, leading to the formation of what is now understood as Ainu culture and identity.

In Chapter 3, Japanese literature that depicts the Ainu and their lands is scrutinized. Literary texts from the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa eras in which the action takes place in Hokkaido are analyzed and compared to explore the stereotypes, misconceptions, othering, and orientalizing of the Ainu people by Japanese authors. In essence, these texts are criticized for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about the "former aborigines" that inhabit the Northern Territories.

In comparison, the case study manga that will be analyzed in-depth in Chapter 4 stands in stark contrast with these works, providing accurate, research-backed, and positive depictions of the Ainu, their customs, language, and spirituality. After a brief summary of the plot and characters, the main themes, tropes, and ideas of *Golden Kamuy* are explored in relation to the theories of ecocriticism and middle ground. Before moving on to the literature review and methodology sections, it is worth pondering the importance of researching this topic in the first place. Beyond the aforementioned gap in the literature, *Golden Kamuy* and its impact on the Ainu community, Japanese opinion thereof, and broadly speaking on the interest in Ainu culture has been tremendous. Although Chapter 4 will go more in-depth, the manga's impact can easily be grasped based on first-hand accounts of Ainu people, but also Japanese readers that fell in love with the *Golden Kamuy* universe and the people it depicts.

Research motivation: *Golden Kamuy*'s impact on readers' lives

Golden Kamuy has had a tremendous impact on the lives of its readers, be they Ainu or not. Kamuy Central translated interviews with three people directly impacted by *Golden Kamuy* and its recent success (Lompat 2020). Firstly, Kaizawa Toru, a Nibutani Ainu craftsman, fondly reminisces his fateful encounter with Satoru Noda, who came to Nibutani to conduct fieldwork and commission a *makiri* from Kaizawa (Lompat 2020). Both in the article and in *Manga: The Citi Exhibition* (2019), Kaizawa praises *Golden Kamuy* for its

positive depictions of Ainu culture and lifestyle, stating that he appreciates how they are presented as equals to the Japanese (Rousmaniere and Matsuba 2019, 33). Due to the manga's success, Kaizawa's commissions have more than quintupled, leading to over a year of commissions being booked in advance (Lompat 2020). Beyond commissions, Kaizawa mentions that many (predominantly young, female) fans have recently started visiting his workshop in cosplay, commissioning *Golden Kamuy*-themed *makiri*, and going on holiday in Hokkaido to explore the world of *Golden Kamuy* (Lompat 2020). It is worth noting that although the majority of fans are young, also a large number of middle-aged Ainu are allegedly enjoying the manga (Lompat 2020).

Golden Kamuy has also inspired Ainus that were apathetic towards their ethnic heritage to rediscover their identity, history, and culture through Golden Kamuy. For instance, Ueno Fuuka is a young Ainu student that became interested in her Ainu heritage after reading *Golden Kamuy* and relating to Asirpa, the young, proud Ainu hunter (Lompat 2020). Her entrance test topic of choice at Sapporo University was *Golden Kamuy*, and how it inspired a sense of pride and belonging in her (Lompat 2020). At university, she partakes in the Urespa Club, where she learns Ainu history, dances, cuisine, and culture. Her experience is akin to what Ann-Elise Lewallen describes as the shift from *being* Ainu to *becoming* Ainu, achieved by engaging in cultural activities such as clothwork (in Ueno's case, dancing, singing, and cooking) to (re)create one's Ainu identity, adapted to the present circumstances, yet grounded in tradition (Lewallen 2016, 1-2).

Ainu youth and artisans, however, are not the only ones impacted by *Golden Kamuy* and its accurate, engaging, and positive depictions of the Ainu. Japanese readers such as Hayashi Sawako, a Tokyo-based doctor, became wholly engrossed in the story and the Ainu culture it depicts (Lompat 2020). Keen on experiencing the sights of *Golden Kamuy* for herself, she traveled to Hokkaido before her national exam to become a doctor. On this trip, she spent weeks creating a leaflet that describes roughly 30 places she visited on the island for other *Golden Kamuy* fans looking to travel to Hokkaido. Through museum visits, interactions with the Ainu people, and further reading about the Ainu and the hardships they endured due to Japanese colonization, Hayashi broadened her knowledge of the Ainu thanks to the appeal of *Golden Kamuy* (Lompat 2020).

While only three stories of *Golden Kamuy*'s impact on readers were presented in this section, it is safe to say that the manga has helped promote the indigenous peoples' culture to a wide audience; Noda Satoru has sold over 16 millions copies of the manga in the past 7 years, and its popularity is steadily growing (Akibamarket 2021). Museums in Hokkaido have

been holding *Golden Kamuy*-themed events and temporary exhibitions, boosting domestic tourism, especially amongst youth (a new Golden Kamuy-themed exhibition will soon be held at the Ainu National Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, starting on July 3rd, 2021). In 2018, fans could roam around Hokkaido in search of the manga's characters' stamps at museums spread out across seven cities. Currently, no research has been conducted on Golden Kamuy's economic impact on Hokkaido's tourism industry; as for its cultural impact, this thesis tackles the topic for the first time in the field.

Literature review

Ainu-centered studies date back to the late Edo period when the Tokugawa shogunate sought to understand and solidify its grasp of the northern territories (Yamada 2003, 76). Due to similarities in cultural practices, racial features, and beliefs, numerous European scholars visited Hokkaido during the 19th century to research the Ainu peoples' origins and customs. At the same time, Japanese scholars sought answers regarding the Japanese peoples' origins by researching those of the Ainu (Yamada 2003, 77-78). However, in recent years, research on the Ainu people has shifted significantly, especially since the Japanese Diet recognized the Ainu as an indigenous people in 2008.

For the scope of this thesis, a few main themes in Ainu scholarship are particularly relevant. Firstly, the history of Ainu lands' conquest by the Japanese, with an emphasis on the social, economic, and cultural impact that occurred. For this section, Brett Walker, David L. Howell, Ann-Elise Lewallen, and M.J. Hudson's works (amongst others) will serve as the main sources. Another important theme in Ainu scholarship that is relevant is that of Ainu identity and representation in Japanese media. Takashi Kinase, Yoo Kyung Song and Junko Sakoi, Ann-Elise Lewallen, and others' works are of particular interest for this topic. Lastly, the scholarship on the Ainu's relationship with nature and the ecological impact of the conquest of Ainu lands will be analyzed, as ecology and the Ainu-nature relationship are key themes in the case study manga. For this topic, the works of scholars such as Christopher Loy and Walker Brett provide exhaustive accounts of the impact of colonization on the Ainu's way of life and their lands' environmental degradation. The following section consists of a review of the aforementioned authors' works in the same order and based on the three main themes which are relevant for this thesis' scope.

The literature on the colonization of Ainu lands

Brett Walker's "The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion,1590-1800" provides an exhaustive account of the gradual erosion of the Ainu's autonomy, their relationship with the Japanese government and the Matsumae domain officials, as well as an overview of the ecological, economic, cultural, and epidemiologic impact of the conquest of Ainu lands. Walker challenges the commonly-held notion that Japan was an isolated country during the Edo period, highlighting how, when presented from

a Ezo-centric (Hokkaido) perspective, Edo Japan was expanding northward. Walker tackles the gradual conquest of Ezo through a "middle ground" approach, contrasting how the Ainu lived before and after the investigated period (1590 and 1800). According to him, the Ainu were self-sufficient people who lived off their lands sustainably and were able to repel Mongolian and Japanese incursions but had become reliant on Japanese trade, decimated by disease, and unable to prevent environmental degradation (Walker 2001, 11). Walker's Ezo-centered account is remarkable due to its holistic and exhaustive approach in which the conquest of Ainu lands' ramifications are explored in-depth, from the ecological degradation due to overfishing and overhunting for trade with Japan to the pervasive cultural changes that came with the market reforms (Walker 2001, 13-14). Walker's account is also compelling due to the large variety of sources (and types of sources) presented as evidence throughout the book, from Tokugawa officials' records to Ainu poems and Western accounts of the Ainu-Japanese relations.

Ann-Elise Lewallen's "'Intimate Frontiers': Disciplining Ethnicity and Ainu Women's Sexual Subjectivity in Early Colonial Hokkaido." further explores the colonization of Ainu lands, providing an analysis of both the colonization process and its effects on Ainu women's bodily autonomy and societal role. Her paper highlights how the colonial division of labor in fisheries disrupted the Ainu family unit, creating precarious conditions under which Ainu women were sexually assaulted and without protection from their partners/families (Lewallen 2016, 33). The Ainu ballad cited by Lewallen acts as a metaphor for the suffering of Ainu women ("Esashi Oiwake"), decrying both the loss of ancestral land and bodily autonomy due to the colonization process (Lewallen 2016, 20). Lewallen argues that Ainu women acted as an "intimate frontier" upon which early Japanese colonizers reinforced the hierarchical relations; thus, the destruction and commodification of Ainu lands occurred concomitantly with the erasure of Ainu women's sexual subjectivity through sexual assault and forced separation of Ainu couples (Lewallen 2016, 19-21, 29). Her work challenges historiographic notions that Ezochi/Hokkaido was colonized in 1869, showcasing how pervasive and damaging to the Ainu population and environment the early Japanese incursions were.

In "Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State", David L. Howell discusses the Ainu-Japanese relationship during the Edo period in a similar fashion to Walker and Lewallen (specifically regarding the center-periphery dichotomy through which Ezo was viewed as foreign, yet subservient to Japan without being viewed as "Japanese"). Howell's analysis focuses on how, during the Edo period, the Ainu were othered and politically used to help the shogunate define the Japanese ethnicity through seclusion (Howell

1994, 74-75). Like Walker, Howell argues that the Tokugawa system of limited autonomy of daimyos under the Shogunate's oversight and, specifically, Matsumae's special role in overseeing trade with Ezochi led to the interdependence between the Matsumae house and the Ainu (Howell 1994, 84). While the Ainu grew increasingly reliant on Japanese goods and, thus, on the Matsumae domain, the latter needed Ainu for legitimacy in front of the Shogun. Howell's account of the Ainu-Japanese history and interdependency before and during the Meiji era is particularly useful, as this thesis' case study text's action takes place during Meiji Japan, and the dynamics of the Ainu-Japanese relationship during the Meiji period cannot be analyzed without knowledge of them during the Tokugawa period. Compared to the previous two authors, Howell's account is perhaps Japanese-centric, focused on the institutions that shaped the interdependency and Japanese identity formation, though he manages to paint a balanced picture of the Ainu-Japanese relationship.

Ainu identity formation and representation in Japanese texts

A sizeable part of Ainu-centered academic scholarship is, at the very least partially, concerned with how the indigenous people in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril islands became "Ainu", as well as with their representation in Japanese texts (i.e. textbooks, books, manga, etc). As noted earlier, certain scholars argue that the Ainu identity was formed as a response to increased interactions (trading, but also warfare) with the Japanese. Thus, it is worth exploring how Japanese sources depict Ainu, especially since the Ainu have no writing system of their own, leading to Japanese audiences learning about the Ainu almost exclusively from Japanese-written sources.

In "Stories of the Ainu: The Oldest Indigenous People in Japanese Children's Literature", Yoo Kyung Sung and Junko Sakoi explore how Ainu people, their spirituality, and their relationship with nature are depicted in Japanese children's literature. Their work shows how the Ainu are depicted as foreign, colonized, and in touch with nature and the seasons. Since most of the analyzed books are written by non-Ainu people (i.e. Japanese authors), the study shows that such texts create an imagined, fictional Ainu identity (Song and Sakoi 2017, 11) - one that is largely without counter narrative due to the relatively little interest in Ainu culture beyond tourism. They identify the common themes in children's books that depict Ainu stories, namely *kamuy* (the divine beings that exist in nature, tools, animals, etc) and ecology-related concepts: "(1) ecocritical warnings from animals and nature to prevent pollution, (2) seeking life and becoming whole, (3) locating postcolonial ecocriticism in time and space", as well as the lack of real Ainu contemporary stories (Song

and Sakoi 2017, 7). Although important, as they teach positive ecological messages to children, such literary texts still create imagined, outlandish notions about what Ainu people are, in no small part because they are written by cultural outsiders.

Takashi Kinase's "Difference, Representation, Positionality: An Examination of the Politics of Contemporary Ainu Images" provides an exhaustive overview of Ainu depictions in Japan both before and after the 1960s/1970s (when he argues that the Ainu reclaimed and reversed the depictions of them). The stereotypical depictions in question are those which make the Ainu seem primitive or savage by identifying them as being "one with nature" (Kinase 2002, 171). He discusses the various trends, organizations, and movements that sought to change public perception about the Ainu, their culture, and lifestyle (seen as some in the 1970s and thereafter as an alternative to consumerism), although the numerous movements are rather superficially discussed. That said, the merit of his work is that it highlights how even among Ainu people, different factions clashed due to divergent understandings of what Ainu culture is and how it should be represented (Kinase 2002, 175), but also that the enfranchisement of the Ainu occurred in the wider context of the political divide in Japan over the Japanese postwar identity and the ecological movements. His text describes an Ainu identity formation that is neither linear nor homogenous, but one influenced by the broader Japanese political context, intracultural divides, and generational disputes.

Another work that discusses Ainu identity formation at great lengths is Ann-Elise Lewallen's "The Fabric of Indigeneity: Ainu Identity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism in Japan". In it, she explores how Ainu women employ the "self-craft" of identities through clothwork, essentially going from "being Ainu" to "becoming Ainu". The distinction is important, as many Ainu ethnic people are disconnected from their roots due to assimilation and social stigma surrounding the Ainu ethnicity. She argues that Ainu women, through practices such as clothwork, strengthen their identity as Ainu and fight back against state regulations and campaigns that aim to further assimilate the Ainu. As previously discussed, Ainu women were at the intimate frontier upon which early Japanese colonizers reinforced the hierarchical structures that led to the gradual assimilation and subordination of the Ainu to the Japanese. Through this well-researched, exhaustive book, Ann-Elise Lewallen adds multiple new perspectives through which Ainu identity formation continues to play out today.

Ainu-nature relationship and the ecological impact of their lands' colonization

Ainu identities, as previously shown, are and have not been static or unaffected by changes in Japanese society. The ecological degradation due to gold panning, mining, overfishing, and overhunting that occurred in the last few centuries is certainly inextricable from the first section of the literature review, namely the history of the Ainu lands colonization process. This section will explore some of the scholarly literature which discusses the environmental degradation caused by imperialism in the Ainu lands, as well as the strong Ainu-nature relationship.

The previously discussed *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion,1590-1800* by Brett Walker is not only relevant in terms of providing a comprehensive history of the pre-modern Japanese colonialism in the Ainu lands but also an exhaustive overview of the impact that the introduction of the market economy through trading outposts had on Ezo. According to Walker, previously fertile, game-rich territories gradually became insufficient for the Ainu's day-to-day needs due to overhunting and overfishing practices and the export of those products to Japan (Walker 2001, 75). Also in this chapter, Walker touches upon the Ainu-nature relationship, which is marked by a high degree of respect shown to the animals, land, and waters where the Ainu reside, showcased by the many rituals conducted before and after a hunt (Walker 2001, 77). Furthermore, through mining and mass fishing practices, Japanese financial interests severely diminished the Ainu's main food source supply, making their diet more grain-reliant and leading to starvation (Walker 2001, 84). Another key aspect that was previously discussed is that of women Ainu having to leave the household (and, thus, the small agricultural plots) for fisheries, further strengthening the dependency on Japanese imports for the Ainu food supply (Walker 2001, 87). Thus, Walker's chapter on the Ainu ecology and dependence highlights a major issue, that of market economy-led environmental degradation and food dependence, which can only be understood through the historic, economic, political, and ecological perspective.

Another article that tackles Ainu lands' ecological degradation and the shift from a lifestyle based on hunting to one primarily fueled by dependence on Japanese trade is Christoper Loy's "Cultivating Ezo: Indigenous Innovation and Ecological Change during Japan's Bakumatsu Era". In it, he identifies several factors such as political instability, ecological damage from overfishing, and overhunting for trade that led to significant changes in Ainu cultures, identities, food consumption, and food production practices. Loy's case study of an Ainu headman that decided to switch to agriculture due to environmental degradation and lack of game highlights how, when faced with such problems, indigenous

people can have some degree of agency and adapt despite adversity to preserve their culture (Loy 2015, 66). His work builds upon the research and theoretical frameworks established by David Howell, Brett Walker, among others to highlight how Matsumae policies led to the degradation of Ezo lands and rivers and the economic-political motivations behind the said policies. In this context, he presents a case study of an Ainu headman who resorted to farming for self-preservation; essentially, one small experiment in agriculture as one amongst several options which Ainu people chose for survival. Although interesting, the case study seems hardly relevant, as the vast majority of Ainu chose other means of self-preservation. Still, Loy provides excellent insight into the effects of environmental degradation during the Meiji period, research that complements Walker's neatly.

Methodology

Two main approaches will be used in this thesis: ecocriticism and middle ground. Ecocriticism is the primary approach and will be used more overtly to analyze the ecological implications of the manga case study, while the middle ground approach predominantly informs the overall perspective from which both the manga and this thesis is written.

Ecocriticism

In order to analyze the contemporary depictions of ethnic minorities in Japan in manga, multiple theoretical approaches will be employed. Ecocriticism will provide a coherent approach to understanding the link between the depictions of Ainu people, their relationship with nature, and Japan's relationship with indigenous people and nature as a whole. Ecocriticism is, simply put, a theoretical approach in literary studies that aims to explore the interconnectedness of nature and culture through literature and to analyze how nature is depicted in texts (Glotfelty 1996, xviii-xix). As a school of criticism, it is rooted in the environmental movement of the 1960s in the US sparked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962) (Garrard 2012, 1). Interdisciplinary in nature, ecocriticism calls on all disciplines to tackle the environmental crisis from within their fields (Glotfelty 1996, xxi). Ecocritics "read literature from an ecocentric point of view" and "apply ecological issues to the representation of the natural world" (Johnson 2009, 623). More concretely, the heterogeneous school tackles themes such as the pastoral, wildernesses, pollution, the apocalypse, fauna, the Earth's future. It also includes approaches such as ecofeminism, which is concerned with the oppression of women and nature under patriarchy. In the Japanese context, Masami Yuki highlights how ecocriticism was imported in the 1990s through US-centered Japanese literature scholars, followed by a period of comparative Western-Japanese approaches, and finally crystallized into research on Japanese literature by ecocritics (Masami 2014, 1). Although initially Western-centric, the last two decades were marked by a significant increase in ecocriticism literature from across the globe, perhaps spurred by the visible impact of worldwide environmental degradation.

For the scope of this thesis, ecocriticism provides a useful approach from which to analyze Ainu-Japanese relations in light of Ainu lands' environmental degradation. The

manga-based case study will further expand the scope of current ecocritical Japanese literary research by moving beyond classical texts typically analyzed by Japanese ecocritics such as *The Tale of Genji* and *Manyōshu* (Masami 2014, 6). Still, this thesis' scope is not limited to Ainu-nature-Japan relations; the depictions of Ainu in Japanese media can only partially be explored with this approach. Thus, ecocriticism serves only as a part of this thesis' theoretical framework.

Middle ground approach

Pioneered by Frederick Jackson Turner, the idea that frontiers shape a country's cultural and political development has come under great scrutiny since its inception. Criticized for depicting indigenous lands as "wilderness", ripe for the taking, Turner's frontier approach as is has since become obsolete. New Western historians reshaped the frontier approach, arguing that frontiers should be seen as middle grounds where cultures and people interact and (mis)communicate, where the center-periphery dichotomy is hard to distinguish (Walker 2001, 8-10). Although New Western history in and of itself is irrelevant for the scope of this thesis, frontier studies can certainly be applied to the Japanese/Ainu case, as demonstrated by Walker, Lewallen, Howell, etc. Of particular interest for this research is the applied models of Walker and Lewallen on Ainu lands; although the two scholars analyze frontiers differently, they both draw upon New Western frontier scholarship.

Brett Walker in "The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800." builds upon the New Western historiographical notion of middle ground. Based on it, he argues that the increasingly homogenous Ainu culture that emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came into existence due to interactions in the middle ground, creating codependencies and reinforcing hierarchical relations that ultimately spelled the demise of much of the Ainu culture (Walker 2001, 12). By analyzing ceremonies between Ainu chiefs and Matsumae officials, Walker highlights how both cultures impacted each other and could even share drinks in Ainu style while Japanese cultural norms still dominated and reshaped Ainu customs (Walker 2001, 239). Through the middle ground approach, a colonizer-centric approach is no longer needed; one can tell a story from the colonized perspective, or even focus on the murkiness and fluidity of "frontiers"/middle grounds, as Walker exemplifies in his Ezo-centric approach to writing historiography of Ainu-Japanese relations. By using a colonized-centric approach, Walker does not only contribute to Ainu historiography; in fact, a significant contribution of his research is that he demonstrates through the Ainu's perspective and through the middle ground approach that the

Edo government's hegemony was projected far wider than previously thought, while also further decreasing the credibility of the *sakoku* (closed country) theory (Walker 2001, 12). Thus, as the aim of this thesis is to explore Ainu depictions in Japanese contemporary media, a nuanced approach such as the middle ground one can provide sensible answers to complex issues such as that of Ainu identity formation and representation.

Beyond Walker, Ann-Elise Lewallen in "'Intimate Frontiers': Disciplining Ethnicity and Ainu Women's Sexual Subjectivity in Early Colonial Hokkaido." makes use of New Western frontier theories to analyze Ainu-Japanese relations, although she identifies a different frontier, namely the "intimate frontier" represented by Ainu women. Although other historians have used a variety of places as frontiers in their research, the use of Ainu women as a frontier opens up new avenues for research, and Lewallen's work is a strong foundation for future such endeavors. In her view, Ainu women and, more specifically, the abuse, separation, discrimination, sexual abuse, and shaming which they suffered at the hands of Japanese colonizers serve as an intimate frontier where hierarchical relations are constituted and reinforced (Lewallen 2016, 21). By highlighting state-sanctioned sexual assault, forced separation, and forced marriages between Japanese men and Ainu women, Lewallen's work reveals how colonization occurs not just through conquest, economic subjugation, and cultural assimilation, but also in the households and families of the colonized people. Her approach is novel and useful, as it allows scholars to move beyond the established views and challenge commonly held beliefs about historic processes such as the colonization of Ainu lands.

Chapter 1. Japanese Colonization of Ainu Lands

This chapter will provide an overview of the pre-colonial and colonial periods during which Ainu lands were gradually tamed and subsequently annexed by the Japanese state. Before delving into the actual colonization and colonial practices that gradually eroded Ainu autonomy, the following section will explore the Ainu's origins and define their territories. The Ainu lands, formerly known as Ezo/Ezochi, are currently known as Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands (although only Hokkaido is under Japanese control today, and many Ainu people from Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands migrated to Hokkaido). Mark J. Hudson emphasizes that historically speaking, Ainu culture dates back to the thirteenth century as a result of merging, both peacefully and through warfare, with other cultures, specifically the Satsumon and Okhotsk cultures (Hudson 2017, 698). Moreover, linguistic and cultural closeness amongst the Ainu descendants of Satsumon and Okhotsk cultures appears to have arisen out of a need for collective defense against Japanese incursions (Howell 1994, 77). Ainu people have always traded with the Japanese in the southern part of modern-day Hokkaido; thus, it is important to note that the two cultures have been in contact and interlinked through trade since the 13th century (Siddle 1996, 26). Two periods are of particular importance for the scope of this chapter, namely the early colonial and colonial periods. Early colonial, in this case, is used to convey that the colonization of Ezo did not begin in 1869; in fact, the colonization process can be traced back to the Edo period. After the Meiji Restoration, colonial practices increased through legislation that stripped the Ainu of their ethnicity in legal terms, of their land, names, and identity as a whole (Howell 1994, 91).

The Ainu culture crystallized in the thirteenth century based on multicultural and multiethnic exchanges with Satsumon, Okhotsk, and Japanese cultures; still, their lifestyle is drastically different in comparison with their ancestral groups due to high levels of trade with the Japanese. Contact between the Yamato people and the indigenous people of northern Honshu and beyond (called *Emishi* or *Ebisu*) is first noted in *Nihonshoki* (~720 AD), where the "barbarians" are depicted as savage non-humans (Siddle 1996, 27). At this point, the indigenous people were outside the control sphere of Yamato authorities, although trade (or

tribute, according to the Yamato court) occurred between the northern Emishi and the Yamato authorities since the seventh century AD (Siddle 1996, 28).

Figure 1. Japan in the eighth century (Batten 2003, 31)

During the next few centuries, the Tōhoku Emishi were conquered by Japanese rulers and their lands came under the nominal control of the Kamakura Bakufu (Siddle 1996, 29). From this point onwards, Emishi faded out of discourse, and the lands north of Honshū came to be known as *Ezo* (Siddle 1996, 29). Since the thirteenth century, Japanese prisoners were occasionally deported to Ezo, while some war refugees escaped to the island, and, along with traders, occupied parts of Southern Hokkaido's Oshima peninsula. Here, in Southern Hokkaido, the first Japanese settlements were formed, and their inhabitants were known as *Wajin* (Siddle 1996, 29-30). By this point, Ezo is still outside the political sphere of the Muromachi state, being seen as a foreign land where vicious barbarians live. Trade between

Wajin and Ainu settlements steadily grew during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries without significant central interference, although warfare was not uncommon between Wajin and Ainu. One stark example is that of what is known as Koshamain's War, a conflict rooted in a minor dispute that ultimately nearly drove Japanese settlements out of Ezo entirely (Walker 2001, 27) which, although short in nature, sparked a century of intermittent warfare (Siddle 1996, 31).

The various families that ruled over the Japanese settlements prior to the Edo period -Abe, Kiyohara, Fujiwara during the Heian period, Andō during the Kamakura period, and Andō (possibly unrelated) during the Muromachi period- were delegates of the central authority, but had a high degree of autonomy (Batten 2003, 39). This is especially true during the *Sengoku Jidai* (Warring States period), when domains were essentially independent, despite the idea of *Japan* persisting in writing during the period (Batten 2003, 42). Significant changes in the Ainu-Japanese relations occurred after the Tokugawa regime began at the onset of the seventeenth century. Through the Matsumae family, whose domain was incorporated in the Tokugawa regime in 1604 and received rights to a trade monopoly over Wajin territory, Ainu-Japanese trade relations increased rapidly (Siddle 1996, 32). Trading posts were set up throughout Ainu lands to increase Matsumae's control over the trade, and traders exploited the newly instituted trade monopoly to increase prices of Japanese goods which the Ainu had grown dependent on (Siddle 1996, 33). As Walker highlights, Japanese products became a staple in Ainu customs, traditions, and eventually in their diet, creating dependencies that were strengthened through farming prohibition laws during the Edo period (Walker 2001, 87).

Although trade with the Japanese was present since the thirteenth century, it rapidly expanded in the Edo period, which led to the consolidation of power by some Ainu *kotankorokur* (leader) over larger areas (Siddle 1996, 27). Beyond price increases, Wajin overfishing and overhunting near the Matsumae domain, along with the advent of gold mining and gold panning drastically damaged the subsistence capabilities of the Ainu by limiting their primary food sources and polluting the lands and waters (Siddle 1996, 33). These factors directly led to another wave of Ainu warfare against the Japanese in the seventeenth century, exemplified by the war of Henauke (1643) and Shakushain (1669). Although certainly sparked by the increase in exploitation of Ainu lands and labor, the Shakushain war was also a multifaceted inter-Ainu conflict fueled by Ainu leaders' strife over territory to gain access to trade-related resources (Walker 2001, 49). The Shakushain War is further relevant to the Ainu-Japanese relations as it was partly based on ecological

concerns sparked by a decrease in available resources for the various Ainu groups, a decrease which is directly linked to Japanese commercial interests in Ezo. Rising competition over fewer resources effectively crippled any potential attempts of Ainu-centered, strong alliances aimed at protecting the land which was rapidly alienated from them (Walker 2001, 52). The conflict forced Matsumae to request state support, to intervene in Ainu affairs, and ultimately to bring Ezo to the attention of the shogunate; in time, these ramifications, along with Russian colonization of the Kurile Islands will have led to the full involvement of the Japanese state in annexing and integrating Ainu lands (Walker 2001, 49) (Siddle 1996, 38-40).

Beyond changes within the Japanese political system such as the transition to the Edo and Meiji period, developments in the rest of the world also had ramifications for both the Ainu and Wajin inhabitants of Ezo. Between 1799 and 1821, the Bakufu government took control of Ezochi as a response to the Russian colonization of the Kuriles, fearing further incursions into their own frontiers, only returning it to the Matsumae clan in 1821 due to mounting costs (Siddle 1996, 52). During this period, the Ainu were forcibly "civilized", i.e. urged and/or forced to adopt Japanese customs, attires, religious beliefs, and so on. Still, the policies were strongly rejected by the Ainu, and they retained none of the customs after 1821 (Siddle 1996, 41). Once again, Ezo came under direct state control in 1855 once more, due to the Russian growing presence in the region, particularly around Sakhalin/Karafuto. Ultimately, after the fall of the Bakufu regime and following a short-lived so-called Ezo Republic, Ezochi was officially annexed in 1869, renamed Hokkaido, and placed under the control of a Colonisation Commission (Siddle 1996, 53). Karafuto and the Kuril Islands were carved up and split between Japan and Russia in 1855 (Siddle 1996, 52).

The most significant changes for the Ainu in centuries would occur during this colonial period, in which the already existing colonial practices become further institutionalized, regulated by the state, and primarily aimed at assimilation, integration, and *Japanisation* (Siddle 1996, 58-62). Ainu communities were uprooted, relocated, and forced to pick up agriculture (which ultimately failed), and essentially removed from their ancestral lands, hunting grounds, and ultimately removed from their way of life. The Hokkaido Former Natives Protection Act was passed in 1899 with the explicit aims of assimilating the Ainu through education, the promotion of agriculture (with many restrictions on the land "given" to the Ainu), and medical assistance (Siddle 1996, 70-71). The land given for agricultural purposes was often unfit for exploitation, and most Ainus lost their lands through debt schemes that left the gained land in Wajin hands; moreover, the Ainu language began to

decline in use due to education policies which stressed the use of Japanese and discouraged Ainu dialects (Siddle 1996, 71-72).

Through these institutional colonial practices, the Ainu became second class citizens on their own lands, although relocated and dispossessed even of their original territories (Siddle 1996, 73); by this point, their lifestyle revolved more around day labor and perhaps agriculture on barely fertile lands, and not on their gathering and hunting lifestyle which allowed them to be neither nomadic nor agricultural-based (Watanabe 1973, 42). Beyond discriminatory, colonial practices enshrined in law, the Ainu continued to face economic and social hardships due to relocation, the loss of their lifestyle, and persisting racist perceptions held by some Japanese in Hokkaido and beyond. To this day, the colonization of Ainu lands continues to be observable in aspects such as the commodification of Ainu culture, initially ruined by colonial practices, through tourist spots dotted throughout Hokkaido.

The Japanese House and Diet adopted resolutions that requested the government to recognize the indigenous nature of the Ainu people in 2018. Finally, in 2019, the "Act on Promoting Measures to Realize a Society in Which the Pride of the Ainu People Is Respected" was adopted, which officially recognized that Ainu people are indigenous to the northern part of Japan and discrimination against the Ainu are to be outlawed. Ultimately, the Ainu have only recently regained some semblance of dignity in a country that has long boasted about its alleged ethnic homogeneity.

Chapter 2. Ainu Identity Formation, Degradation, and Resilience

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ainu culture and Ainu identity formed partly out of interactions with the Japanese culture. Thus, the formation and relative homogenization of Ainu culture is inextricably linked to the trade relations with Japanese merchants and, ultimately, to the colonization of Ainu lands by both Japanese clans and the Japanese state. Although outside the scope of this thesis, it is also worth mentioning that this identity formation process in the middle ground of Ezo was not unidirectional; throughout the last millennium, the Japanese identity also underwent significant changes due to Japanese-Ainu relations. As Howell illustrates, the Edo period was marked by a clear distinction between the center (*ka*) and periphery (*i*) which effectively established ethnic boundaries that would serve as clear distinctions between Japanese and non-Japanese (Howell 1994, 92). Through "othering", the Japanese identity could be formed in opposition to the "uncivilized barbarians" based on Chinese imported ideals. As the Japanese identity and geographical boundaries were loose before the Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate needed to define these boundaries to better exert its newly acquired and relatively centralized control. Since Ezo and the Ryukyu Islands were under Japanese influence (but not under direct rule), the Japanese identity was strengthened through dissociation from these indigenous people; thus, to be Japanese meant to not be outside the direct political influence of the shogunate (Howell 1994, 74, 92). So far, this chapter has presented the Ainu identity formation in relation to Japanese relations and Japanese internal developments. But what is Ainu identity in and of itself?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Ainu culture formed roughly during the thirteenth century as the result of assimilation between the Okhotsk and Satsumon cultures, as well as through trade and interactions with Japanese merchants and, eventually, settlers. Their identity was tied to the political units comprising several villages named *petiwor* (which, themselves, were each composed of 10-30 households) in which they resided, to the land on which they hunted, and to the *kamuy* which surround them (Walker 2001, 77-79). The land and game which lives in Ainu territories are sacred to the Ainu; in their worldview, the *kamuy* in animals bless the Ainu by allowing themselves to be killed as a form of gratitude for the respectful attitudes of the hunters (Walker 2001, 79). As self-sufficient hunters (under normal conditions), the Ainu hunted and fished in sync with the seasons, procuring sufficient food

for the winter season by hunting deer in autumn, for instance (Walker 2001, 80). Much of Ainu folklore, tales, and rituals revolve around the various animals which provide them with food, clothes, and trade goods. In time, due to colonial practices and environmental degradation, only the folklore, tales, and handcraft customs remained mainstream, as Ainu practices were either outlawed or became untenable. It is worth noting that belonging to a family in Ainu culture has historically been less patrilinear than in Japan, as shown by the Tokugawa period records of Ainu households which include the category of *utare*, a term which describes household members with no blood ties to the household heads (Ann-elise Lewallen 2016, 61).

Japanese views of the Ainu throughout time

Discussing Ainu identity formation, as shown previously, is closely linked to the Japanese identity formation, Japan's domestic strifes, and Japan's foreign relations with Western empires during the late Edo and the Meiji Period. Since Japan colonized the Ainu and their lands, the way in which Japanese officials (both at the state and local domain level) viewed the indigenous people of the "Northern Territories" directly impacted the latter's livelihood. Thus, this section will explore the predominant Japanese views on the Ainu.

Prior to the Edo period, Japanese sources depict the people living in southern Hokkaido as foreign barbarians akin to demons covered in hair (Siddle 1996, 30). Japanese identity in relation to *i*, the periphery, was emphasized through differentiating: in the eyes of Japanese observers, the Ainu had long beards, unfamiliar diets, wore strange clothes, and were oblivious to Japanese customs -i.e. the correct way of wearing clothes- (Howell 1994, 89). Beyond the physical and cultural descriptors used to differentiate the foreign Ainu from the "civilized" Japanese, the Ainu were also often depicted in a demeaning manner as "people together with nature" to emphasize their savageness (Kinase 2002, 60).

During the Edo period, most of the Ainu-Japanese contact occurred in the context of labor and trade (with the exception of rituals between Ainu chieftains and Matsumae officials). Thus, most *Wajin* that came into contact with the Ainu during this period were seasonal migrant workers and traders, the former of which committed widespread violence, sexual violence, and theft against the local population (Siddle 1996, 44-45). While the seasonal migrant workers left no records or depictions of the Ainu, the Matsumae family commissioned paintings of Ainu leaders during the late Edo period, paintings that mirrored the racial stereotypes present in pre-Edo paintings: the exaggerated characteristics (body hair, beard, facial expressions), emphasis on strength and otherness (Siddle 1996, 49).

The impact of colonial practices on Ainu customs and lifestyle

Throughout the previous sections, the notion that the Ainu lifestyle (based on hunting, fishing, and some forms of agriculture and plant gathering) being self-sufficient was introduced. While certainly applicable to the pre-Edo period, the colonial practices of the Edo and Meiji periods drastically changed the ways in which the Ainu lived, procured foodstuffs, and, ultimately, identified themselves. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle was possible due to the division of labor within family units and the *kotan*s, particularly for activities such as bear and deer hunting, net fishing, and house-building (Watanabe 1973, 42-44). Due to ecological degradation sparked by overfishing, overhunting, and the destruction of habitats, along with price and demand increases from the Japanese side, this lifestyle became unsustainable by the eighteenth century, leading Ainu men (and often women) to work as contractors in Japanese-owned fisheries, often far away from their lands (Walker 2001, 87). As their old ways of procuring food slowly became untenable, reliance on Japanese food such as rice further disrupted the Ainu lifestyle and self-sufficiency capacities (Walker 2001, 87). Meiji and early Showa period colonial practices led to the most significant changes for the Ainu. Policies such as the banning of tattoos, hunting in certain regions, forcing them into agriculture on subpar land, and forced intermarriages between Ainu women and Japanese men directly led to the near extinction of the Ainu culture and language (Howell 1994, 91-92). Schools were opened with the express goal of replacing Ainu culture and language with the Japanese ones; the Ainu language was banned, along with their spirituality. In fact, the very identity of Ainu was stripped from them in legal terms (Ann-elise Lewallen 2016, 61).

As Walker highlights, the Ainu were once self-sufficient and able to repel Mongol and Japanese incursions but had become dislocated, disease-ridden, and largely dependent on the Japanese by the end of the Edo period (Walker 2001, 11-12). Under colonial rule, they were viewed as barbarians in need of civilization, stripped of any rights, banned from exercising their customs and food gathering processes. Today, the Ainu are organizing themselves to challenge the persisting racial stereotypes against them, to raise awareness of the injustices committed by Japanese officials against them, and to regain their dignity. Takashi Kinase documented the recontextualization of negative depictions of Ainu (for instance through images such as “people that are one with nature”) by Ainu activists themselves, highlighting how such depictions can be appropriated and be given new, positive meanings by the community itself (Kinase 2002, 176). During the Edo or Meiji period, due to power relations

and the lack of a formal writing script, the Ainu were unable to mount a resistance to Japanese hegemony on the semiotic level. In recent decades, partially powered by broader left-wing movements in Japan and Japan's identity crisis following the defeat in World War II, the Ainu have regained some control over the way in which they are depicted, treated, and acknowledged as indigenous people to Hokkaido. In legal terms, this struggle has culminated with the passing of the Act on Promoting Measures to Realize a Society in Which the Pride of the Ainu People Is Respected in 2019 which officially recognizes the Ainu as indigenous people, while also mandating the promotion of Ainu culture through new Ainu-centered museums, parks, and protections on some former Ainu lands (Umeda 2019). The struggle for proper recognition throughout Japan and the dispelling of remaining stereotypes and misconceptions about the Ainu, their lifestyle, cultural heritage, and history is also carried through literature, written both by Ainu and Japanese authors. The following chapter will tackle the issue of Ainu depictions in Japanese literature, followed by a case study chapter on Satoru Noda's *Golden Kamuy*, a contemporary historical fiction manga that depicts the Ainu-Japanese relations following the Russo-Japanese War.

Chapter 3. Ainu Depictions in Japanese Literature

The Northern Territories were viewed and depicted by the Japanese for centuries as barren, pristine, virgin, and ripe for the taking. Their inhabitants, too, were typically depicted in racist, stereotypical ways which emphasized their distinctiveness from the writer's own perspective. As previously discussed, this othering process served not only to justify colonial practices by dehumanizing the Ainu but also to aid the Japanese identity formation process. This chapter will examine the various ways in which the Ainu inhabitants of the Northern Territories were depicted throughout time by Japanese writers.

Before delving into specific examples of Japanese literary texts which depict the Ainu, the genre of "Hokkaido literature" itself will be discussed. Noriko Agatsuma Day argues that all literature that had Hokkaido as the main or part of the setting was lumped together as early as the 1950s in an effort to promote Hokkaido and its "Japaneseness" in the postwar era (Day 2012, 23). This "Hokkaido literature" includes works written by both Japanese and Ainu writers, with the only commonalities being the backdrop of the action and the Japanese language. Only Ainu texts written in Japanese were included (both Ainu literature and translated folklore), perhaps in an effort to double down on the unique, yet "Japanese" nature of Hokkaido (Day 2012, 24). Day identifies the concepts of *naichi* (mainland Japan) and *gaichi* (colonies/foreign countries, i.e. Okinawa, Taiwan, Manchuria) as key concepts which are used to explore how, despite Hokkaido is theoretically viewed as *naichi* after its "successful" colonization, Hokkaido residents (Wajin, specifically) view Hokkaido as a frontier, separate from mainland Japan (Day 2012, 12-13). What Day ultimately identifies is the permanent outsider status of Hokkaido perceived by Japanese writers (and the general populace, for that matter), as it originally was a foreign land, occupied by "barbarian demons". Thus, despite assimilation and the percentage-wise small Ainu population in Hokkaido today, the island continues to be shrouded in colonial-era, outdated notions of foreignness, and the *naichi-gaichi* dichotomy reinforced the distinctiveness of the so-called "internal colony" (Day 2012, 14-17).

In previous chapters, different accounts of the Ainu were mentioned, from foreign explorers' memoirs to Matsumae records. During the Meiji period, Japanese writers who sought to explore the "virgin", "untouched", and "foreign" land of the former Ezo provide

arguably the first literary accounts of the Ainu lands and their indigenous inhabitants. Although the literary texts and their content that are discussed by Day extensively in her paper contain Hokkaido as the main setting, the Ainu are sparingly mentioned in them. Instead, "nature" and idyllic notions about the "unexplored" Hokkaido related to Western ideas of frontiers (explored in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters) which permeated Japanese thought in early Meiji (Day 2012, 19-20, and 42-44). Still, the texts that do present the indigenous people of Hokkaido more than in passing reveal how centuries-old ideas about the Ainu continued to persist throughout the Meiji period and beyond. As Ainu writers were few and far between, in no small part due to their lack of a written script (thus, "Ainu writers" refers to the Ainu that write in Japanese), the literary depictions of Ainu almost exclusively come from Japanese sources. As such, Ainu depictions have historically been predominantly present in Japanese-written texts.

In line with American authors that wrote about the Western frontier, Japanese writers that traveled to Hokkaido for literary purposes depicted the land as a barren frontier, with little regard for the people inhabiting the territory. Instead of a middle ground where the Ainu and Wajin interacted, intermingled, and reinforced each other's identities, Hokkaido represented an idyllic place upon which the Wajin's desires could be fulfilled. Of course, such an idyllic place existed only in the Wajin's minds, as the harsh reality of the cold climate, difficult work conditions, and the difficulties of agriculture in the Hokkaido soil steep in - these challenges are depicted, for instance, in Kunikida Doppo's works such as Beef and Potatoes (1901) (Day 2012, 37-40). Other authors contemporary with Doppo such as Arishima Takeo tackle the issues of rapid modernization fueled by penal and Ainu labor in the colonization of Hokkaido and, more broadly, in Japan's quest to catch up with the Western powers (Day 2012, 67).

In Descendants of Cain (1917), Arishima depicts Hokkaido as a hostile place where savage Ainu live; the differences between *gaichi* and *naichi* are emphasized, and nature is depicted as a force that stumps the settlers' attempts of making a living in the land (Day 2012, 68-69). Arishima makes ample use of Ainu names of places, rivers, mountains, and so on, perhaps in an attempt of differentiating the land from the *naichi*, providing credibility and authenticity of his works. (Day 2012, 71-72). Descendants of Cain's protagonist, Ninemon, is presented as a savage, illiterate Ainu, one which is inseparable from nature - he does not know the proper way of bowing, he behaves like a beast and ultimately behaves like the harsh, untameable nature which Arishima encountered in Hokkaido (Day 2012, 73-75). When encountering Wajin kids that were crossing his land, Ninemon brutally beats them, as if the

Wajin and Ainu could not coexist in the harsh Hokkaido lands (Arishima 1917, 21). The beastly, savage nature of the indigenous people of the Northern Territories is, as previously mentioned, recurring since the first encounters between the Yamato people and their northern neighbors, be they Emishi or, later, Ainu.

Itō Sei, through The Street of Ghosts (1937), challenges the Meiji generation of writers' tendency of depicting Hokkaido and the Ainu through othering by employing parody, exaggerating the exotic nature of Otaru to simultaneously confirm *naichi* people's preconceived notion of Hokkaido and (attempt to) escape the specter of the *naichi-gaichi* dichotomy (Day 2012, 131). His description of the second floor of a *sobaya* (noodle restaurant; the second floor was used as a meeting place for lovers) evokes the hybridity, uncertainty, and disconnection characterized by Hokkaido in relation to the *naichi* (Day 2012, 151). In this book, the idea that being a Japanese person mixed with Ainu blood leads to "impurity" is introduced, calling into question what *Japaneseness* actually is, and exploring how one's body is subject to scrutiny and judgment based on its features and the prevalent understandings of race at the time (Day 2012, 143-144). The protagonist gets discriminated against by a train station employee due to his family tree containing Ainu names; still, he considers himself superior to the "pure" Ainu, all the while reinforcing the pure-impure dichotomy (Day 2012, 145-146). Despite challenging previously held beliefs about the Ainu and their place in Hokkaido through parody, Sei fails to depict a hybrid middle ground without resorting to the same simplistic dichotomies of *naichi* and *gaichi*, pure and impure, Japanese and *other*. Still, for the sake of this thesis, his fictive, yet representative account of Ainu-Wajin relations and Wajin-held notions of race and Japaneseness paint a picture of a Japanese identity that continues to be propped up by differentiation, even as the Ainu were deemed *Japanese*, at least legally speaking, following the Meiji Restoration.

Although the previously mentioned literary texts were written many decades after the Ainu were officially deemed to be Japanese, the representations of Ainu in Japanese literary texts, even by relatively progressive voices such as Itō Sei, reproduced the centuries-old stereotypical notions of Ainu. Moving beyond adult-oriented fiction, the following section will examine how Japanese children's books depict the Ainu, their customs, appearance, religion, and relation with nature.

In "Stories of the Ainu: The Oldest Indigenous People in Japanese Children's Literature", Yoo Kyung Sung and Junko Sakoi analyze how Japanese writers represent the Ainu in children's books. They argue that the Ainu are depicted in a similar fashion to how indigenous people across the world are by the colonizers, particularly in relation to their

relationship with nature and their environment (Sung and Sakoi 2017, 11). The Ainu are predominantly depicted in fiction writing, with a strong emphasis on their close ties and deep understanding of nature, its natural cycles, and their spiritual beliefs are often placed at the forefront of literature, in lieu of historical, economic, and political themes (Sung and Sakoi 2017, 11-12). The forty-three children's books which they analyze are written by cultural outsiders, and the *kamuy* play a central role in them, perhaps due to the fact that Ainu *kamuy* are fundamentally different from Japanese *kami* (gods) in the sense that the *kamuy* reside in mundane objects, animals, natural elements, and have no superhuman powers (Sung and Sakoi 2017, 6-7). The authors, through their ecocritical and postcolonial approach, hone in on four major themes present in the children's books, namely "(1) ecocritical warnings from animals and nature to prevent pollution, (2) seeking life and becoming whole, (3) locating postcolonial ecocriticism in time and space, and (4) continuity of colonization: missing stories of the real Ainu" (Sung and Sakoi 2017, 7). The first two themes are argued by the authors to be useful insofar as they help teach valuable lessons to Japanese children through Ainu folktales that deal with the necessity of protecting the environment and living in peace with the environment, and with oneself. Still, the images of Ainu as being part of nature, thus inherently different from the Japanese who are distinctly human persist even in these children's books, reinforcing the othering of "foreign" people to maintain the supposed purity of the Japanese identity. By presenting the Ainu primarily through the imaginary realm to Japanese children, the centuries-old stereotypes persist in contemporary Japan, thus keeping the colonial legacy that shrouds Hokkaido and its indigenous inhabitants alive. The following chapter will present an alternative approach that, although also in the realm of fiction in the form of a historical fiction manga, has actually managed to successfully promote Ainu culture and enfranchise Ainu voices from both the scholarly and public Ainu realm. Golden Kamuy's success has sparked a massive wave of interest in Ainu culture, both within Japan and abroad, leading to many Ainu culture-centered books being reprinted, boosting the sales of handcrafted, locally produced Ainu items, and bringing the Ainu's historic plight to the forefront of public discussion in Japan.

Chapter 4. Case study: *Golden Kamuy*

Satoru Noda's *Golden Kamuy* (2014-present) is perhaps the best example of Ainu representation in Japanese contemporary literature, both in terms of culturally sensitive depictions and accuracy. Its popularity rapidly grew in recent years in Japan and beyond; this has sparked a surge of interest in Ainu culture that no literary piece has achieved thus far. This chapter will start with an introduction to the *Golden Kamuy* world, its author, and the research that went into the creation of this manga. Then, the series' main themes will be explored (although only the Ainu-related themes will be analyzed in-depth). Simultaneously, *Golden Kamuy*'s Ainu depictions will be scrutinized in light of the ecocritical and middle ground theories, with particular attention being paid to Ainu-Japanese and human-animal relations in Hokkaido. Finally, *Golden Kamuy*'s impact on various groups (i.e. Ainu, Ainu descendants, Japanese readers, and global readers) will briefly be explored.

Before moving forward, let us first understand what *Golden Kamuy* fundamentally is. In terms of genre, it is not as straightforward as most other manga - it is easily classified as historical fiction, Japanese-style Western, and treasure hunt-based adventure manga. Still, that only grazes the surface, as the story often delves into Ainu language, culture, customs, and food, but also into comedy, thriller, mystery, horror, and romance. Satoru Noda skillfully ties together this variety of genres in his story by alternating between the main plotline and multiple side stories that are usually focused on one or a couple of characters. The manga follows Sugimoto Saichi (also known as Immortal Sugimoto), a Russo-Japanese war veteran, and Asirpa (Japanese name: Kichube Asuko), a young, skilled female Ainu hunter whose father allegedly killed a group of Ainu chieftains that gathered and hid an immense amount of gold.

Figure 2. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 1, 2014)

Sugimoto partners up with Asirpa after finding out about the gold from a former convict (pictured above) to search for the stolen gold save for himself while returning the majority of the gold to the rightful owners, the Ainu. As for Asirpa, she agrees to help Sugimoto find the gold, as she believes her father was amongst the Ainu killed for the gold, and thus seeks answers regarding her fathers' alleged killer. By and large, the plot follows three factions - the Sugimoto/Asirpa pair and their friends, the military branch led by Lieutenant Tsurumi, and the Hijikata Toshizou group, formed largely out of convicts. There are other involved parties, such as the various indigenous groups (primarily, but not limited to, Hokkaido Ainu), Russian separatists, and Western investors, whose involvement is important for the worldbuilding effort, but less so for driving the main plot forward. The convicts are particularly important, as the gold's location can only be found by gathering the tattooed skins of most, if not all 24 convicts which were tattooed by Nopperabou, the alleged killer of the Ainu chieftains that gathered the gold.

Before moving forward with the theme-by-theme analysis of *Golden Kamuy*, let us explore the aforementioned groups and their motivations more. Firstly, Sugimoto Saichi and Asirpa form the main group; throughout the story, various characters join them on their journey, with some leaving, betraying them, or dying. Notable characters that join the pair are:

- Sugimoto Saichi, a Russo-Japanese war veteran known for his fierce combat style and quick recovery from injuries (gaining the nickname of The Immortal Sugimoto). Although a ruthless warrior, Sugimoto displays numerous acts of compassion and kindness towards the Ainu. His motivations for pursuing the gold are pure, wanting a tiny share of the gold to pay for his deceased friends' wife's eye surgery. As for the rest of the gold, he wants the Ainu to use them as they see fit, since it was righteously theirs. Through his interactions with Asirpa, the readers learn Ainu words, customs, folklore, and traditional culinary recipes.
- Asirpa, the young female protagonist, is an Ainu-Russian hunter that simultaneously represents change in Ainu society by challenging traditional norms while also promoting and teaching the "old" Ainu ways to the Japanese through her interactions with Sugimoto. Thanks to her legacy as the daughter of a mixed partnership between a Russian separatist and an Ainu woman, Asirpa cares deeply about the Ainu and their culture, but is also critical of certain elements of it which she finds outdated (i.e. the mandatory face tattoos for young women and fortune telling). Ultimately, she seeks the gold to protect the Ainu and their lands from further colonisation.
- Yoshitake Shiraishi, a convict known as the Escape King who, although motivated by money, aids the pair throughout the series. Towards the climax of the story, he supposedly betrayed the Sugimoto group in favor of the Hijikata Toshizou group. Still, he managed to trick Hijikata with fake skins, ultimately remaining loyal to Sugimoto and Asirpa.
- Kiroranke, Asirpa's father's friend and Russian separatist who came to Hokkaido with Wilk to gather funds for their Russian revolt (they had assassinated the Russian Emperor and were on the run). He brought Asirpa to Karafuto, hoping to aid her in unlocking her memories that could solve the puzzle leading to the gold stash.

Beyond the characters that join their party, there are multiple other factions vying for the tons of Ainu gold. The Japanese Army's 7th Division, for instance, is a faction led by Lieutenant Tokushirou Tsurumi, a shrewd soldier that seeks the gold as funds for a military

rebellion against the Central army with the hopes of creating their own government in Hokkaido. Through coercion, violence, and forgery, the 7th Division quickly amasses the majority of convict skins, reaching the gold's location simultaneously with the Sugimoto-Asirpa group (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 284, 2014). Tsurumi's goals have little regard for the inhabitants of Hokkaido; the lands would simply be overtaken from the government by this militaristic faction. The 7th Division is also challenged by the Hijikata Toshizou faction in the pursuit of the Ainu gold. Their leader is a former Shinsengumi headsman and former warrior for the short-lived Ezo Republic who seeks the gold to create his own country in Hokkaido, in which all minorities would be equal - though his real motives are probably related to weakening the Meiji government as revenge (government which has imprisoned him for his involvement in the Ezo Republic). Although these three aforementioned groups are the main ones fighting over the gold, many more perspectives are shown throughout the manga, adding layers of complexity and humanity to the otherwise brutal fight over long-lost treasure.

As for the author, Satoru Noda's background is highly relevant in the context of *Golden Kamuy*. For one, he was born and raised in Hokkaido, and his great grandfather was a Meiji era farmer-soldier and, thus, the inspiration for Sugimoto Saichi - although the latter is depicted more as a miner-soldier in the first chapter (Lompat 2021). Moreover, his approach to writing manga through personal experience has led to the creation of arguably the most accurate depiction to date of Ainu customs, language, appearance, rituals, and way of life in any contemporary Japanese literary text. This is achieved through thorough fieldwork which Satoru conducted along with Ainu and Ainu experts throughout Hokkaido, going to hunts with the Ainu, and commissioning Ainu-made products such as a *makiri* (knife) as reference materials before, but also during the serialization process (Lompat 2021). The Ainu craftsman that made a *makiri* for Satoru, Kaizawa Tooru, praised *Golden Kamuy*'s accuracy in depicting Ainu customs. He also commended the author for presenting them as equals to the various ethnic groups that come up in the story (Rousmaniere and Matsuba 2019, 34).

Key Ainu-related themes in *Golden Kamuy*

Beyond its Japanese-style Western gold hunt adventure plot, there are multiple main themes in the manga that are of particular importance for the scope of this thesis. More specifically, the Ainu culture is depicted in two contrasting ways through two female characters, Asirpa and Inkarmat. Ainu-Japanese relations and the exploitation of Ainu labor is an often touched upon theme, along with the ecology and environmental destruction of

Hokkaido due to Japanese colonial practices. The United States' involvement in the colonization process (and, incidentally, in the depopulation of certain animals such as wolves in Hokkaido) is also touched upon, although it is a relatively minor theme. Lastly, the human-nature relationship is extensively touched upon from the perspectives of the three main groups (Sugimoto/Asirpa, Tsurumi's Army branch, and Hijikata Toshizou's group).

Ainu culture, "new" and "old"

Firstly, the Ainu way of life, both "old" and "new" is shown through Inkarmat and Asirpa's interactions with the Japanese crew. It could be facile to describe Asirpa simply as representing a new generation of Ainu, those who are more secular and sceptical of certain Ainu spiritual beliefs. She certainly does not conform to many Ainu standards, being a female hunter who seeks to live freely in the mountains, without adhering to the typical gendered division of labor.

Figure 3. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 42, 2014)

However, her situation is more nuanced, as she constantly introduces Ainu folklore, language, customs, and traditional dishes to Sugimoto with a sense of earnest appreciation for them (even if, occasionally, she rationalizes spiritual practices). From birth, she was nurtured by her Russian-born father (her mother being Ainu) to embody a new, emancipated type of

Ainu since her name translates to “tomorrow’s woman” and trained as a self-sufficient hunter-gatherer. Still, she portrays the Ainu beliefs to the Wajin that she encounters just as she was taught by her elders. As seen in the panel above, Asirpa can, at times, stray from conventional Ainu wisdom for practical reasons - in this case, out of sheer hunger (although it it worth mentioning that she never ate the meat of a *wen kamuy*, a man-eating bear mentioned in the first speech bubble). Sugimoto’s response in this panel also highlights how he has learned much about Ainu culture throughout his journey with Asirpa in the search for gold. He often shows appreciation for Ainu traditions, even when Asirpa is skeptical of them to some extent.

On the other hand, Inkarmat, the Ainu fortune teller, is portrayed as a sly mystic that uses a variety of tools and insights to con Japanese men of their money (likely a reference to how the Ainu were often cheated or outright exploited when trading with the Japanese). In contrast with Asirpa, she fervently believes in visions and premonitions which often put her in indirect or direct conflict with Asirpa. At later stages in the story, it is revealed that Inkarmat was an orphan that met Wilk, Asirpa’s father, in her youth, acting as a teacher of Ainu culture to him - similar to how Asirpa is teaching Sugimoto everything she knows about Ainu beliefs, customs, language, and so on. After a near death experience, Inkarmat realizes thanks to a *Wajin* soldier that predictions are not set in stone, eventually leading to her becoming a nuanced, fleshed-out character. Still, broadly speaking, she fulfills the role of the “old”, “superstitious” Ainu woman. Almost all of Noda’s characters are, at some point in the story, explored in-depth, and thus the readers can easily relate to their experiences beyond their role in the plot.

Ainu spiritual beliefs

Throughout the manga, the spirituality and spiritual customs of the Ainu are thoroughly explored. From *huci* feeding her guardian spirit at the back of her neck to the growing of cub bears for the *iomante* sending off ceremony (ritual in which a young bear is sacrificed for the *kamuy* to bring game), the Ainu spirituality and their rituals are often touched upon, along with folklore and allegories. The panel below is one of many examples in which Asirpa explains the Ainu religious system in depth, providing the readers with a positive, factual depiction of Ainu customs and religion. In comparison with other literary works, *Golden Kamuy*’s depictions of these practices are not accompanied by any judgement of comparisons with Japanese or Western religions; instead, the rituals are presented as a way for the Ainu to ensure that they live in touch with nature.

Figure 4. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 12, 2014)

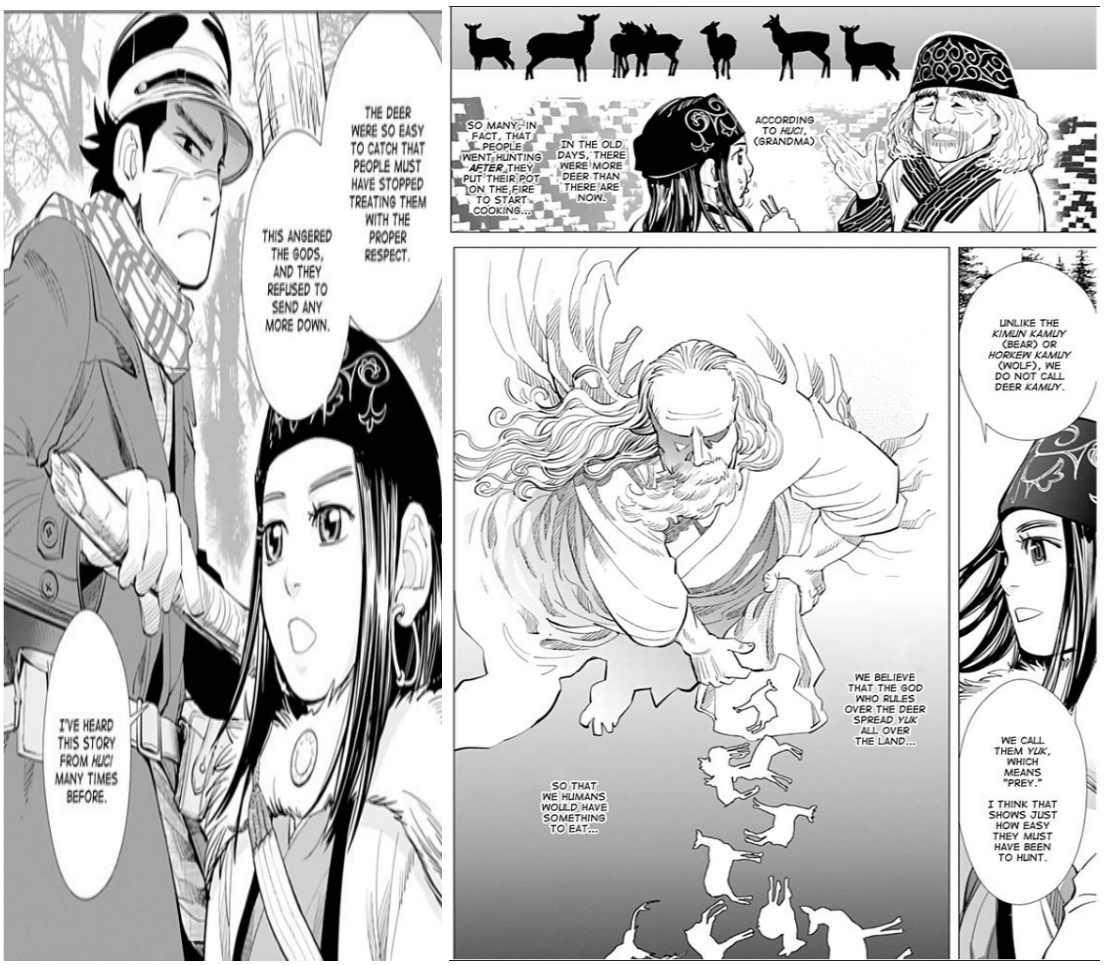


Figure 5. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 22, 2014)

As seen in the panels above, much of the Ainu mythology revolves around their sources of food, in this case the deer that were once so bountiful in their lands that they considered them godsent food and, thus, were not even called *kamuy*. Yet, ecological warnings are tied to the teachings of *huci* (and, by proxy, Asirpa): people's greed led to a decline in deer population. On numerous occasions, the salmon, deer, wolf, and other staple Ainu animals' declining populations are attributed to either the Ainu's lack of respect for the *kamuy* or by the Wajin's overfishing and overhunting practices. In both cases, religious explanations are used to make sense of these undesired changes (i.e. the *kamuy* were not given the appropriate respect). Through the usage of Ainu religious practices and folklore, Noda incorporates ecological and moral teachings that aim to educate Japan's youth not only on Ainu culture, but also on broader themes such as environmentalism, the cycles of life, the effects of pollution, and sustainability.

Colonialism and exploitation

The theme of exploitation of Ainu labor by Japanese merchants is often depicted in *Golden Kamuy*. As Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues, the rapidly modernizing Japan's demand for Hokkaido fishery products (fertilizer, primarily) spelled the doom for Ainu subsistence or farming attempts, as labor work in fisheries was promoted or outright forced on the Ainu populace (Morris-Suzuki 1994, 91). Still, Noda never depicts the Ainu as mere victims of modernity and colonization, but rather as actors with agency that negotiate their place in Hokkaido in a middle ground through day-to-day interactions with the Wajin. *Golden Kamuy*, although only implicitly at times, certainly exemplifies how Japanese financial interests worked to ensure that sufficient Ainu worked in the fisheries.

Figure 6. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 38, 2014).

In Volume 4, the fishery workers' harsh working conditions are contrasted by the boss's lavish mansion, ornate with unnecessary luxury down to the toilets. Not only the Ainu are shown as laborers in the fisheries, however; former convicts and poor Wajins are also depicted as working in the fisheries, in line with Walker and Siddle's accounts of the working populace during the Edo and Meiji periods. Beyond the accuracy of this depiction, it is also notable that by presenting both Ainu and Wajin laborers as exploited, the chapter reads as a critique of labor exploitation in general, decrying the race for profit at the expense of humans and the environment. Still, the Ainu are the most affected group due to their reliance on the land and its game for survival, and Noda succeeds in capturing this (like in the panel below).

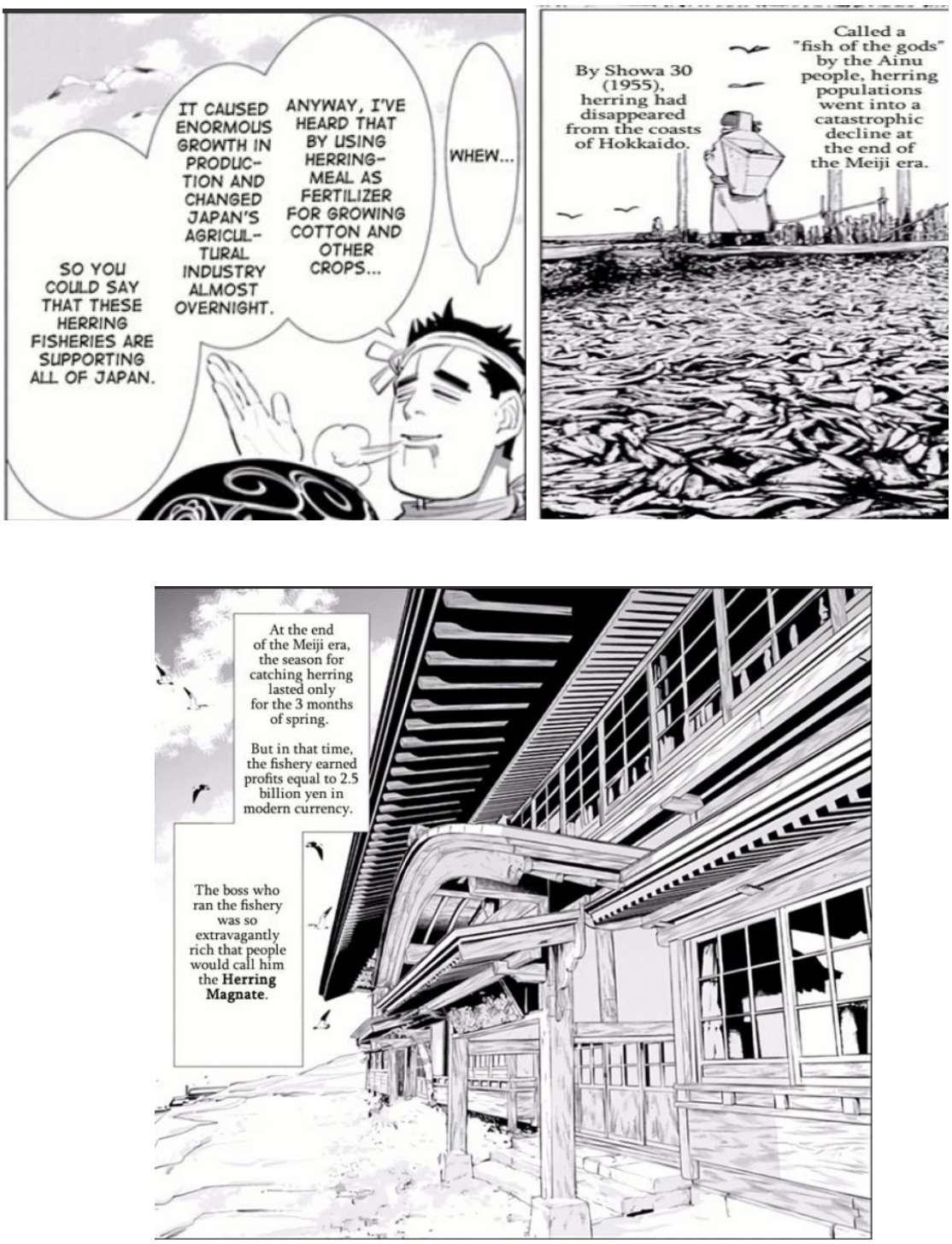


Figure 7. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 39-40, 2014)

While the theme of colonialism and exploitation is overshadowed by the thrill of the fight between Sugimoto and one of the convicts-turned-fisherman, the implications of the aforementioned depiction are still highly relevant for the plot, as it accurately depicts the intersection of Ainu and Wajin labor exploitation by Wajin traders and officials in Hokkaido. As previously noted, due to the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act, the Ainu

had little choice but to partake in this exploitative system, as their primary means of subsistence became outlawed (unlike the Japanese, who could arguably choose other means of employment). The panels above highlight how lucrative the Hokkaido fisheries were for their owners, but also for Japan as a whole - providing valuable resources for the rapidly developing nation at the expense of the ecosystem and laborers. Although ethnically Japanese, Noda never shies away from critiquing the Japanese exploitation of resources and Ainu labor, providing a balanced, historically accurate overview of daily life in late Meiji era Hokkaido.

Environmental degradation and Ainu sustainability

Regarding Hokkaido's environmental degradation due to overfishing, overhunting, and gold mining, *Golden Kamuy* often incorporates Ainu folklore and lifestyle-related references concerning the ongoing destruction of their hunting grounds. Noda incorporates many ecocritical-like warnings of resource depletion, moral degradation, and ecosystem-perturbing consequences of Japanese profit-seeking practices (pictured below).

Figure 8. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 30, 2014)

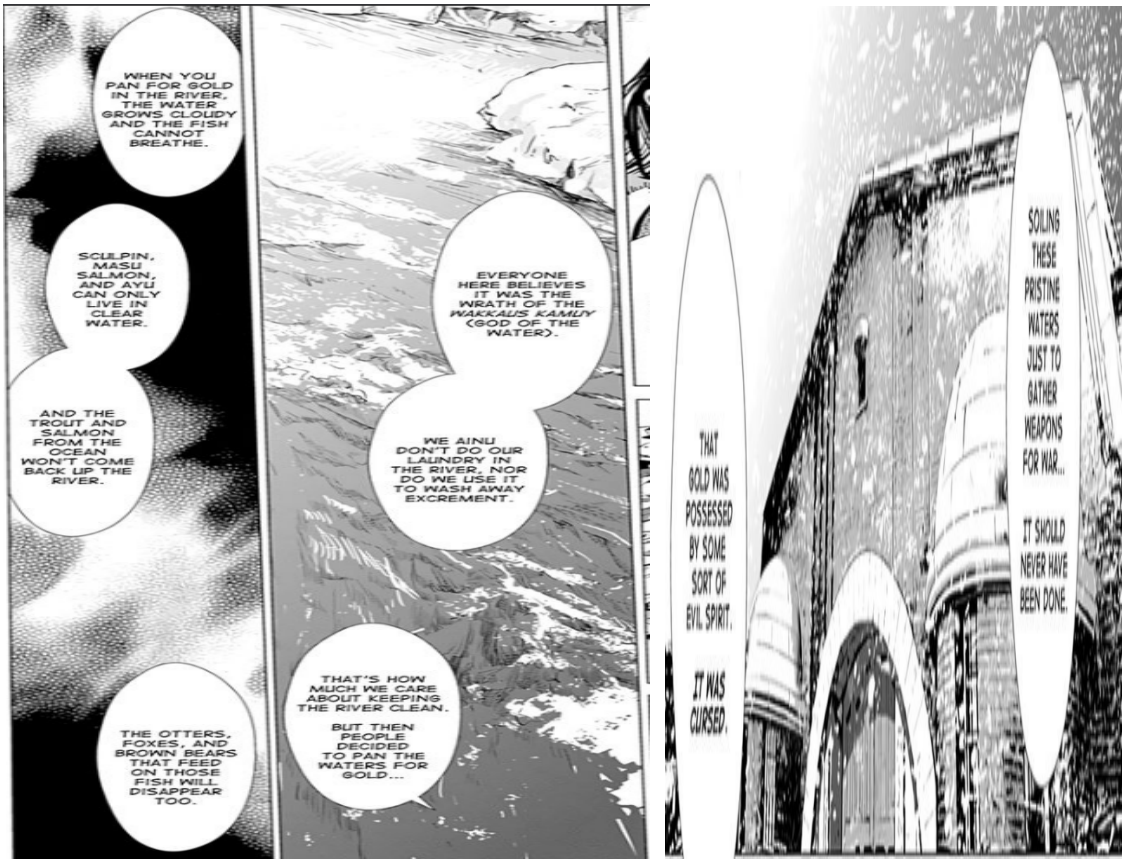


Figure 9. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 13, 2014)

Beyond the clear relation between the Ainu's livelihood and the necessity of having access to food and clean waters expressed in the panels above, these warnings can also be interpreted as ecological messages aimed at the readers with the express purpose of promoting ecological awareness (similar to the ecocritical messages observed by Sung and Sakoi in Ainu-centered children's literature). Huci passes down her knowledge to Asirpa, the *kotan's* future, and then Asirpa passes it on to Sugimoto in the middle ground-like environment facilitated by the search of the gold in which people of all ethnicities collaborate and share knowledge. For instance, in the first volume, Asirpa teaches Sugimoto that for the Ainu, although virtually all objects and animals have a *kamuy*, the abundance of deer in Hokkaido led the Ainu to believe that they were a gift from above sent for their consumption and, thus, the deer are without *kamuy.*

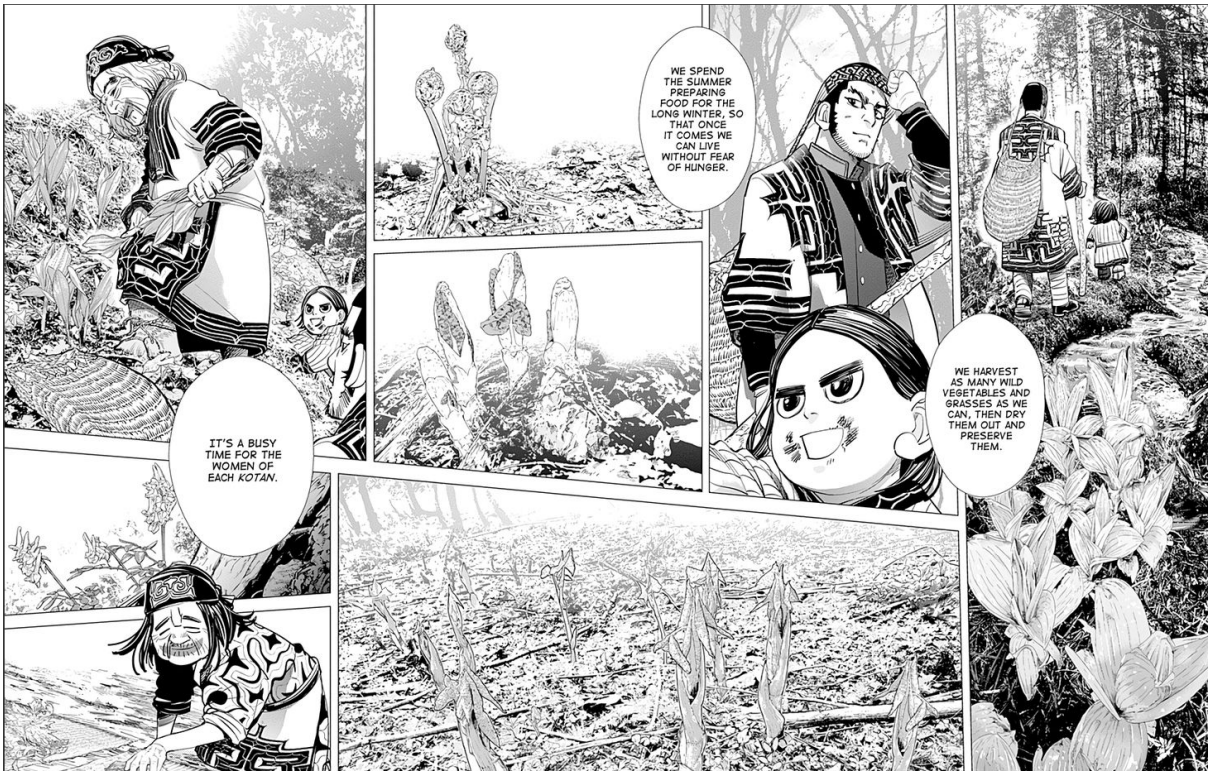
Through non-othering descriptions of the Ainu, their lifestyle, and cultural norms, readers can easily grasp how vital the animals and lands of Hokkaido were to the indigenous people's very existence. By mixing real Ainu folklore tales with an accurate account of the Ainu's spiritual belief system, ecological messages are transmitted without sounding

condescending or interrupting the narrative in any way, as almost half of the entire series is devoted to depicting the Ainu and their lifestyle during the late Meiji era.

Figure 10. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 22, 2014)

Folklore, as expressed in the panel above, is likely mentioned by Noda not just for presenting various aspects of Ainu culture, but also to nudge the reader in the right direction regarding the bigger picture and, thus, the meaning of *Golden Kamuy* as a whole. If we apply an ecocritical approach to the gold hunt, in light of the many mentions of environmental degradation, bad omens, and general loss of hunt and territory due to Japanese colonial expansion in Hokkaido, it could be understood as an allegory for Japanese colonialism as a whole. The gold was useless to the Ainu since they had no rituals that required the use of it; still, once the Japanese discovered gold in Hokkaido, they polluted the rivers and lands through mining practices. For the Ainu, gathering the gold meant protection from further expansion by the Japanese; for the Japanese, it was yet another resource that they could extract from the Northern Territories. After all, the damage caused by the mining

disproportionately affects the indigenous people that live off the damaged land and not the Japanese settlers who import most of their food from the mainland.[1] Despite the persistence of the myth that the Ainu were strictly hunter gatherers, it is worth noting that Noda included panels which specifically depict the cultivation of plants by women, practice most notably identified by Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1994).



[1] It must be noted that, at this time, a significant amount of the Ainu food intake was imported due to restrictions on hunting and the decrease in available game, among other factors.

Figure 11. (*Golden Kamuy* Chapter 73, 2014)

In the panels above, the characters are minimally drawn, while the Hokkaido lands, waters, and plants are drawn with incredible precision and detail. While describing the Ainu philosophy regarding the passage of time (also noted by Song and Sakoi in their analysis of children's books) and division of labor, the Hokkaido scenery takes the spotlight away from the characters - perhaps signifying how quintessential the nature is for the inhabitants of Hokkaido, and how insignificant the humans are in comparison.

Lastly, it is worth noting that beyond Ainu-Japanese relations, the manga also explicitly deals with human-animal relations. Sometimes, this comes in the form of explaining the life-death cycle of animals and humans to Sugimoto by Asirpa (i.e. by appreciating the heat emanated by a hunted deer's body). Other times, Westerners like Eddie Dunn are presented as viewing nature as a wild resource that needs to be tamed, while the Japanese (represented by Lieutenant Tsurumi, in some capacity) are shown to fear the destructive capabilities of nature. Ultimately, only the Ainu are depicted as having any respect for the land and animals with which they coexist and depend on. In this case, the image of "people that are one with nature" lacks any negative connotations; in fact, the Westerners and Japanese are directly or indirectly criticized for exploiting the Ainu lands, rivers, and fauna to the point of extinction and destruction.

In the words of Chiba University's Nakagawa Hiroshi, the manga's lead Ainu language supervisor, *kamuy* can also be understood as "environment", since they encompass

nearly everything that the Ainu encounter or use daily. By having a good relationship with the environment/*kamuy*, the Ainu lead a happy and prosperous life. Alternatively, if the environment is disrespected and damaged, the Ainu will lose their main food and water sources (Dot Asahi 2018); thus, by promoting respect and appreciation for *kamuy*, the Ainu (and, in this case, *Golden Kamuy*'s representation of the Ainu and their culture) can teach valuable lessons to people today, when our lives are often alienated from nature. This healthy, sustainable Ainu-animals relationship is contrasted with the settler-animals relationship, which usually is mentioned in relation to species that went extinct thanks to Western or Japanese overhunting practices (the Hokkaido wolf and herring, for instance). Moreover, most Ainu dishes presented throughout the manga highlight in one way or another how no part of the animal is ever wasted, with organs such as the eyeballs and brains being eaten or parts such as fur, pelt, and bladder being used for clothes or tool making. This strong emphasis on sustainability and minimal waste further promotes environmental-minded thinking, a much-needed lesson in a notoriously overly plastic-reliant country like Japan.

Conclusion

Golden Kamuy provides an accurate, fun, and thought-provoking portrayal of Ainu culture, customs, and life during late Meiji Japan, posing serious questions about sustainability, indigenous rights, the cohabitation of Wajin and Ainu people in Hokkaido. Although the main plot is centered around the search for the hidden gold, the manga shines in its numerous everyday moments of early twentieth century Hokkaido life, particularly regarding Ainu hunting, cooking, folklore, and Ainu-Japanese everyday interactions. Its positive portrayal of the indigenous people has inspired Ainu and Wajin alike to reconnect or discover both the beauty and ecological relevance of Ainu culture today. Its success has aided the activism and awareness campaigns of the recent decades in Hokkaido for Ainu rights, bringing the issue of Ainu visibility and recognition to the forefront. Through clever humor, well-researched historical and cultural elements, and detailed, complex characters, Noda managed to symbolically bring the *gaichi* closer to the *naichi* through literature, boosting local tourism and indigenous artists' sales. Themes such as "old" and "new" Ainu identity and culture, colonial exploitation, ecological degradation, Ainu-Japanese relations in the middle ground, and human-animal relations are explored extensively throughout the series, adding multiple layers of analysis to complement the witty humor and beautiful landscapes of Hokkaido. The manga's merits are manyfold, most notably being that it aids young, often apathetic Ainu youths to rediscover their identity and spark their desire to learn or expand their grasp on the language and customs. By enhancing the Ainu's visibility throughout Japan and beyond, *Golden Kamuy* dispels many of the misconceptions, stereotypes, and myths that Wajin have accumulated about the Ainu through, but not limited to, literature like the one presented in the previous chapter. The non-othering, positive, and research-backed depiction should serve as a model for future authors that will have chosen to incorporate Ainu depictions in their works.

This thesis has sought to shed light on the under-researched topic of Ainu representation in contemporary Japanese popular literature. Through the *Golden Kamuy* case study, along with the supporting chapters that provided ample historical and socio-cultural background, this thesis has highlighted how positive, non-othering, and factually accurate depictions of the Ainu, their culture, customs, and ecological worldview have a positive

impact on both the Ainu and Japanese community by raising awareness and educating readers. As the only bilingual manga in the Japanese and Ainu language, *Golden Kamuy* is simultaneously an educational and entertainment manga, promoting the use of the Ainu language in an engaging manner, while also fostering environmental awareness through allegories and Ainu folklore. This thesis has contextualized and compared the manga with previous Japanese literature and, more broadly, has given it the proper historical context from which it can be further analyzed by scholars across disciplines. Since *Golden Kamuy* has been boosting tourism in Hokkaido, there are many economic, political, and cultural angles from which the manga's rise to popularity can be academically explored. As it is currently nearing completion (it will probably finish serialization by the end of the year), further research on its ending and broader impact will be necessary.

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