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Ainu Representation in the World of Japanese Comics: *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* Take on the Ruling Narratives of Hokkaidō History

Abstract

Examining Japanese history through *manga* may initially seem unconventional, given the considerable distrust towards the medium in Western scholarship, where it is often viewed as a tool for distorting history. To avoid misinterpretation in the analysis of Japanese comics, it is essential to approach them with what Tessa Morris-Suzuki terms *historical truthfulness,* recognising them as gateways to a complex web of inherited ideas rather than direct representations of the historical periods that they depict. This approach is supported by Luc Pauwels' *integrated conceptual framework for visual sociology*, which cautions against conflating the depiction with the depicted in the analysis of pre-made visuals. This study employs this methodological framework to analyse and compare two *manga* series that explore Ainu history and culture: Tezuka Osamu's *Shumari* and Noda Satoru's *Golden Kamuy*. Both narratives are set in Meiji-era Hokkaidō, a time when *Wajin* newcomers sought to erase the Indigenous Ainu from the northern island's history. Consequently, Hokkaidō is often still perceived as a natural frontier developed by settlers for the benefit of the Japanese nation, while the Ainu continue to be stereotyped as a *dying race*. By critically engaging with these prevailing narratives, Tezuka and Noda elevate their work to what Pierre Nora calls *places of memory*. Nissim Otmazgin describes the way in which interacting with such seemingly unassuming places of memory creates, propagates, and reproduces a variety of memories about history among its readership as *banal memory*. Tezuka's *Shumari* challenges the narrative of Hokkaidō as empty land by portraying it as the colonised land of the Ainu, yet he struggles to escape the dying race stereotype in the depiction of his Ainu characters. Conversely, Noda's *Golden Kamuy* rejects this stereotype by vividly—and at times anachronistically—showcasing the beauty of Ainu culture. However, by sidelining historical injustices in his narrative, Noda offers readers a shallow understanding of Ainu history.

Keywords: Ainu, banal memory, dying race, historical truthfulness, Hokkaidō, *manga,* Meiji period, place of memory, Wajin

Introduction

Shumari シュマリ, a classic *manga* 漫画[1] by Tezuka Osamu 手塚治虫, and *Golden Kamuy* ゴールデンカムイ, Noda Satoru's 野田サトル contemporary *manga* sensation,[2] offer contrasting tones in their storytelling. While the former is sombre and tragic, the latter is exciting and fun. Despite these tonal differences, both plots unfold from a similar premise. During the Meiji period (1869–1912), a *Wajin* 和人[3] warrior with exceptional combat skills travels to Hokkaidō 北海道 for a woman he loves. Once there, he meets a young Ainu girl who joins him on his adventures.

This study explores the representation of Ainu history and culture in historical *manga* by analysing these two works and comparing their content and sociopolitical context. It is argued that their critical stance on the master narrative of Hokkaidō's history—rooted in the Meiji period and still influential today—transforms these stories into what Pierre Nora calls *places of memory (lieux de mémoire).* To effectively substantiate this claim, the study adheres to the following structure. First, it establishes *manga* as a legitimate medium of

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[1] Zoltan Kacsuk writes that nowadays this Japanese word has multiple meanings. In Japan, it is used to simply denote all comic books. However, the word gains additional layers of meaning when used outside of the Japanese context. It can then stand for either comics that are made in Japan (*manga* in a narrow sense) or an internationally utilised style of drawing comics that originated from Japan (*manga* in a broader sense). Based on Kacsuk's definition, both *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* can be considered *manga* in the narrow sense of the world, so the term 'Japanese comics'—sometimes shortened to just comics—is used in this study as a synonym of *manga* (Kacsuk 2018: 2).

[2] Both *manga* titles borrow a word from the Ainu language. *Shumari* means fox (Kokuritsu Ainu Minzoku Hakubutsukan n.d.: *Sumari*), and *kamuy* is a word of enormous cultural significance denoting the spirits or gods traditionally revered by the Ainu people *(ibid., Kamuy).* An inquisitive glance at these official romanisations reveals that while the former follows the rules of the Hepburn romanisation system, the latter clearly does not adhere to it. It was probably transcribed according to another system specific to the Ainu language, which is also used in the *Akor Itak: Ainugo Tekisuto 1* アコㇿイタㇰ：アイヌ語テキスト１, an Ainu language textbook made by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido (Hokkaidō Ainu Kyōkai 北海道アイヌ協会). For the sake of clarity and to highlight the separateness of the Ainu from the Japanese language, the *Akor Itak*-style of romanisation is exclusively employed in this study. For further information about this romanisation system, see Hokkaidō Utari Kyōkai (2002: 4–6).

[3] An often-used word of this study, *Wajin* may be unfamiliar to most readers, except those who have a special interest in Hokkaidō history and/or Ainu studies. Even though the Ainu belong to a different ethnic group than most Japanese people, they are still citizens of the Japanese state. Therefore, it would be incorrect to only refer to the majority population as 'the Japanese'. Researchers of the above-mentioned fields usually conceptualise the Japanese majority as an ethnic group, but they cannot seem to agree on a universal ethnonym for them. Out of the many possible labels suggested in the literature, most contemporary researchers default to *Wajin,* a label with a written usage that can be traced back to 1799 (Howell 2014: 109).

inquiry into Japanese history. Second, it discusses how the reinterpretation of history in these works elevates them to places of memory. The study then introduces the concepts of Hokkaidō as empty land and the Ainu as a *dying race,* both central to the Meiji era's master narrative. Finally, it contrasts how Tezuka and Noda challenge these inherited stereotypes in their respective works.

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is essential to clarify the study's methodological framework. The research employs the *integrated conceptual framework for visual sociology* developed by Luc Pauwels, which offers a unified approach to investigating society and culture from a visual starting point.[4] Although a detailed description of this methodology is unnecessary, one of Pauwels' key warnings regarding the study of pre-made visuals is particularly relevant to the analysis of *manga* created by *Wajin* artists that depict non-*Wajin* characters. He cautions that the depiction is not equivalent to the depicted, meaning that the analysis of a certain depiction is likely to reveal more about the creator's mindset than about the subject matter itself. In this context, while *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* provide insight into Ainu culture and history, a critical reading of these texts primarily illuminates the attitudes held by *Wajin* towards the Ainu. Furthermore, this study explores how these attitudes have evolved over time, as reflected in the differing perspectives between the two comics, published four decades apart.[5]

***Manga* and history**

Considering the state of contemporary Western scholarship, it is a bit unorthodox to look at Japanese history through the lens of *manga*. Roman Rosenbaum writes that although *manga* studies and popular culture studies are currently enjoying unprecedented levels of global popularity, surprisingly few researchers feel inclined to examine the ways in which Japanese comics can shape their readers' perception of history. There is even some distrust towards the medium because of its tarnished reputation as a potential tool for the misrepresentation of history, which it owes to the controversies surrounding such works as Kobayashi Yoshinori's 小林よしのり *Sensō-ron* 戦争論 and Yamano Sharin's 山野車輪 *Manga Kenkanryū* マンガ嫌韓流.[6]

Yet, if one considers the emotionally charged relationship between today's consumers and their favoured popular culture products, treating *manga* as a possible venue for the re-exploration of history—and examining it accord-

[4] Pauwels 2011: 4.
[5] *Ibid.,* 11.
[6] Rosenbaum 2013: 1.

ingly—becomes a timely and practical decision. Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues that nowadays popular culture plays a large part in forming people's historical consciousness, which makes it unwise to ignore the mass-marketed narratives found in historical novels, films, and *manga*.[7] These popular culture products are influential, because they give the people consuming them an opportunity to identify with people from the past by appealing to their imagination and sense of empathy. This identification is likely to inspire emotionally invested consumers to rethink their opinions on past events. In this aspect, mass-marketed historical narratives are quite unlike the academic history found in journals and textbooks, which tends to shy away from emotion and instead aims to foster intellectual curiosity towards history.[8]

Interestingly, Morris-Suzuki also echoes Pauwels' warning against the notion of historical *manga* as unproblematic windows into the past. She argues for conceptualising them instead as an accessible gateway to accumulated historical knowledge that is coloured by the biases of previous generations. This interpretation is a byproduct of her way of making sense of the past, which she calls *historical truthfulness*. The point of historical truthfulness boils down to being conscious of the fact that historical information must go through a long chain of transformations—being filtered through the hearts and minds of consecutive generations—to reach people living in the present. Additionally, paying attention to this metamorphosis of historical knowledge is a prerequisite of reflecting on one's own place in the process of history: although today's people are not responsible for the sins of their ancestors, they live in a world that was built on this injustice, enjoying—often unconsciously—the benefits in which these actions resulted.[9]

Manga as a place of memory

When Japanese comics such as *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* transcend their role as mere transmitters of previously accumulated historical knowledge and instead actively challenge readers' preconceptions about the supposed facts of history, they are transformed into places of memory.

The term was coined by French historian Pierre Nora, and it refers to the last bastions of a nation's historical memory. Nora conceptualises historical memory as a constantly changing and evolving master narrative about a nation's history dictated by powerful actors, such as the state, the church, or the school system.

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[7] Morris-Suzuki 2005: 16.
[8] *Ibid.,* 22–23.
[9] *Ibid.,* 25–28.

This canonised version of past events used to stay with people throughout their entire lives like a trusted companion, firmly keeping past occurrences and time-honoured traditions in the same eternal present they themselves inhabited. This ended when historical memory was banished by critical historiography to reside only in places of memory, while the people were left with history, the impersonal science of intellectually engaging with and recreating the past.[10]

An archive, a museum, a textbook, a treaty, a statue, a monument, a speech, a pilgrimage, an anniversary, or an event of some historical importance—these are all things that can be considered places of memory if they fulfil the following two requirements. First, they must be originally conceived of as an artefact to be remembered, such as pieces of art or legal documents. Second, they must simultaneously have three—a material, a symbolic and a functional—dimensions. Depending on the individual place, one of the three dimensions tends to be more prominent than the others. Nora mentions *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants,* an iconic textbook that chronicles the journey of two boys through the French provinces to illustrate the multifaceted aspect of these diverse places. As a textbook, it is a primarily functional phenomenon, which materialises in each printed copy of the text. It is made symbolic by the ritualistic way it used to be read in French schools, all over the country and like clockwork.[11]

Manga can be conceptualised as places of memory in the same vein as Nora's textbook. Like the textbook, these Japanese comics are a primarily functional phenomenon. Although they have evolved beyond being mere children's entertainment to even become a subject of study at Japanese universities, the stereotypical function of *manga* remains to entertain readers.[12] They are made material in countless *manga* magazines and *tankōbon* 単行本 volumes, while they are lent symbolic weight by the devoted masses who read them regularly. Yet, what makes the *manga* analysed in this study—and other Japanese comics in general—a markedly different type of place of memory is the fact that the act of reading them is rarely assigned any significance. It is seen instead as an everyday activity that people unceremoniously undertake in their leisure time, which in turn makes it worthy of little notice. As a side effect of being unnoticed, Nissim Otmazgin theorises that *manga* subliminally alter the historical memory of Japan, a nation where these comics permeate society. He dubbed the way in which interacting with such unassuming places of memory creates, propagates, and reproduces a variety of memories about history among its readership as *banal memory*.[13]

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[10] Nora 2009: 13–15.

[11] *Ibid.,* 27–28.

[12] To learn more about the evolution of the role that *manga* have played over the years, see Ito (2008: 26–47) and Bouissou (2010: 17–33).

[13] Otmazgin 2016: 12.

According to Nora, the passive power to influence a nation's historical memory is insufficient for historiographical works to be considered places of memory: these works must also explicitly aim to reshape how their readers perceive history. Therefore, *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* cannot be classified as places of memory solely by virtue of being influential and multifaceted pieces of art with historical themes.[14] While this criterion may initially appear unnecessary, given that Japanese comics are not typically regarded as historiographical works, Otmazgin offers a compelling argument to the contrary. The process of creating academic works on history and historical *manga* is strikingly similar. Both historians and manga artists (*mangaka* 漫画家) conduct research on the subjects they wish to depict, interpreting their findings through the lens of personal beliefs, prevailing convictions, and the zeitgeist of their time. The primary distinction between these recreations of history lies in the peer review process: unlike their scholarly counterparts, *mangaka* are afforded the artistic freedom to blend facts and fiction in their narratives. Combined with the medium's widespread popularity, this positions the genre of historical *manga* as a form of *pop historiography,* characterised by a negligible authority but achieving an extensive reach to which scholars of history can only aspire.[15]

Shumari and *Golden Kamuy* become places of memory because they actively challenge the validity of the old master narrative of Hokkaidō's history, a narrative that has remained influential since its formulation during the Meiji period. What specific elements of this narrative do the two *mangaka* critically address? While Tezuka rejects the entrenched perception of Hokkaidō as empty land, Noda dismantles the stereotypical portrayal of the Ainu as a dying race. As the following analysis demonstrates, however, the former's empathetic portrayal of the dispossessed Ainu casts these characters as helpless victims doomed to extinction. Similarly, the latter's tendency to obscure historical injustices behind the vivid portrayal of Ainu culture may leave his readers with a superficial understanding of Hokkaidō's history.

The erasure of the Ainu from the history of Hokkaidō

The notion of Hokkaidō as empty land is connected to the systematic erasure of the Ainu from the northern island's history. This is a topic that is excessively discussed by Michele Mason in her book, *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan*.[16]

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[14] Nora 2009: 29–30.

[15] Otmazgin 2016: 4.

[16] In both Mason's book and this study, the geographical name 'Hokkaidō' stands for Japan's

The Meiji state—from the standpoint of the Indigenous Ainu a foreign power—successfully extended its influence to Hokkaidō, subjugating the Ainu population, exploiting the local natural resources, and repopulating the island with *Wajin* settlers in the process. According to Mason, this is the reason why Hokkaidō should be considered the Japanese Empire's first—and only successful—settler colony.[17] Despite this sound reasoning, her statement may initially seem a bit drastic, because it breaks some of the conventions in Japanese historiography and early postcolonial discourse. The age of Japanese empire building is usually dated from 1895, when Taiwan came under Japanese rule. In this context, Hokkaidō—appropriated by the empire decades earlier—was seen as an informal colony. It was also seen by early postcolonial scholars as a classic case of *colonisation* (i.e., internal migration to underdeveloped parts of a country) instead of *colonialism* (i.e., the political and economic subjugation of people who live outside a country's borders). Additionally, a reoccurring term used in Japanese- and English-language scholarship to reference Hokkaidō is *internal colony* (*naikoku shokuminchi* 内国植民地), which only fuels the ambiguity around the northern island's colonial status.[18]

During this colonisation process, Hokkaidō was treated as if devoid of any human presence, while its Indigenous inhabitants were legally and symbolically erased from its history.[19] It was retroactively naturalised as one of the four main islands of Japan by the sudden influx of *Wajin* settlers, and much of it was declared ownerless land to legally account for the dispossession of the Ainu.

current northernmost island. It is still important to note, however, that in the discussed historical period the administrative unit of Hokkaidō also included the Kurils (Chishima rettō 千島列島). The two southernmost islands, namely Kunashir (Kunashiri-tō 国後島) and Iturup (Etorofu-tō 択捉島), became one of the then 11 provinces of Hokkaidō under the name Chishima Province (Chishima-no kuni 千島国) when Japan's administration was extended to the north of Honshū 本州 in 1869 (Emori 2015: 381–382). After the ratification of the Treaty of Saint Petersburg (Karafuto-Chishima Kōkan Jōyaku 樺太・千島交換条約) in 1875, the remaining islands of the archipelago were also incorporated into the same administrative unit (*ibid.,* 414).

[17] Mason 2012: 7.

[18] *Ibid.,* 16–18.

[19] Today, Hokkaidō is the last corner of the Ainu's ancestral land that they still inhabit after the expansion of their *Wajin* and Russian neighbours had forced them out of the northern parts of Honshū, the Kuril Islands, and the southern parts of Sakhalin (Karafuto 樺太) by the middle of the 20th century (Fitzhugh 1999: 9–11). Despite the attempt to erase the ties between Hokkaidō and its Indigenous population from Japanese public perception, the northern island is still seen as the homeland of the Ainu. There exits an enduring misconception that an Ainu person stops being Ainu the second they leave their ancestral village in the Hokkaidō countryside and/or move south of the Tsugaru Strait (Tsugaru Kaikyō 津軽海峡), which leads to the further marginalisation of the Ainu who no longer live on the northern island. For further information on this topic, see Watson (2014: 69–85).

The laws and regulations of *Wajin* lawmakers not only robbed them of their lands but also nearly succeeded in completely depriving them of their language and culture. These tragic developments stemmed from the Japanese state's utter disregard for Ainu sovereignty, which first showed itself in the state's refusal to formalise its relationship with the Ainu by the ratification of a treaty.[20] At the same time, prominent *Wajin* intellectuals and literary fiction authors of the Meiji period[21] were actively rewriting Hokkaidō's history to ignore the suffering that colonisation caused to the Ainu in favour of detailing the plight of *Wajin* settlers. In the name of Japanese modernisation, the colonisation of the Ainu and their homeland was rapidly buried under a legacy of development and progress.[22]

A dying race

In the Meiji period, the Ainu came to be referred to as a dying race (*horobiyuku minzoku* 滅びゆく民族) by academics, authors, educators and journalists. During the debates in the Japanese Diet on proposals for a Protection Act, politicians seemed to prefer another epithet. They called the Ainu an *inferior race* (*rettō no jinshu* 劣等の人種) and reasoned that their apparent misery resulted from the law of the *survival of the fittest* (*yūshō reppai* 優勝劣敗). The vocabulary used in these contemporary discourses attests to the fact that Social Darwinism[23]

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[20] Mason 2012: 8–10.

[21] This is process is explored in the detail by Mason in a case study focusing on the works of Kunikida Doppo (1871–1908) 国木田独歩 (*ibid.,* 57–81). The absence of a native writing system (Tamura 1999: 57.) likely facilitated the erasure of the Ainu from their homeland and contributed to the delayed emergence of works written by Ainu authors. The first ever such publication about Ainu culture was published in 1918, six years into the Taishō period (1912–1926). It was a short pamphlet titled *Ainu Monogatari* アイヌ物語. Even though its author, a young teacher named Takekuma Tokusaburō 武隈徳三郎 (1896–1951), criticises the subpar education Ainu children were receiving at the time, it cannot be fully considered a counter-narrative, as he was in favour of Ainu assimilation (Emori 2015: 460–461). However, two of his fellow Ainu, Chiri Yukie 知里幸恵 (1903–1922) and Iboshi Hokuto 違星北斗 (1901–1929), were openly lamenting the losses of their people around the same time (*ibid.,* 464–472).

[22] Mason 2012: 2.

[23] According to Mike Hawkins, the four main tenets of the Social Darwinist worldview are as follows. First, all organisms, including humans, are governed by the laws of biology. Second, population growth puts pressure on resources, which leads to organisms struggling to survive. Third, certain physical and mental traits are advantageous to have in this struggle and can be inherited by the offspring of their original possessors, becoming more common in the whole population as a result. Fourth, selection and inheritance are the dual causes behind the emergence and the extinction of species (Claeys 2000: 228). Interestingly, Gregory Claeys argues that Social Darwinism is somewhat of a misnomer, because most of these beliefs predate

and scientific racism[24] were enthusiastically adopted and embraced by many Japanese people living in the Meiji period.[25] However, the age-old prejudice expressed in these imported phrases was not originally racial in nature, as pointed out by Richard Siddle, who retraced the development of a negative Ainu stereotype throughout Japanese history.[26]

Before the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) this stereotype was informed by the *ka-i chitsujo* 華夷秩序, a moralising worldview imported from China, which defined barbarians as hairy, flesh-eating, and cave-dwelling savages covered in animal skins. This role was filled in the new Japanese context by the *Emishi* 蝦夷. They were a group of people living in the Tōhoku region 東北地方 who resisted the rule of the civilised Yamato court 大和朝廷. Following the subjugation of the *Emishi,* in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) the same image was transferred to the *Ezo* 蝦夷, the ancestors of the modern-day Ainu. Like the *Emishi* before them, the *Ezo* were also seen as powerful adversaries by their southern neighbours, often depicted as terrifying demons in picture scrolls. This balance of power ensured that the Ainu and the *Wajin* living in southern Hokkaidō had a somewhat equitable relationship based on trade up until the mid-17th century, when the scales of power ultimately dipped in favour of the *Wajin*.[27]

The Tokugawa period was a time when mutually beneficial trade between the two neighbouring groups gradually gave way to the exploitation of Ainu workers, who were now forced to toil in the fisheries operated by the contractors of the Matsumae fief 松前藩. These fishing stations were converted from the original trading posts after an Ainu chieftain named Shakushain シャクシャイン lost his war against the *Wajin* in 1669, putting an end to the independent

the publication of Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) *Origin of Species* in 1859. There already existed a worldview based on Malthusianism and political economy that exalted productive members of society—who were thought to have an advantage over others because of their respectability and character—as the only ones deserving of survival. Darwin's contribution to these preexisting ideas mainly came from redefining advantage and race. Advantage became the result of inherited characteristics, and race became a biological category closely connected to skin colour. Although Darwin originally designated fecundity as the most advantageous inheritable characteristic of the animal kingdom, he later came to define intelligence and morality as the superior qualities in humans. By the late 19th century, it was widely prophesied that the inferior (i.e., non-white) races, which were presumed to lack these qualities, would eventually lose in the existential struggle and die out (*ibid.,* 235–238).

[24] For a comprehensive overview on the development of Darwin's ideas into different forms of scientific racism, such as Karl Pearson's (1857–1936) biometrics, Vacher de Lapouge's (1854–1936) anthroposociology, and Harry H. Laughlin's (1880–1943) eugenics, see Jackson – Weidman (2005/2006: 66–79).

[25] Siddle 2011: 122–123.

[26] *Ibid.,* 106.

[27] *Ibid.,* 107–109.

political development of Ainu communities. This loss of independence translated to further dehumanisation: the once powerful demons morphed into pitiful slaves in the eyes of the local *Wajin,* who attributed canine origins to the Ainu and saw them as unworthy of being assimilated into human society. This was contrary to the official policy of the Bakufu 幕府 that was aimed at the assimilation of the Ainu and was driven first by a Confucian sense of duty to civilise the barbarians, and later by considerations of homeland security. However, this policy was resisted by the Ainu and the local *Wajin* population alike.[28]

By the time of the Meiji Restoration, the Ainu were seen as a mix of savage demons and inferior weaklings. Social Darwinism and scientific racism added another layer to this native stereotype when they were imported to Meiji Japan with the popular works of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer.[29] The supposed inferiority of the Ainu was now attributed to race. The imagined urgency to gather as much information as possible about the dying race before it inevitably vanishes drove scholars of Ainu studies—including Tsuboi Shōgorō 坪井正五郎, Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍蔵, and Koganei Yoshikiyo 小金井良精—to resort to the use of such cruel and unethical methods as grave robbery and the impersonation of medical personnel. Unlike the native prejudice against the Ainu that developed because of their subjugation, Western-style racism was used to justify the Japanese Empire's dominion over Ainu lands: in an official history of Hokkaidō published in 1918, the colonisation of the island was labelled as the responsibility of the *Wajin,* the only *superior race* (*yūtō jinshu* 優等人種) in contact with the Ainu.[30] This is eerily similar to the views of Karl Pearson and Benjamin Kidd, both prominent English Social Darwinists of the early 20th century, who deemed the colonisation projects of the British Empire mutually beneficial for the coloniser and the colonised. They reasoned that while the former gained the resources needed to survive in the struggle for existence, the latter received the gift of civilisation in return.[31]

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[28] *Ibid.,* 109–116.

[29] T. H. Huxley (1825–1895) was a vocal advocate of Darwin's ideas. He came up with the term *agnostic* to express that there was a lack of scientific evidence for God's existence (Claeys 2000: 225). Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) is the originator of the phrase *survival of the fittest*. He was also one of the first people to argue that Darwin's principles, whose focus was originally on the evolution of animal species, could be applied to human societies (Dennis 1995: 244). Interestingly enough, it was under the influence of such contemporaries that Darwin himself became a Social Darwinist (Claeys 2000: 237).

[30] Siddle 2011: 118–121.

[31] Dennis 1995: 245.

Shumari

Tezuka clearly states in the epilogue of *Shumari,* which was originally serialised in the *manga* magazine *Big Comic* (*Biggu Komikku* ビッグコミック) between June 1974 and April 1976,[32] that he wanted to retell the history of Hokkaidō's development from the perspective of the Indigenous Ainu. He credits a book titled *Hokkaidō kaitaku-shi* 北海道開拓誌 as his direct inspiration, where he had read about the tragic history of an Ainu settlement in the Kawakami region (Kawakami-chihō 川上地方), which inspired him to draw a story that highlights the dispossession of Ainu lands and the suffering that resulted from it. He even planned to have a main character of mixed Ainu and *Wajin* descent but changed his mind because of the feedback he received from concerned Ainu individuals and his own doubts about not being able to adequately portray such a sensitive topic as a member of the Japanese majority.[33]

In his retelling of history, he repeatedly rejects Hokkaidō's portrayal as empty land by asserting that the northern island rightfully belongs to its original inhabitants. In addition to giving a fictional voice to the Ainu to claim ownership of their homeland,[34] this sentiment is echoed multiple times throughout the story by Shumari, the misleadingly named *Wajin* protagonist himself,[35] to effectively drive the point home to readers. The scene where he is asked by his new lover why he refuses to do agricultural work is a particularly poignant example of this, because Shumari not only reaffirms the Ainu's ownership of their homeland but also asserts that *Wajin* settlers can only ever be visitors to Hokkaidō who have no right to use any of its natural resources. To salve his conscience, Shumari tries to open a horse farm, which he sees as something less exploitative, a piece of land that he only temporarily borrows from its real owners.[36]

Additionally, Tezuka also employs a less heavy-handed method to underscore the Ainu's claim to the northern island. He devotes many pages to the illustration of the trials and tribulations faced by ordinary *Wajin* settlers (for instance, he shows a farmer losing his life in a flash flood while trying to protect

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[32] Tezuka Osamu Official n.d.: *Shumari*.

[33] Tezuka 2015b: 491–492.

[34] Tezuka 2015a: 32.

[35] Shumari is a *Wajin* character who completely rejects his ethnic origins and instead finds identification with the Ainu. This is signified by him using an Ainu name, wearing pants adorned with Ainu motives on the hem, and dispensing Indigenous knowledge. Mason argues that Tezuka instrumentalises Ainuness as a tool of social criticism by positioning his idealised version of the Ainu (i.e., peaceful people who live in harmony with nature) as morally superior to modernising Japanese society. This gives Shumari—a character with an adopted ethnic identity—a kind of moral superiority over other *Wajin* characters (Mason 2012: 174–175).

[36] Tezuka 2015a: 295.

his meagre plot of land,[37] or the roof of Shumari's house caving in because of the thick layer of snow that has fallen on it[38]), but his stereotypical portrayal of these struggles—evocative of the stories written by literary fiction authors in the Meiji period—gets recontextualised by a fleeting remark of Shumari. As he goes panning for gold while trying to fight off a swarm of hungry mosquitoes, he remarks that life on Hokkaidō is so harsh that no sane person would try to settle down on the island, and that the only people who could thrive among such conditions were the Ainu. This implies that the *Wajin* settlers' suffering is a result of their misguided attempts to build a life for themselves in a place where they do not belong.[39]

Tezuka draws Hokkaidō as the stolen homeland of the Ainu, which has an unfortunate side effect: the portrayal of his Ainu characters remains firmly rooted in the dying race stereotype. This becomes particularly clear in a subplot where Shumari tries and partly fails to save a group of displaced Ainu who are sheltering in the woods of his horse ranch. When he tries to rally the men of the temporary Ainu village (*kotan* コタン), to defend against an incoming attack of *Wajin* bandits, his help gets rejected because of the men's passivity and prideful-ness. While an elder declares that their hunting bows and arrows should not be used to harm other humans, a much younger Ainu man proudly states that they do not need Shumari's help to protect themselves. This man and the others who follow him into battle are later mercilessly slaughtered by the bandits, leaving only Shumari and his friends to protect the remaining Ainu—women, children, and the elderly—from further harm. Even though they succeed in protecting their charges, the survivors of the *kotan* also vanish from the story without further explanation.[40] The death of the younger Ainu men is not the only element of this subplot that reinforces the dying race stereotype. In her own insightful analyses of the *manga,* Mason argues that the unacknowledged disappearance of the surviving Ainu characters mirrors the way the real Ainu were expected to disappear from the modernising world in the Meiji period and beyond.[41]

If one considers when *Shumari* was originally written and published, it becomes less surprising that Tezuka does not break away from the portrayal of the Ainu as a dying race. In the 1970s, the Hokkaidō Kyūdojin Hogohō 北海道旧土人保護法—or the Hokkaidō Former Natives Protection Act—of 1889 was technically still in effect.[42] The international prominence of Indigenous issues,

[37] *Ibid.,* 72.
[38] *Ibid.,* 288.
[39] *Ibid.,* 183.
[40] Tezuka 2015b: 129–199.
[41] Mason 2012: 174.
[42] The Protection Act was modelled after the American Dawes Act—also known as the General Allotment Act—of 1887. Most Ainu traditionally earned their livelihood by hunting and trad-

combined with the domestic emergence of social movements, only just started to inspire Japanese activists to emphasise the negative consequences of colonisation on Ainu communities and critically engage with the state's assimilation policy.[43] The assimilation policy was also supported by the first ever Ainu organisation, the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, which had close ties to the Hokkaidō government: it started out as an extension of the local administration in 1930, and most of its initial members were conservative Ainu farmers who willingly cooperated with the local government to secure help for their people. In 1974, this help took the form of the Hokkaidō Utari Welfare Measures (Hokkaidō Utari Fukushi Taisaku 北海道ウタリ福祉対策), which were enacted to improve the living conditions, employment rates, and educational levels of the Ainu of Hokkaidō. The image of a dying race put on life support by the government's intervention was alive and well.[44]

Another unique dimension of Tezuka's portrayal of his Ainu characters is his penchant for describing them as inherently peaceful people who abhor any form of violence against humans, which insinuates that they are too kind and too purehearted to survive amongst the cruelties of a modernising world.[45] This sentiment is particularly apparent in a scene where Shumari prevents a group of *Wajin* soldiers from killing a fugitive samurai who was granted sanctuary in a *kotan*. One of these soldiers immediately tries to shoot the fugitive, but Shumari quickly intervenes to spare his 'peaceful' and 'compassionate' Ainu friends the sight of unnecessary bloodshed. After he orders the other *Wajin* to stand down, he gently scolds the Ainu elders, who were passively watching the situation unfold. He tells them that they are 'too kind' to aid such a scoundrel. It is implied that their ill-advised kindness would have had some dire consequences for them without Shumari's help.[46] Scenes like this one or the above-mentioned fight with the bandits clearly position Shumari as a benevolent guardian of the Ainu. However, if one consults records of Ainu-*Wajin* shared history or tales from Ainu

ing with their *Wajin* neighbours. This law was meant to change that by promoting their assimilation into Japanese society as farmers. It was announced on the 2 March 1899 and came into effect a month later, on the 1 April. It had two main features. The first was the allotment of five hectares of land for each interested Ainu family, and the second was the building of special primary schools with the aim to convert Indigenous children into dutiful Japanese citizens (Emori 2015: 440–442).

43 To read more about why early Ainu activists were in support of assimilation, see Howell (2004: 5–29).

44 Komai 2022: 150–151.

45 His sentiment seems to parallel that of early Western observers who were prone to see the Ainu as an embodiment of the 'noble savage' archetype. This kind of thinking was most prevalent before the birth of a cultural anthropology based on empirical data (Ölschleger 2014: 25). This similarity should be studied later in depth.

46 Tezuka 2015a: 102.

oral literature, it becomes clear that the Indigenous people of Hokkaidō were neither too peaceful nor too passive to fight for the things they wanted.

Richard Siddle points out that the relationship between the *Wajin* and their northern neighbours was characterised by fierce conflict for hundreds of years. After a *Wajin* blacksmith killed an Ainu customer in a fight over a dull knife in 1456, the friction between the two groups exploded into warfare. The following year, an Ainu leader named Koshamain コシャマイン rallied his people against the invaders and nearly destroyed all *Wajin* settlements on Hokkaidō. This conflict served as an overture to 100 years of intermittent warfare that was characterised by faked peace negotiations. This tactic was employed by the *Wajin* side to lull Ainu leadership into a false sense of security to make it easier to eliminate them. Before being assassinated, Shakushain successfully led his men to destroy *Wajin* trading posts and vessels all over Hokkaidō, killing hundreds of *Wajin* in the process. In 1789, desperate Ainu attacked and killed 71 *Wajin* in eastern Hokkaidō as a final act of resistance against their exploitation in the fisheries.[47] Contrary to Tezuka's repeated assertions, the Ainu did try to protect themselves from the encroachment of their southern neighbours. Their bows and arrows simply proved too insufficient a protection against Japan's military might. If one is inclined to be a bit more charitable in the interpretation of Tezuka's work, the figure of the young Ainu man who refuses Shumari's help in the fight against the bandits could be interpreted as a symbol of the brave, yet ultimately futile resistance that was cursorily summarised in this paragraph.

However, it is true that the Ainu can be described as fairly peaceful if one considers their traditional methods of in-group conflict resolution. Their belief in the power of words influenced the way they used to solve conflicts between members of their own community. People who disagreed with each other—or their representatives—traditionally participated in a ritual of sorts called *caranke* チャランケ. It was a battle of words and endurance that could rage on for hours: the participants were given all the time they could possibly need to recount—in the form of a rhythmical chant—why they were in the right, and the opposing party had to listen to it in silence before getting the chance to do the same. Once one of the speakers became too exhausted to continue, the other was automatically declared the winner. A tie was resolved by resorting to a controlled form of violence that involved a carved, baseball-bat-like stick called *sutu* ストゥ. The participants took turns hitting each other on the bare back with this stick, and the person that could not take any more hits automatically lost the fight.[48]

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[47] Siddle 1999: 68–71.
[48] Nakagawa 2019: 84–85.

In *The Basics of Ainu Culture* (*Ainu Bunka no Kisochishiki* アイヌ文化の基礎知識), an introductory book published under the editorial supervision of the now defunct Ainu Museum アイヌ民族博物館, it is suggested that one should consult the stories preserved in Ainu oral literature instead of defaulting to the written word of *Wajin* sources when studying Ainu history.[49] By following this advice,[50] one can learn about another—a much more brutal—method that Ainu people used to end their disagreements. It was called *topattumi* トパットゥミ, and it can be defined as the exact opposite of *caranke,* a bloody battle fought in complete silence. According to the stories, if the inhabitants of an Ainu settlement grew jealous of the wealth of another *kotan*, they waited for nightfall to then kill every resident of that village in their sleep to get to the coveted riches. In many stories about *topattumi,* a baby becomes the sole survivor thanks to the quick thinking of their parents, and they eventually grow up to seek revenge on those who destroyed their village in the name of greed.[51] If this information is considered, the portrayal of the *kotan* as a peaceful sanctuary where unnecessary bloodshed is a foreign concept becomes not only infantilising but also misleading.

Golden Kamuy

In comparison to Tezuka, Noda appears to be less altruistic in his motivations for creating a *manga* that prominently features Ainu characters. In a 2016 interview with the website *Kono Manga ga Sugoi! WEB* このマンガがすごい！WEB, Noda revealed that *Golden Kamuy* initially began as a generic *shuryō manga* 狩猟マンガ—a *manga* with a story focused on hunting—set on Hokkaidō. To add depth and a unique twist to his narrative, he decided to look to the Ainu for inspiration. Although the dark historical reality associated with his chosen subject matter prompted him to conduct thorough background research, Noda

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[49] Kojima 2018: 32–33.

[50] Utilising Indigenous stories for educational and research purposes is at the centre of ‘Indigenous storywork’, a concept introduced by Jo-ann Archibald Q’um Q’um Xiam. Her approach is guided by seven core principles. The first four—respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity—offer ethical guidance for engaging with Indigenous communities and their knowledge. The remaining three—holism, interrelatedness, and synergy—facilitate the interpretation of Indigenous narratives (Archibald – Lee-Morgan – De Santolo 2019: 1–2). Indigenous storywork is a form of ‘decolonising methodologies’, which seek to restore Indigenous agency in the research of their cultural practices by incorporating Indigenous epistemologies and adapting existing Western research methods. This approach not only promotes social justice for Indigenous people in academic settings but also places a heavy emphasis on the importance of connecting with and contributing to the community being studied (*ibid.,* 5–8).

[51] Nakagawa 2019: 86–87.

refused to depict his Ainu characters as victims, aiming instead to portray them as compelling and strong individuals first, and Ainu second. This unconventional characterisation reportedly received positive feedback from many within the Ainu community. Moreover, his positive and engaging presentation of Indigenous cultural practices serves to keep his story marketable.[52] In other words, Noda's challenge to established narratives of Hokkaidō history is significantly driven by his financial interests and career ambitions.

Although Noda does not explicitly state an intention to challenge Meiji-era stereotypes about the Ainu, his *manga* series facilitates a positive reinterpretation of Ainu people and their culture. Nakagawa Hiroshi 中川裕, who provided expertise for the production of *Golden Kamuy,* notes that many fans have come to treat the series as an illustrated textbook on Ainu culture, seeking not only entertainment but also education through their engagement with the *manga*.[53]

Golden Kamuy's serialisation started in the *manga* magazine *Weekly Young Jump* (*Shūkan Yangu Janpu* 週刊ヤングジャンプ) in 2014, 40 years after Tezuka's *Shumari* made its first appearance on the pages of a similar publication.[54] As the below analysis of Noda's *manga* demonstrates, Ainu representation in Japanese comics has shifted from a poignant requiem for the noble ways of a dying race to a vibrant celebration of Ainu culture over these four decades. Drawing on Pauwels' insights regarding the relationship between depiction, creator, and subject matter, one might theorise that this significant shift reflects a broader change in Japanese societal attitudes. Notably, the promotion of Ainu culture has indeed become an item on the Japanese state's agenda since the late 1990s.

In 1984, the Ainu Association of Hokkaido proposed a relatively progressive law to replace the Protection Act, which would have guaranteed the Ainu rights related to political representation and participation, protections against socioeconomic discrimination, and the establishment of a national organisation to govern Ainu policy. It would have even included economic benefits as a form of reparations for their historical dispossession. However, after this proposal reached the National Diet, where it was reviewed by the Council of Experts on the Implementation of Countermeasures for the Ainu People (Utari Taisaku no Arikata ni kansuru Yūshikisha Kondankai ウタリ対策のあり方に関する有識者懇談会), it lost most of its progressive character. Based on the report of the Council, the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act (Ainu Bunka no Shinkō narabini Ainu no Dentōtō ni kansuru Chishiki no Fukyū oyobi Keihatsu ni kansuru Hōritsu アイヌ文化の振興並びにアイヌの伝統等に関する知識の普及及び啓発

[52] Kono Manga ga Sugoi! WEB 2016: *Golden Kamuy Tanjōhiwa*.
[53] Nakagawa 2019: 244–245.
[54] Mangapedia n.d.: *Golden Kamuy*.

に関する法律) was passed in 1997. Its sole focus was on the promotion and dissemination of Ainu culture, which it narrowly defined in the apolitical terms of language, dance, music, and handicraft. For the implementation of this law, the Foundation for the Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (Ainu Bunka Shinkō Kenkyū Suishin Kikō アイヌ文化振興・研究・推進機構)—the predecessor of the current Foundation for Ainu Culture (Ainu Minzoku Bunka Zaidan アイヌ民族文化財団)[55]—was created. Eléonore Komai cynically describes this change as the replacement of the antiquated dying race rhetoric with the modernised discourse of a dying culture.[56] Viewed from this angle, the contrast between *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* seems a bit less stark.

In 2019, the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act was replaced by the Act on Promoting Measures to Realise a Society in which the Pride of the Ainu People is Respected (Ainu no Hitobito no Hokori ga Sonchō sareru Shakai wo Jitsugen suru tame no Shisaku no Suishin ni kansuru Hōritsu アイヌの人々の誇りが尊重される社会を実現するための施策の推進に関する法律). This was the result of 10 years of deliberation. After both houses of the Japanese Diet declared the Ainu as the Indigenous people of Japan in a 2008 joint resolution, the Advisory Council for Future Ainu Policy (Ainu Seisaku no Arikata ni kansuru Yūshikisha Kondankai アイヌ政策のあり方に関する有識者懇談会) was established. It published its final report in 2009, which became the basis of the New Ainu Policy 10 years later. While the policy utilises Ainu culture as a tourist attraction to aid in the revitalisation of rural Hokkaidō, it mandates all prefectures to promote Ainu culture and traditions. Additionally, the government was also required to establish the first ever national Ainu organisation, the Ainu Policy Promotion Headquarters (Naikaku Kanbō Ainu Sōgō Seisakushitsu 内閣官房アイヌ総合政策室). Although Ainu cultural promotion was finally elevated to the national level, a resolution of related political issues is still considered a target for the future.[57]

The shift from assimilation to the promotion of Ainu culture, coupled with the two *manga* artists' different approach to drawing Ainu characters, establishes a markedly different tone in the first chapter of *Golden Kamuy* compared to *Shumari*. Shumari, an ex-samurai, acts as the guardian of the helpless Ainu from the very beginning: his story starts when he reluctantly saves Imekano イメカノ, an Ainu damsel in distress, from a group of bandits. On the way back to her *kotan,* he charms her with his expert survival skills, but their relationship is tragically cut short by a wolf attack, leaving a heartbroken Shumari to return her

[55] Ainu Minzoku Bunka Zaidan n.d.: *Enkaku*.
[56] Komai 2022: 152–154.
[57] *Ibid.,* 155–159.

body to her village community.[58] These roles are switched up in *Golden Kamuy*: Sugimoto Saichi 杉本佐一, a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), is on a mission to find the lost gold of the Ainu when he gets attacked by a bear. He is saved by Asirpa アシㇼパ, whose Indigenous knowledge and capabilities as a huntress impress him so much that he recruits her to be his equal partner in the treasure hunt.[59] Through the figure of Asirpa, the Ainu are quickly freed from the role of the helpless victim while their cultural practices are affirmed as having immense value for everyday life and survival on Hokkaidō.

From this point forward, Asirpa imparts her Indigenous knowledge to Sugimoto, and, by extension, to the readers of the *manga*. Her character effectively serves as a conduit for the *mangaka,* conveying crucial insight into Ainu cultural practices. These insights encompass various aspects of Ainu culture, including their traditional religious beliefs. Moreover, this cultural element is intricately woven into the structure of the plot, making it particularly suitable for a focused analysis within the limited scope of this study.

Nakagawa explains that the belief in *kamuy* is intrinsically linked to the personification of the environment, a central aspect of the traditional Ainu worldview. The Ainu traditionally understand the world by anthropomorphising it, attributing a soul to every entity—whether animal, plant, inanimate object, or natural phenomenon. An entity is revered as a *kamuy* if it displays abilities superior to humans or somehow benefits them with its existence. *Kamuy* usually reside in their own realm called *kamuy mosir* カムイモシㇼ, where they live and appear exactly like humans, and only visit the human world (*aynu mosir* アイヌモシㇼ), to interact with its inhabitants. These interactions are essential for both parties, as each requires goods that can only be obtained through trade with the other. For instance, a *kamuy*—in its original spirit form invisible to the human eye—might appear as a brown bear, presenting its hosts with the bear's meat and pelt. In turn, humans must reciprocate with praises and other offerings, such as alcohol or Japanese rice cakes. Failing to do so would put an end to the visits, leaving the ungrateful humans to starve.[60]

The same information is conveyed in the *manga* through a few thought bubbles paired with detailed, realistic illustrations. One standout example showcases *manga*'s ability to effectively illustrate complex concepts: it depicts a spirit resembling a bearded Ainu man as he drapes the forms of various animals—a wolf, a fox, a deer, a brown bear, a rabbit, an owl, and a squirrel—over

[58] Tezuka 2015a: 11–31.
[59] Noda 2015a: *loc* 47–97.
[60] Nakagawa 2019: 18–24.

his shoulders like a cape. It is moments like this that give *Golden Kamuy* the appearance of an illustrated textbook.[61]

The most frequently depicted *kamuy* in Noda's *manga* is the brown bear (*kimunkamuy* キムンカムイ). The *manga* touches on the two primary rituals associated with this animal and provides a detailed explanation on the *wenkamuy* ウェンカムイ, a concept that is often linked to reddish-coated brown bears. The exploration of the traditional Ainu worldview described above is prompted by Asirpa and Sugimoto's discovery of a orphaned bear cub and serves as a prelude to the description of one of these rituals, the *iyomante* イヨマンテ.[62] Sugimoto initially believes that the little cub will be released into the mountains after it matures in a few years, but Asirpa quickly corrects him. Once it reaches adolescence, the cub will be ritualistically sacrificed to send its spirit back to *kamuy mosir*. To persuade Sugimoto—and *Wajin* readers—that the cub is not simply slaughtered out of cruelty, she highlights the Indigenous reasoning behind this practice. Her explanation is richly illustrated with realistic depictions of a *heperset* ヘペレセッ cage, a *nusasan* ヌササン altar decorated with bear skulls, people celebrating, an old man praying, and a younger man shooting a blunt ceremonial arrow (*heper'ay* ヘペレアイ).[63]

These pictures are all important snapshots from the *iyomante* ritual, which technically begins years before the event when Ainu hunters discover a bear cub. This discovery is interpreted as the mother bear entrusting humans with the care of her child, leading them to bring the cub back to the *kotan* to be carefully raised for several years. Once the bear matures, the people of the *kotan,* along with guests from neighbouring villages, gather to return the adolescent *kamuy* to its parents in *kamuy mosir*. The *iyomante* ritual commences with an elder praying to the fire goddess, as depicted in the *manga*'s illustration. Joined by other men, the elder then releases the adolescent bear from the *heperset* cage, allowing it to play and roam briefly. Following this final playtime, the bear is ritualistically sacrificed by shooting it with *heper'ay* arrows and strangling it between two logs. The carcass is then skinned, and the bear's head is placed on the folded skin. The adolescent spirit is believed to inhabit this form during the ensuing festivities. It is invited inside the house through the god window (*kamuy puyar* カムイプヤㇻ), where it observes the villagers' merriment and

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[61] Noda 2015b: *loc* 86–87.

[62] The *mangaka*'s decision to utilise *iyomante* as a plot device to introduce Ainu religious beliefs is a judicious choice. Spirit-sending ceremonies are central to traditional Ainu social identity, *iyomante* being the most significant among them. While Watanabe Hitoshi 渡辺仁 characterised this ritual as the essential core of Ainu identity, Utagawa Hiroshi 宇田川洋views it as a mechanism for the survival of Ainu culture amidst economic and political oppression (Fitzhugh 1999: 21).

[63] Noda 2015b: *loc* 84–89.

receives gifts of sacred shaved sticks (*inaw* イナウ), dried salmon (*satcep* サッチェㇷ゚), and alcohol (*tonoto* トノト). The celebration continues the following evening with the recitation of heroic tales called *yukar* ユカㇻ,[64] which are deliberately left unfinished to entice the *kamuy* to return. The ritual concludes with the bear's head—adorned with sacred wood shavings (*inawkike* イナウキケ)—being placed on the *nusasan* altar, just outside the *kamuy puyar*. Finally, a final ceremonial arrow is shot to guide the spirit back to its home.[65]

Additionally, the *mangaka* offers a logical explanation for this practice to further alleviate potential discomfort that readers may feel towards the sacrifice of the bear cub. Why do the Ainu invest years in raising the bear only to sacrifice it later? Logically, more fur and meat can be harvested from an adolescent bear than a very young cub.[66] After all, the practice of raising livestock for slaughter should not be unfamiliar to non-Indigenous people, including both Westerners and the *Wajin* majority of Japan.

Another ritual closely associated with brown bears is the *hopunire* ホプニレ. In Ainu culture, three types of sending ceremonies are traditionally practiced: those for animals, plants, and tools. Animal-sending ceremonies are further divided into two categories: *iyomante* and *hopunire*. In Sakhalin and Hokkaidō, the former typically refers to the ritualistic sacrifice of semi-domesticated bears but can also include ceremonies for the fish owl revered as the guardian spirit of the *kotan*. On the other hand, *hopunire* encompasses sending ceremonies for foxes, raccoon dogs, wolves, deer, whales, and fish owls, as well as for adult bears hunted in the mountains. In this latter case, the ceremony is known as *kamuy hopunire* カムイオプニレ[67] in the Kushiro region (Kushiro-chiiki 釧路地域).[68]

The *hopunire* ritual begins when Ainu hunters kill an adult bear during a hunt in the mountains and process its carcass on-site for easier transportation back to the village. The act of hunting is interpreted as the *kamuy* guest (the

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[64] *Yukar* are tales of epic poetry that typically recount the exploits of a young boy with superhuman abilities. The storyteller enhances the rhythmic chanting by tapping the beat on the rim of the fireplace with a special stick called *repni* レㇷ゚ニ. Listeners actively participate by tapping along and offering exclamations (*hetce* ヘッチェ). Some *yukar* are so lengthy that even three days and nights are insufficient to recount them from start to finish. A similar genre is called *kamuy yukar* カムイユカㇻ, where the hero is usually a *kamuy*. The storyteller assumes the role of the *kamuy,* chanting in the first person. The performance is enlivened by repeated phrases called *sakehe* サケヘ. Both *yukar* and *kamuy yukar* are sung in a polite version of the Ainu language known as *atomteitak* アトㇺテイタㇰ (Kojima 2018: 217–218).

[65] Akino 1999: 248–250.

[66] Noda 2015b: *loc* 90.

[67] In the Ainu dialects of Hokkaidō, the word *kamuy* is frequently used synonymously with *kimunkamuy* due to the elevated status of the brown bear (Nakagawa 2019: 28).

[68] Utagawa 1999: 256–257.

bear) accepting the invitation (the poisoned arrow) extended by its human hosts (the hunters) to join them for a celebration. The bear's pelt is peeled from the carcass and folded with the head still attached, which is likened to removing the coat from a human guest, as highlighted in the *manga*.[69] It is then transported back to the *kotan* either bound to an individual's back with rope or carried on the shoulders of two or more people, similar to a *mikoshi* 神輿 shrine. The latter method is illustrated in the *manga*.[70] The celebration held in the adult bear's honour is essentially identical to the previously described *iyomante* ritual: the *kamuy* is invited into the house through the *kamuy puyar*, where the villagers engage in dancing, singing, feasting, and storytelling while honouring their guest with gifts, which translate to heightened wealth and prestige for the recipient in *kamuy mosir*.[71] During their visit to the Kushiro area, Asirpa and Sugimoto also participate in a *kamuy hopunire,* during which Asirpa highlights the difference between the two types of bear-sending ceremonies. Additionally, there is a beautifully detailed illustration of the *kamuy* seated in a place of honour during the festivities.[72]

A being of Ainu folklore that plays a pivotal role in *Golden Kamuy*'s main storyline is the *wenkamuy,* or the bad *kamuy*. A *kamuy* is branded as bad if it is a threat to humans. Just as the *kamuy* are free to cease their visitation of ungrateful humans, the Ainu are also not expected to tolerate the abuse of these hostile spirits.[73] Interestingly, this aspect of Ainu culture is completely misinterpreted by Tezuka.[74] In the scene where Shumari presents the body of Imekano to her

[69] Noda 2017: *loc* 55.
[70] *Ibid*., *loc* 57.
[71] Nakagawa 2019: 30–31.
[72] Noda 2017: *loc* 58–59.
[73] Nakagawa 2019: 40.
[74] This is not the only instance of misinformation affecting Tezuka's depiction of the Ainu people and their culture. For example, he emphasises their identity as hunter-gatherers, with Shumari noting that the Ainu seldom cultivate the land (Tezuka 2015a: 146). This portrayal is a bit problematic, as the characterisation of the Ainu as solely hunter-gatherers has historically been used by previous scholars of Ainu studies to assert their supposed primitiveness, thereby justifying agricultural colonisation. Furthermore, the history of Ainu farming continues to be overlooked by many scholars (Hudson 2014: 117–118). In reality, however, the primary subsistence activities of the Ainu—hunting, fishing, and gathering—were traditionally supplemented by small-scale agriculture (Keira–Keira 1999: 234). Women, children, and the elderly cultivated garden plots during the spring and summer months, harvesting grains, roots, and beans in the autumn (*ibid*., 237). The relative unimportance of Ainu agriculture can also be partially attributed to the influence of the Matsumae fief, which prohibited the Ainu from cultivating their native crops and Japanese rice to increase their dependence on trade with the *Wajin*. Additionally, as Ainu women—the primary agricultural labour force—began to work in the fisheries, they had less time to dedicate to their garden plots (Walker 2001: 85–87). Another indication of the gaps in Tezuka's research is his incorrect use of the verb *kimun*

village community, one Ainu man sadly remarks that her death was the will of the *kamuy,* which leaves them without recourse.[75] To the contrary, the traditional Ainu method for seeking revenge on a *wenkamuy* is introduced in the second chapter of Noda's *manga*. In this scene, Asirpa refuses her share of a men-eating bear that she and Sugimoto killed together. She explains that the bear is considered a *wenkamuy* due to its crime of killing and eating a human being. Consequently, its body is to be left to decompose as a form of punishment, while its soul is condemned to the Ainu version of hell known as *teynepoknamosir* テイネポㇰナモシㇼ.[76]

Leaving the body of a *kamuy* to decompose is considered an effective punishment, as these spirits are believed to be unable to leave their physical form without human assistance. By forgoing a sending ceremony, humans can imprison the offending *kamuy* within its own decaying flesh, preventing its return to *kamuy mosir*. As a further precaution, the carcass is sometimes cut up into small pieces and scattered, making the *wenkamuy*'s escape even more difficult. However, this method can prove ineffective against particularly powerful hostile spirits that possess the ability to reassemble their bodies at will. To prevent this, humans may invoke the power of the fire goddess by smearing the remains with ash or burning it together with garbage. Alternatively, they may offer the remains to a vengeful *kamuy* trapped in a fallen tree. After successfully imprisoning the *wenkamuy,* the Ainu pray to the other *kamuy*, imploring them to banish the guilty spirit to suffer eternally in *teynepoknamosir*.[77]

Sugimoto and Asirpa fight many a bear throughout the 31-volume series, but one of their most dangerous encounters is with three brown bears that have reddish-brown coats.[78] The imminent danger of this encounter is foreshadowed by Asirpa's remark about red-coated bears being regarded as particularly ill-tempered in tales of Ainu oral literature.[79] This subplot mirrors the traditional Ainu belief that some bears are more likely to become *wenkamuy* than others. Whereas black-coated bears living on the mountaintop are regarded as high-ranking and peaceful *kamuy,* their reddish-coated brethren living at the foot of mountains are seen as inherently mean and therefore dangerous to humans. For this reason, they are also referred to as *nupurikesunpuriwenkur* ヌプリケスンプリウェンクㇽ, literally meaning 'he who lives at the foot of the mountain and behaves badly'. According to Ainu oral literature, these red-coated *kimunkamuy*

キムン—which means 'being in' or 'going into the mountains' (Kokuritsu Ainu Minzoku Hakubutsukan n.d.: *Kimun*)—as an abbreviated form of *kimunkamuy* (Tezuka 2015a: 202).

[75] Tezuka 2015a: 31.

[76] Noda 2015a: *loc* 93.

[77] Nakagawa 2019: 42–45.

[78] Noda 2016a: *loc* 131.

[79] *Ibid.,* 96.

tend to repent in the face of eternal damnation, offering up their services as a guardian deity to their intended victims.[80]

Golden Kamuy indirectly addresses the reformation of the *wenkamuy* by substituting the traditional men-eating bear for the titular *kamuy* of gold. The narrative suggests that the Ainu's lost gold functions as a malevolent force, bringing only suffering to its possessors. This interpretation is reinforced through repeated references throughout the text and culminates in Lieutenant Tsurumi's 鶴見中尉 unhinged monologue, which canonises the gold's *wenkamuy* status.[81]

While the Ainu did not venerate gold as a *kamuy,* there is an entity in their folklore that may have inspired Noda's portrayal of it as a bloodthirsty spirit: *Tumuncikamuy* トゥムンチカムイ. The word *tumunci* means war or massacre in the Ainu language, and *Tumuncikamuy* lives up to its name by compelling people to fight and kill one another to satiate its literal thirst for human blood. Nakagawa recounts a tale where a villager brings home a mysterious box containing the armour and sword of *Tumuncikamuy*.[82] It is deliberately placed in the villager's way by the bloodthirsty spirit itself to be brought back to the *kotan* and used there as a conduit of the *kamuy*'s harmful influence. The presence of the box leads to a massacre that spares only two women.[83] This story parallels Noda's bloody treasure hunt, though his gilded version of *Tumuncikamuy* ultimately transforms into a penitent *wenkamuy,* as Asirpa uses the gold to fund the establishment of Hokkaidō's national parks.[84]

As demonstrated above, reading *Golden Kamuy* can be an educational experience due to Noda's emphasis on showcasing the beauty and richness of Ainu culture. However, this approach obscures the challenges the Ainu had to face during the second half of the Meiji period. By following the journey of Asirpa and Sugimoto as they visit various small Ainu villages during their treasure hunt, readers are afforded the opportunity to immerse themselves in numerous aspects of traditional Ainu culture. In addition to religious beliefs, the *manga* explores Indigenous methods of hunting, fishing and gathering, native techniques of garment and tool production, Ainu cuisine, social etiquette, and oral literature across 31 volumes. Yet, the unfortunate reality is that by 1907, when the series is set,[85] this traditional and peacefully secluded way of life was no

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[80] Nakagawa 2019: 29.

[81] Noda 2021: *loc* 210.

[82] The story referenced by Nakagawa is an Ainu folktale (*uwepeker* ウウェペケㇾ). Unlike *yukar* and *kamuy yukar,* the prose of these epic narratives closely resembles everyday Ainu conversations. While some *uwepeker* are quite brief, the longer ones can take over two hours to narrate in full (Kojima 2018: 219).

[83] Nakagawa 2024: 64–67.

[84] Noda 2022b: *loc* 252.

[85] Noda 2022a: *loc* 144.

longer a reality for most Ainu, as an increasing number of *Wajin* settlers had begun purchasing land and establishing farms.[86]

This misleading portrayal of Ainu history is further compounded by the *mangaka*'s relegation of its problematic aspects into the background of his narrative. For instance, while the damage inflicted on the Ainu through forced relocations[87] and diseases introduced by *Wajin* settlers[88] are mentioned, these tragic events are situated in the past of *Golden Kamuy*'s main storyline, thereby remaining on the periphery of the readers' focus. Similarly, although it is noted that the Ainu are not permitted to hunt or fish freely,[89] the significance of these restrictive laws may be lost on readers not well-versed in Ainu history, as the main characters frequently disregard these oppressive regulations to hunt and fish at will. In reality, the laws that effectively banned the Ainu from hunting deer (1899) and catching salmon (1898) played a pivotal role in the destruction of their traditional way of life that Noda so lovingly portrays, as these meats were the most important components of the Ainu diet.[90] Noda's preference for emphasising the vibrancy of Ainu culture over the Indigenous suffering caused by colonisation certainly frees his Ainu characters from the stereotypical portrayal of powerless victims, but it also obscures the darker complexities of Ainu–Wajin relations.

An additional reason for not reading Noda's *manga* as an illustrated textbook on Ainu culture and history is his tendency to frequently exercise his creative freedom as *mangaka* by blending fact and fiction in his work. At times, the blending of reality and fantasy is explicitly acknowledged within the text, as seen in Asirpa's atypical gender presentation. Her refusal to engage in women's work and to undergo traditional tattooing is a source of frustration for her grandmother.[91] Asirpa's portrayal as a huntress is considered atypical,[92] because hunting—along with the preparation and execution of religious ceremonies, fishing, and tool production—was traditionally regarded as the men's responsibility, while gathering, gardening, clothing and utensil production, and childrearing were tasks typically assigned to women.[93] Additionally, tattoos were believed

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[86] Emori 2015: 427.

[87] Noda 2018: *loc* 142–147.

[88] Noda 2016b: *loc* 106.

[89] Noda 2015a: *loc* 19.

[90] Nakagawa 2019: 69.

[91] Noda 2015b: *loc* 80–81.

[92] Interestingly, while atypical, such cases are not unprecedented. Similar instances to that of Asirpa can be found in historical records. Nakagawa references Kitahara Mokottunas 北原モコットゥナㇱ, who has found mention of two Ainu huntresses. One of these women was trained to become a skilled hunter following the death of her brothers. The other, named Ciyuhirika チユヒリカ, is recorded in Matsuura Takeshirō's 松浦武四郎 (1818–1888) *Kinsei Ezo Jinbutsu-shi* 近世蝦夷人物誌 (Nakagawa 2019: 198).

[93] Keira–Keira 1999: 234–235.

to enhance the beauty of Ainu women, making the reaction of Asirpa's grandmother quite realistic. Traditionally, Ainu women had tattoos around their lips, on their forearms, and on their hands. The process involved making small incisions with a knife on the desired area, rubbing soot into the wounds, and treating them with antiseptic plant juices. This practice usually began when girls were around six or seven years old and required multiple sessions to complete. By the time the tattoos were completed, the girls—typically in their late teens—were considered ready for marriage. However, the practice of tattooing was banned by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1799 and later by the Meiji government in 1871, leading to its gradual decline.[94]

At other times, the fictional elements are so seamlessly integrated into the narrative that casual readers may not recognise them, rendering these instances particularly misleading. For example, there is a scene in which the *mangaka* slightly misrepresents a technique called *kuwaecarse* クワエチャㇻセ to compose a visually striking moment that highlights Asirpa's competence. In the *manga*, she uses her staff as a makeshift snowboard to slide down a snowy mountain.[95] However, in reality, the staff functioned as a ski pole, aiding Ainu hunters in their descent while they glided on the snow using their specially made boots.[96]

Conclusion

Shumari and *Golden Kamuy* belong to a well-established genre of *manga*: the longstanding relationship between Japanese comics and historical narratives is highlighted by Morris-Suzuki, who traces their connection back to the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of long-format historical comics in Japan. Notable examples of this era include Shirato Sanpei's 白土三平 (1932–2021) *Ninja Bugeichō* 忍者武芸帳 and Ishinomori Shōtarō's 石ノ森章太郎 (1938–1998) *Manga Nihon no Rekishi* マンガ日本の歴史. While the long format is well-suited to the exploration of complex historical themes, the visual creativity and widespread appeal of the *manga* medium have allowed these works to reach a broad audience, potentially having as profound an impact on popular perceptions of Japanese history as conventional textbooks.[97]

A key characteristic of historical *manga*—and comic books in general, regardless of their country of origin—is their tendency to be more action driven, often prioritising conflict over the more peaceful aspects of history. *Shumari*

[94] Kodama 1999: 325–326.
[95] Noda 2015c: *loc* 106.
[96] Nakagawa 2019: 243–244.
[97] Morris-Suzuki 2015: 175–177.

and *Golden Kamuy* exemplify this tendency, centring on the violent exploits of a samurai-turned-settler and a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War against the backdrop of the broader conflict between the Indigenous Ainu and their *Wajin* colonisers. When depicting such conflicts, the *mangaka* possesses the ability to shape readers' sympathies by narrating the story from the perspective of certain characters. This effect is intensified by a quality of Japanese comics that is also shared by propaganda images and political cartoons: the stark lines and exaggerated features of *manga* imprint on the human mind, leaving a lasting impression that continues to influence readers' perception of history.[98]

As places of memory, *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* are distinguished from other historical *manga* by the deliberate choice of Tezuka and Noda to engage *Wajin* readers in a narrative that elicits sympathy for the Ainu characters by contradicting their preconceived notions about the Indigenous people of the Japanese north. This approach encourages readers to reflect on their role in the shared history of the Ainu and *Wajin* and to reevaluate the incorporation of the northern island into the Japanese Empire in light of historical truthfulness. However, the *mangaka*'s commitment to being historically truthful does not render their works without flaws: Tezuka's empathetic portrayal of the dispossessed Ainu risks perpetuating the dying race stereotype, while Noda's tendency to hide unsightly history behind the beauty of Ainu culture may lead to a superficial understanding of the complex relationship between the Ainu and the *Wajin* among his readership.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these flaws, *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* remain compelling places of memory for analysis, functioning as written and drawn monuments to Ainu history. They gain their significance by symbolising a history that is largely devoid of traditional physical monuments, making them valuable subjects for further research. Their hybridity is particularly noteworthy: defying Nora's clear distinction between places of memory created by the victors and the vanquished, *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy* are reassessments of colonised Ainu history, authored by the descendants of the very people who colonised them. This hybridity provides further evidence for the validity of Pauwels' warning about the nature of pre-made visuals, yet it raises important questions about the ownership and shaping of collective memory: who holds the right to dictate how we remember Ainu history?[99]

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[98] *Ibid.,* 181–184.
[99] Nora 2009: 32.

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[101] In accordance with her own preferences, ann-elise lewallen’s name is written consequently in lower case.

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