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Ainu Representation in the World of Japanese Comics: Witnessing Indigenous Rights Violations in Japanese Graphic Life Narratives

Abstract

Chiri Yukie and the Ainu (*Chiri Yukie to Ainu* 知里幸恵とアイヌ, 2018) and *Song of the Kamuy* (*Kamuy no Uta* カムイのうた, 2023) are both Japanese comics that fictionalize the life of Chiri Yukie (1903–1922), an Ainu poet whose first and only published work titled *Collection of Ainu Chants of Spiritual Beings* (*Ainu Shinyōshū* アイヌ神謡集, 1923) was one of the earliest efforts for the transmission of a living Ainu identity. This paper analyses the content of the above-mentioned manga by employing Olga Micheal’s methodology. In her book titled *Human Rights in Graphic Life Narratives* (2023), Michael theorizes that graphic life narratives—including Western comic books—have the potential to highlight or obscure the connection between the colonial history of the Global South and the current human rights violations committed against its inhabitants. Reformulating her theory to fit the Japanese context, this paper seeks to find out how the above-mentioned manga portray the interrelatedness of Hokkaidō’s status as a settler colony and the violation of the Ainu people’s indigenous rights during Yukie’s lifetime, when special primary schools were set up to mould Ainu children into dutiful Japanese citizens, and Ainu cemeteries were routinely robbed to satisfy the scientific curiosity of Wajin anthropologists. To different degrees, the above-mentioned manga both gloss over the role colonialism played in these injustices, just as they leave out that Yukie could be seen as a victim of the colonial power imbalance between her and Kindaichi Kyōsuke (1882–1971), the Wajin professor she worked with. Even though the ambiguity inherent in both stories’ portrayal of real-life events and sentiments is antithetical to the spirit of *historical truthfulness*, as advocated for by Tessa-Morris Suzuki (2005), they can be seen as something more than casual entertainment. In addition to transforming their readers into *secondary witnesses*, *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* and *Song of the Kamuy* are both *places of memory*, as originally defined by Pierre Nora (2009). While the former is elevated to this status by virtue of being an educational *gakushū manga*, the latter is transformed by the activist stance taken by its creators against Ainu discrimination.

Keywords: Ainu orature, Chiri Yukie, historical truthfulness, indigenous rights, Kindaichi Kyōsuke, manga, places of memory, settler colony, secondary witness, systemic discrimination

Introduction

After long decades of assimilationist policies, the culture of the Ainu people, who are widely regarded as the indigenous minority of Northern Japan, now enjoys the official support of the Japanese government. The first legal expression of this governmental endorsement was the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act (CPA) of 1997. To oversee the implementation of the CPA, the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture—later renamed the Foundation for Ainu Culture (Foundation)—was created. In 2008, the lower and upper houses of the Japanese Diet jointly declared the Ainu to be an indigenous group, which resulted in the CPA giving way to the Ainu Policy Promotion Act (PPA) 11 years later. The PPA redefines Ainu culture as a matter of the national agenda by mandating all prefectures to develop their own strategies ensuring its promotion on the local level, and by requiring the government to create the Ainu Policy Promotion Headquarters to oversee the implementation of a national Ainu policy.

Although the CPA signified a seemingly progressive turn in Japan's treatment of the Ainu, it drew the criticism of scholars, as summarized by Eléonore Komai. First, Ainu lands were conceived of as an inherent part of Japan's territory during the CPA's inception, leaving their colonial legacy unaddressed. Second, the law's sole focus was on the promotion and dissemination of Ainu culture, granting no political or economic rights to the Ainu. Third, the CPA narrowly defined Ainu culture as an archaic and unchanging composite of traditional dance, music, handicraft and the Ainu language, without any political dimension. Finally, the Foundation's activities were designed by Wajin 和人¹ bureaucrats without any

¹ The relevant literature supplies interested researchers with several ethnonyms denoting the dominant ethnic group of Japan, which are compiled by David L. Howell. Yamato 大和 was once a popular choice that fell out of favour because of its close association with prewar Japanese nationalism. Samo サモ is a possible alternative originating in the Ainu language: it is derived from the word *sisam* シサム (meaning 'neighbour') and it has been commonly used by the Ainu themselves to refer to their southern neighbours since 1467, at least. This term has a slightly derogatory undertone, making it comparable in Howell's opinion to the Hawai'ian *haole*—a dismissive exonym for white people. Wajin is usually the default term of choice for scholars today. It was widely used in the Hokkaidō of the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, with the first documented instance of it dating back to 1799 (Howell 2014: 109). While the negative connotations of Yamato and Samo make the author of this article cautious about adopting them into the paper's terminology, it is important to acknowledge that defaulting to Wajin is also a problematic choice, as pointed out by Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt in a private conversation during the 2025 NAJS Conference, which took place in Reykjavik on 22 and 23 May. According to Iwata-Weickgenannt, the word Wajin may potentially function as a barrier between contemporary members of the Japanese majority and the darker aspects of Ainu-Wajin shared history, allowing them to disassociate themselves from the past. Since they presumably identify as Nihonjin 日本人, the past atrocities committed against the Ainu by Wajin may seem unrelated to them, the Nihonjin of today. This line of inquiry deserves further exploration.

Ainu involvement. Based on these characteristics, Komai interprets the CPA as an attempt to reframe the previously prominent *dying race* (*horobiyuku minzoku* 滅びゆく民族) discourse.² According to this updated narrative, it is no longer the Ainu people who need the government's help, but their *dying culture*.³

The PPA now treats Ainu culture as an object of national concern. However, indigenous land rights and other related political rights are still not being implemented. Their absence prompts Komai to question if such a law could effectively facilitate the reinvigoration of Ainu culture. Nevertheless, this may not be a shortcoming, but simply a reflection of the lawmakers' true intentions, which are supposedly more focused on the utilization of Ainu culture as a tourist attraction to stimulate the economy of rural Hokkaidō and the cosmetic enhancement of Japan's international standing regarding indigenous matters. The former objective has prominently taken shape in the National Ainu Museum and Park, nicknamed Upopoy ウポポイ (lit. 'many people singing together') in the Ainu language.⁴

The criticism of the current Ainu policy is approached from a different angle by ann-elise lewallen.⁵ She observes that the Foundation—and through it the Japanese government—has been vested with the power to define and shape Ainu culture since the enactment of the CPA and the PPA. The Foundation's authority is legitimated by the economic power it wields, as it only funds those Ainu organizations that conform to its notions of Ainu tradition.⁶ However, long before the Wajin authorities decided to meddle in the cultural affairs of the Ainu, the preservation of these practices was solely the domain of Ainu women. Their role as keepers of the home (*cisekor katkemat* チセコロ カツケマツ)⁷ partially shielded them from the pressures of the new Hokkaidō government's assimilationist agenda during the Meiji period (1868–1912). While Ainu men, who mainly worked outside the home, were forced to abandon their ethnic identity, Ainu women were enabled by the relative privacy of the domestic sphere to

² After the ideas of social Darwinism were adopted by Japanese intellectuals and the wider public alike in the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Ainu gradually came to be seen as members of an inferior race, which was destined to die out because of its inherent inability to survive in the modernizing world. For a brief overview on the evolution of this negative stereotype, see Siddle 2011: 105–131.

³ Komai 2022: 153–154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 158–159.

⁵ To honour her preferences, ann-elise lewallen's name is written without using capital letters in the main text, the footnotes and the reference list of this article.

⁶ lewallen 2016: 82.

⁷ Ainu words are romanized in the style of the *Akor Itak* アコロ イタク Ainu language textbook. For further information about this romanization system, see Hokkaidō Utari Kyōkai (2002: 4–6).

become keepers of all Ainu cultural knowledge,⁸ taking over functions that were originally reserved for men in the process.⁹

Based on a description by Sarah M. Strong, Monasnouk モナシノウク (1848–1931), a Hokkaidō Ainu woman and a well-known reciter of Ainu oral literature (orature),¹⁰ can be highlighted as a shining example of the female Ainu culture bearer, since she was a keeper of both feminine and masculine traditions. On the one hand, she was a typical female storyteller in the sense that she was regarded as a shamaness¹¹ by her community. On the other hand, her vast repertoire also included pieces of epic poetry called *yukar* ユカラ, which were originally only narrated by men.¹²

Strong further posits that Monasnouk was the source of the traditional Ainu tales contained in the *Ainu Shinyōshū* アイヌ神謡集 (*Collection of Ainu Chants of Spiritual Beings*, 1923), which is a small collection of 13 *kamuy yukar* カムイ ユカラ. These are chants of spirits that are theorized to have originated from the utterances of female shamans under possession. Monasnouk is credited as a likely source because the book was authored¹³ by her granddaughter and protegee, Chiri Yukie (1903–1922).¹⁴

⁸ Before the end of the 18th century, traditional Ainu society was structured along the lines of male and female gender roles. Men prepared and executed religious ceremonies, hunted game in the forests, fished in the rivers, and carved wood into tools. Women gathered food and gardened during the warmer months, produced clothes and various utensils, and generally took care of their families (Keira–Keira 1999: 234–235).

⁹ lewallen 2016: 16–18.

¹⁰ The texts of oral literature are traditionally transmitted through oral performance and its aural reception. This is where orature most prominently differs from written literature. For a brief overview regarding the various other differences between oral and written forms of literature, see Wallner (2017: 72–84).

¹¹ Among the Hokkaidō Ainu, engaging in shamanic practices was a vocation primarily followed by women. These female shamans were called *tusukur* トウスクル, and they served as passive mediums in the sense that they traditionally required the help of a male elder to open themselves up to spirit possession (Wada 1996: 305–306).

¹² Strong 2011: 2, 22.

¹³ Strong writes that Yukie's role in the creation of the *Ainu Shinyōshū* was to 'transcribe, translate and arrange' the *kamuy yukar* chants for publication (*ibid.*, 3), insinuating that only the Japanese translation is the result of Yukie's own creative work. However, Kitamichi Kunihiko 北道邦彦 and Tsuboi Hideto 坪井秀人 effectively argue against this position by asserting that Yukie is also the author—not simply the translator—of the Ainu-language texts, as each instance of retelling a piece of oral literature is a spontaneous act of creating the storyteller's own version of it (Tsuboi 2007: 85). A possible reason for the continued denial of Yukie's authorship since her work was first published is theorized by Tsuboi. By writing down the Ainu-language texts utilizing the Latin alphabet and translating them to Japanese, these chants were appropriated in the context of Japanese colonialism as a simple tool to aid Kindaichi's investigation into the phonetics of the Ainu language (*ibid.*, 102, 115). That is to say, only Yukie's Japanese translation was allowed to have any literary merit, while her Ainu texts had to serve the practical purposes of a Wajin researcher.

¹⁴ Strong 2011: 3, 7.

Yukie was born and raised in the small township of Horobetsu 幌別—known today as the city of Noboribetsu 登別—until the age of six, when she was relocated to Asahikawa 旭川 and entrusted to the care of her maternal aunt, Kannari Matsu 金成マツ (1875–1961). Matsu was an accomplished epic poet in her own right, and she took care of her niece with the help of her mother, Monasnouk. Growing up in such a home environment gave Yukie a deep attachment to Ainu culture and an unusual fluency in both the Japanese and the Ainu language. After a fateful meeting in her mid-teens with the famed Wajin linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke 金田一京助 (1882–1971), Yukie was inspired to record her oral heritage. She subsequently followed Kindaichi to Tōkyō, where she became a member of his household to support his research and get the *Ainu Shinyōshū* ready for publication. She successfully completed the last round of revisions on her manuscript but suffered a fatal heart attack on the very same day. She was just 19 years old at the time of her death.¹⁵

Her life may have been short, but her spirit clearly lives on in her work. In the foreword of the *Ainu Shinyōshū*, Yukie writes about her hope for a future where the Ainu are strong enough to survive in an increasingly volatile world.¹⁶ As noted by Emori Susumu 得森進, this makes her book markedly different from other similar ones compiled by Wajin researchers, whose only interest lied in the documentation of Ainu culture before it would purportedly follow the Ainu people to their waiting grave. Furthermore, Emori interprets Yukie’s intention in writing her book as an early effort to transmit a living Ainu identity through the vehicle of the Ainu words and traditional stories contained within it. He refers to this identity as the ‘hearth of the [Ainu] people’ (*minzoku no kokoro* アイヌ民族の心).¹⁷ Yukie’s personal approach is essentially antithetical to the Foundation’s current agenda, where Ainu traditions are seen as valuable artifacts that belong in the display cases of Upopoy. By taking a small, early step towards the living preservation of Ainu culture, she silently defied the dying race narrative of the past and the dying culture rhetoric of the present.

Chiri Yukie and the Ainu (*Chiri Yukie to Ainu* 知里幸恵とアイヌ, 2018) and *Song of the Kamuy* (*Kamuy no Uta* カムイのうた, 2023) are both Japanese comics that fictionalize the life of Yukie and the creation process of the *Ainu Shinyōshū*. Serving as a continuation of a previous article titled *Ainu Representation in the World of Japanese Comics: Shumari and Golden Kamuy Take on the Ruling Narratives of Hokkaidō History* (2025), this paper builds on the ideas of its predecessor by arguing that the above-mentioned biographical manga not only become *places of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*) but also function as places where

¹⁵ Nakagawa (ed.) 2023: 203–206.

¹⁶ Chiri 2023: 4.

¹⁷ Emori 2015: 464–465.

readers can bear witness to and therefore empathize with the suffering of others. By focusing specifically on the violations committed against the Ainu people's indigenous rights during Yukie's lifetime, such places additionally possess the potential to highlight the interrelatedness of these infringements and Japanese colonialism. Although the emotionally charged depictions of the assimilationist education forced on Ainu primary schoolers and the defilement of Ainu burial grounds by Wajin researchers are bound to arouse the sympathy of the readership for Yukie and her people, these Japanese comics still fall short of their potential to effectively contend with Northern Japan's colonial legacy. The various factors that contribute to this failure will be investigated in the following sections.

To unpack this line of argument, the paper first demonstrates how the concept of the *secondary witness* fits with and expands on the framework already established by the previous article. This is followed by the introduction of the concept of indigenous rights and a short description of the origins of the Ainu people's ongoing fight to secure them, highlighting the influence Yukie and the *Ainu Shinyōshū* had on the movement. The paper then turns to the main point of analysis: the issue of special Ainu schools and their representation in both manga is investigated, followed by the examination of the depiction of scientific grave robbery in *Song of the Kamuy*. Lastly, the portrayal of Kindaichi Kyōsuke—one of the main supporting characters—and the depiction of the nature of his relationship to Yukie on the pages of the manga in question are subjected to careful scrutiny.

Manga as a place of witnessing

This paper analyses the content of the above-mentioned biographical manga by employing Olga Michael's methodology.¹⁸ In her book titled *Human Rights in Graphic Life Narratives*, Michael theorizes that so-called *graphic life narratives*¹⁹—including works in the Western comic book format—have the potential

¹⁸ Olga Micheal is a researcher associated with the University of Cyprus. Her expertise is in the field of life narratives, autobiographical memory, narrative analysis and visual culture. Her other published work consists of several chapters in collected volumes and various journal articles. For instance, she most recently contributed a chapter titled 'Spatiotemporal Palimpsests, Remembered Times, and Hybrid Temporalities in Narrative Fiction on Europe's "Refugee Crisis"' to *Temporalities and Subjectivities in Migration Literature in Europe* (2024), while her latest journal article titled 'Decolonial chronotopes and palimpsestic heterotopias in Safdar Ahmed's Still Alive' was published in 2025, in the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (Micheal n.d.).

¹⁹ Life narrative is a generic term that encompasses all acts of self-representation, regardless of the type of media that the self is represented in (Smith–Watson 2015: 3–4). Michael broadens this category by including life stories that are narrated by someone other than the author or artist behind the work, referring to these bibliographical stories as a segment of contemporary

to highlight or to obscure the connection between the colonial history of the Global South and the current human rights violations committed against its inhabitants.²⁰ Michael argues for the potential of these hybrid texts to transform ordinary readers into *secondary witnesses*,²¹ who get confronted by the suffering of marginalized people in a specific manner. This manner of confrontation supposedly promotes an empathetic reaction without permitting the readers' focus to circle back to their own emotional reaction, keeping them engaged with other people's experiences. Additionally, the act of witnessing is purported to have the political power to heighten readers' awareness concerning the depicted issues and to challenge their previously held notions on history. In this context, the act of witnessing stands for reading something in an intelligent, informed and empathetic manner.²² Reformulating Michael's theory to fit the Japanese circumstances, this paper seeks to find out how the manga in question portray the interrelatedness of Hokkaidō's status as a settler colony and the violations of the Ainu people's indigenous rights during Yukie's lifetime, when special primary schools were set up to mould Ainu children into dutiful Japanese citizens, and Ainu cemeteries were routinely robbed to satisfy the scientific curiosity of Wajin anthropologist.²³

heterobiography (Michael 2023: 3). Thomas Couser and Philippe Lejeune define biography/heterobiography as a life story, 'in which the writer and narrator are one person while the subject is someone else' (Crouser 2004: 35). Additionally, Michael examines a diverse set of genres that all contain a graphic component of some kind (Michael 2023: 11–20). The manga about Yukie's life fit in well with these works in the sense that they are life narratives in the biographic vein. In other words, they are also narrated from a third person perspective, although there is no narrator character per se. The stylistic approach is where they most prominently differ from the comics investigated by Michael, since they follow the conventions of the Japanese comic book tradition.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, 11.

²¹ A secondary witness can be defined as someone who did not bear witness firsthand to an event and relies on the testimony or mediation of others to gain an understanding of it (Jones 2019: 269–270). In the case of the manga being investigated here, the meaning of the word *secondary* is admittedly stretched to its limits, since the creators of the manga introducing Yukie's life to readers are presumably only tertiary witnesses themselves, one additional step removed from the original event. By contrast, the narrator characters Michael examines are all self-inserts of mediators who are secondary witnesses. However, Michael also interprets her own scholarly reading of these works as a mode of secondary witnessing, somewhat expanding on its definition (Michael 2023: 4).

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ Michele M. Mason argues that Hokkaidō is Japan's 'only successful settler colony' (Mason 2012: 7) and 'the incubator of ideology and empire' (*ibid.*, 4), effectively defining the land of the Ainu as the unofficial birthplace of the modern Japanese state. She discusses Japanese imperialism and colonialism in detail, addressing most of the aspects that constitute these systems, as defined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. According to her, imperialism and colonialism are interconnected concepts, with the latter being an expression of the former. With

The concept of the secondary witness shares two important commonalities with Pierre Nora's places of memory, which are a core component of this paper's framework that was previously established in *Shumari and Golden Kamuy Take on the Ruling Narratives of Hokkaidō History*. Historical manga were defined there as potential places of memory.²⁴ This means that a biographical account of a person's life in manga form may be a place of memory and a *place of witnessing* at the same time. Based on the concept of the secondary witness, this paper defines places of witnessing as historical manga which invite the reader to bear witness to other people's suffering from a safe literary distance. Being a place of memory and a place of witnessing is not always mutually exclusive, as the latter requires the historical tale to be based on someone's biography.

The first of the commonalities between the two concepts is tied to human emotion: just as engaging with places of memory may elicit an emotional response,²⁵ reading about the trials and tribulations of marginalized people often

time, the meaning of imperialism became more and more layered. In the early 20th century, it was understood as 'a system of control which secured the markets and capital investments'. This economy of expansion was facilitated by colonialism (Smith 2012: 22). Accordingly, Hokkaidō quickly developed into a stronghold of Japanese capitalism during the Meiji period. The government swiftly extracted the island's resources, using their new-found wealth to finance Japan's transformation into a major power. In the 1880s, state-run industries on the island—sulphur, shipping and coal the most important among them—were privatized, giving birth to the *zaibatsu* 財閥 (financial cliques) system, which later came to facilitate the extraction of resources from all over the empire (Mason 2012: 114–115). The control that colonialism exerts over the local people to secure their resources necessarily leads to their subjugation, which may serve as another focal point in discussions of imperialism (Smith 2012: 22–23). In Hokkaidō's case, the economic exploitation of the Ainu began long before the island was incorporated into the empire in 1869, and it was compounded by the Wajin's complete disregard for their customary land-use rights during the Meiji period. Additionally, they became second class citizens as former natives (*kyūdojin* 旧土人), whose native culture was systematically being eradicated through assimilationist policies—the system of special Ainu schools among them—and the forced relocation of their communities. The apparent misery that resulted from these measures was attributed to the Ainu's inherent inferiority in Japanese popular and scholarly discourse (Mason 2012: 7–9). Imperialism also has an ideological dimension: in the context of the Enlightenment, imperialism is seen as a prerequisite for the existence of a modern state, of modern sciences or even of modern personhood (Smith 2012: 23). In a similar vein, Japan successfully redefined itself as an advanced civilization—with a continuous history, rich cultural heritage, and a unified citizenry—while appropriating the Ainu homeland (Mason 2012: 5). The other notable topic of analysis in this paper—namely the desecration of Ainu graveyards by physical anthropologists—is also connected to Japanese imperialism, since all early practitioners of anthropology, archaeology and linguistics earned their spurs by studying colonized populations, who were easily accessible to them (Siddle 1999: 77).

²⁴ Keller 2025: 151–154.

²⁵ Nora 2009: 19.

prompts emotional investment in their stories.²⁶ Tessa-Morris Suzuki suggests that once people form an emotional attachment to the past, they are likely to reevaluate their personal identity,²⁷ which implies an additional reassessment of their views on history. Emotion as a driving force behind rethinking the past relates to another similarity between how places of witnessing and places of memory operate: both are emotionally charged mediums that impact the historical understanding of those who engage with them. According to Nora, there are two primary ways places of memory may influence readers' perspectives on the past: they either explicitly challenge readers' historical knowledge, or they function as a tool for the dissemination of canonized historical information.²⁸

Each manga to be analysed in this paper embodies one of the above-mentioned approaches. *Song of the Kamuy*—the manga and a live action movie of the same title—was created as a part of an initiative called ALL Hokkaidō ALL 北海道, which is aimed at the transmission of Ainu culture and the cultivation of a symbiotic society. Consequently, the creators openly take an activist approach. In the epilogue, they claim that their manga was created to educate people about the worth of Ainu culture and to highlight the discrimination that Ainu people have faced and currently face.²⁹ Asserting that continuous discrimination against the Ainu exists runs contrary to the current common-sense knowledge about Ainu–Wajin relations, transforming *Song of the Kamuy* into a place of memory.

The existence of discrimination perpetrated against the Ainu has been continuously disputed in Japanese society. In the past, assimilationist policies besieging the traditional Ainu way of life—chief among them the Hokkaidō Former Natives Protection Act (Protection Act) of 1899—were not regarded as discrimination by the majority. Although the Protection Act's main objective was to assimilate the Ainu into Japanese society as farmers, it was heralded by lawmakers as a humanistic measure. They argued that it would prevent the Ainu from falling victim to the law of the survival of the fittest, since the ideology of social Darwinism branded them as an inferior race destined for extinction.³⁰ The continuing pressures of assimilation resulted in the disappearance of the Ainu as a group from the Japanese social and political consciousness in the post-war years, until symbols of Ainu identity became visible once more in the 1990s as a result

²⁶ Michael 2013: 4.

²⁷ Morris-Suzuki 2005: 22.

²⁸ Nora 2009: 29–30.

²⁹ Nakahara–Sugawara 2018:150–151.

³⁰ Emori 2015: 440–441.

of the Ainu people's decades long involvement in the international indigenous movement and their campaign for recognition as an indigenous group at home.³¹

However, Kitahara Mokottunas 北原モコットウナシ draws attention to the fact that there are still people who deny the indigenous minority's very existence, because the modern Ainu do not fit their arbitrary definition of Ainuness. This in itself constitutes a form of discrimination.³² Additionally, a 2023 government survey shows that around one third of respondents (28.7%) were sceptical about the existence of discrimination currently perpetrated against the Ainu, mainly because they either have yet to see it or hear about it themselves (67.4%), or believe that the modern Ainu have no lifestyle-related differences (51.1%) or legal limitations (41.5%) that could become the basis for claims of discrimination.³³ According to Kitahara, such excessive inclusion is as discriminatory as the exclusionist accentuation of the Ainu people's differences. Nowadays, this latter form of discrimination takes shape in *microassaults* (i.e. directly showing contempt for or excluding someone), *microinsults* (i.e. making rude or stereotypical comments about someone), and *microinvalidations* (not considering the other person's experiences and feelings).³⁴

While *Song of the Kamuy* was thusly created to actively challenge readers' perception of history, the creators of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* chose to take the other route prescribed by Nora. Their creation functions as a vessel for dispensing information, similarly to an illustrated textbook. This makes it an educational or *gakushū* 学習 manga, and it was indeed published as an addition to the well-known Gakushū Manga Jinbutsukan 学習まんが人物館 (Educational Manga Museum of Notable People) series. This subgenre is otherwise known as *kyōyō* 教養 manga. Itō Kinko 伊藤琴子 traces the emergence of the subgenre to the 1970s, when it first appeared in general magazines that were geared towards a readership of Japanese businessmen. Ishinomori Shōtarō 石ノ森章太郎 is credited with the creation of the first book-length *gakushū* manga entitled *Manga Nihon Keizai Nyūmon* マンガ日本経済入門 (*Japan Inc.: An Introduction to Japanese Economics*). It still serves as an accessible introduction to the workings of Japan's economy at the time. *Japan Inc.* became a bestseller after its publication in multiple languages during the second half of the 1980s. It paved the way for the birth of other kinds of *kyōyō* manga, some of which dramatize the life of important historical figures and past events of historical significance.³⁵

³¹ Siddle 1996: 156, 186.

³² Kitahara 2023: 102.

³³ Cabinet Secretariat 2023: 3, 11.

³⁴ Kitahara 2023: 72, 81–83.

³⁵ Ito 2008: 42–43.

By disseminating knowledge about the life of Yukie and her creation of the *Ainu Shinyōshū*, which is deemed suitable for a presumably young audience of readers, *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* becomes a place of memory.

As will become apparent during the following analysis, the different approaches taken by the creators heavily influenced the tone and plot of each manga. Reminiscent of a history textbook, the tone of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* is kept fairly neutral, and its plot unfolds while following the events of Yukie's life quite truthfully, at least in the sense that there are no important elements of the story that are completely fictional. On the contrary, *Song of the Kamuy* moves Yukie and her story fully into the realm of fiction by embellishing it with devastatingly tragic story beats for dramatic effect. This change is signified by the renaming of important-people-turned-key-characters in Yukie's life. For instance, the main character based on Yukie is named Teru テル, and Kindaichi Kyōsuke is transformed into Professor Kaneda 兼田. The additional layers of tragedy were presumably woven into the plot to tug at the heartstrings of readers, thereby gaining their support for the causes championed by the All Hokkaidō initiative.

Another characteristic of the above-mentioned biographical manga that will emerge through analysis is a tension between the previously established potential for radically altering readers' opinion on history that is inherent in places of memory and places of witnessing, and the way this potential remains unfulfilled by the creators of both *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* and *Song of the Kamuy*. This tension may originate in the hybrid nature of these places. Nora originally draws a clear line when differentiating between places of memory that were created by the victors and the losers of a certain conflict.³⁶ In the case of Ainu-Wajin shared history, the colonizing Wajin are readily identifiable as the victorious party, while the colonized Ainu are positioned as the defeated one. The biographical manga in question are—similarly to *Shumari* and *Golden Kamuy*, as previously argued—hybrid monuments: they are 'reassessments of colonized Ainu history, authored by the descendants of the very people who colonized them'.³⁷ If one exercises their empathy to put themselves on the opposing side of a historical divide, the results are bound to be filled by the tension born from the different factors that shaped and continue to shape the experiences of the affected parties.

³⁶ Nora 2009: 32.

³⁷ Keller 2025: 174.

Indigenous rights and Ainu activism

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz highlights the existence of a long and mutually beneficial relationship between the world's indigenous populations and international law: while indigenous peoples³⁸ have been invoking international law since the 1920s to lend some legitimacy to their claims of self-determination, cultural and land rights, their engagement with it also contributes to its enrichment. Tauli-Corpuz presents the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as an example of indigenous peoples' contributions to the law of nations. She credits the UNDRIP with greatly furthering the international human rights discourse, describing its metaphorical godparent—the United Nations (UN) system—as 'the most important space' for indigenous participation in international legal mechanisms.³⁹

The UNDRIP is a document that lists the various rights of indigenous peoples. For the purposes of this paper, Article 12 and Article 14 of the UNDRIP are of particular importance, as these are the ones that concern the violations of the Ainu people's indigenous rights during Yukie's lifetime. The existence of special primary schools retroactively violates Article 14 which states that indigenous people should create and oversee their own 'educational systems and institutions', where they receive an 'education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning'. This article also stipulates that Indigenous children deserve the same educational opportunities as their non-indigenous peers.⁴⁰ The issue of assimilationist education is touched upon in both *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* and *Song of the Kamuy*, with the latter manga having an additional focus on the irreverent collection of Ainu remains. The scientific desecration of Ainu graveyards is a retroactive violation of Article 12 which states that indigenous people are entitled to 'maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites', and to 'the use and control of their ceremonial objects'. This article also prescribes

³⁸ Smith describes the origins and usage of the term *indigenous peoples* as follows. It originated in the struggles of the American Indian Movement and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood during the 1970s. Its usage may be seen as problematic when it is interpreted as a careless generalization of diverse groups, but its collective nature also possesses positive connotations. First, the term enables the collective mobilization of indigenous groups in the international arena. Second, it fosters feelings of camaraderie among them that fuels their collective struggle for self-determination. Additionally, the final *s* in peoples is meant to signify the diverse plurality that can be found among indigenous groups. Indigenous activists argued quite vehemently for its inclusion, which lends some symbolic weight to its usage. By using *peoples* instead of *people*, one acknowledges indigenous peoples' right to self-determination (Smith 2012: 6–7).

³⁹ Tauli-Corpuz 2008: 83–84, 88.

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly 2007: 7.

the repatriation of human remains.⁴¹ To explore the current discourse around repatriation with the nuance it requires would alone constitute a whole separate paper. Therefore, it should suffice to say here that this issue is far from settled. There are still Ainu remains in the custody of Upopoy, which the museum's website claims could not have been directly returned to the Ainu people.⁴²

Given the biographical nature of the Japanese comics in question, it is unsurprising that the above-mentioned injustices are primarily dramatized from the standpoint of Yukie/Teru and her Ainu family and friends. In other words, from the standpoint of the very people who were adversely affected by these developments in real life. Morris-Suzuki observes that the angle from which the past is shown in historical manga is of great significance, as the manga artist has the ability to foster allegiances between the reader and certain characters by depicting the story from the latter's point of view. Furthermore, a certain quality that historical comics allegedly share with woodblock prints, propaganda materials, and political comics is theorized to add another layer to readers' identification with the past: once they have seen a comic-book style depiction of a past event, their mind's eye is likely to return to that specific illustration every time they recall that specific incident, effectively taken captive by the crisp linework and exaggerated features that characterize the comic-book aesthetic.⁴³

It was argued in *Shumari and Golden Kamuy Take on the Ruling Narratives of Hokkaidō History* that Tezuka Osamu 手塚治虫 and Noda Satoru 野田サトル used the aforementioned qualities of comics to position their readership on the same side as their Ainu characters, potentially making them see centuries of real-life conflict and coexistence between the Wajin and their Northern neighbours in a new light. This, in turn, may lead conscientious readers to re-evaluate the position they currently inhabit in Japanese society, in the spirit of what Morris-Suzuki calls *historical truthfulness*.⁴⁴ When one looks at the present through the lens of historical truthfulness, it quickly becomes apparent that the current world came to be as a direct result of all the different actions taken by previous generations, and that one may be an unaware beneficiary of the transgressions committed by their ancestors.⁴⁵ Today's Wajin are by no means responsible for the assimilationist schools and desecrated graveyards of the past, but they may very well be reaping the benefits of Japan's forceful incorporation of Hokkaidō's territory and resources into their country. A metaphorical visit to

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² Minzoku Kyōsei Shōchō Kūkan n.d.

⁴³ Morris-Suzuki 2005: 182–184.

⁴⁴ Keller 2025: 174.

⁴⁵ Morris-Suzuki 2005: 25–27.

a place of memory and/or witnessing could serve as a potential first step towards this realization for many readers.

The above-described introspective potential that is inherent in places of memory and places of witnessing is complimented by the impact Yukie's life and work had on Ainu activism before and after World War II. To begin with, her book was a source of inspiration for one of the prominent activists in the pre-war era. Although Richard Siddle highlights Kannari Tarō 金成太郎 (1866–1897)⁴⁶ as the earliest known Ainu activist, he traces the actual origins of an Ainu movement to the Taishō period (1912–1926).⁴⁷ David L. Howell describes the ideological landscape in Japan around this time as highly contradictory, since the ideology of a homogenous Japanese nation-state under the rule of the emperor was developing in tandem with the country's acquisition of a multiethnic colonial empire, which fuelled a booming discourse about ethnic and cultural diversity among contemporary ideologues. They argued that the empire's multiethnic population paralleled the diverse roots of the Wajin, and reconceptualized colonial expansion as the reincorporation of people into the nation who were supposedly under Japanese rule in the ancient past. For all the discussion on multiethnicity, the practical goal of the state was always the assimilation of these colonial subjects, the Ainu among them, as the emperor system was not compatible with the presence of non-Japanese identities.⁴⁸ The pro-assimilationist strategies early Ainu activists pursued are a reflection of their time: they defined themselves as proud citizens of Imperial Japan, who also took pride in their ethnic heritage.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Interestingly, he was Yukie's first cousin once removed, and the first Ainu person baptized by John Batchelor (1855–1944), an Anglican English missionary and the most well-respected Western expert on the Ainu at the time. Fujimoto Hideo 藤本英夫, one of Yukie's biographers, speculates that Tarō's mastery of the English and the Ainu language was probably a crucial support for Batchelor's linguistic work and the creation of his Ainu-language Bible and hymns, although Batchelor never gave Tarō any credit for his help (Fujimoto 2002: 48).

⁴⁷ Siddle 1999: 115, 123.

⁴⁸ A possible reason why the *mixed nation theory* of the multiethnic Japanese Empire was not compatible with the actual diversity of its growing population is suggested by Oguma Eiji 小熊英二. He asserts that the pre-war mixed nation theory and the *myth of ethnic homogeneity* generally accepted after World War II are two sides of the same coin, since both are deeply rooted in the idea that lineage with its imagined blood ties is the dominant factor when determining one's nationality. The fact that one-third of the empire's population consisted of non-Japanese subjects did not permit this preoccupation with blood relations to grow into a mainstream ideology focused on the pure and homogenous origins of the Japanese nation until the loss of most colonies. Until then, the importance of lineage was signified by the reconceptualization of newly incorporated nations as long-lost relatives of the Japanese people, who were always meant to rejoin the emperor's family as foster children (Oguma 2002: Chapter 18, para. 1–13).

⁴⁹ Howell 2004: 5–6.

One such early activists was a young poet named Iboshi Hokuto 邊星北斗 (1901–1929), who reportedly entered the world of advocacy after reading the *Ainu Shinyōshū*. Listing what he accomplished before his untimely death from tuberculosis, Siddle mentions the publication of the first and only issue of a magazine entitled *Kotan* コタン (lit. village in the Ainu language). This inaugural issue of *Kotan*, published two years before his death, contained many of Iboshi's poems and essays.⁵⁰ In Howell's interpretation, the dedication on the frontispiece of the magazine—'for good Japanese'—speaks volumes about Iboshi's views on his own Ainuness: in contrast to popular ideologues of his time, he believed in the possibility of an Ainu-Wajin dual identity.⁵¹ Describing his views on Ainu issues, Siddle refers to Iboshi as 'an angry young man', whose poems and essays served as a conduit for his intense scrutiny of the structures of Japanese imperialism and colonialism without criticizing the Japanese state itself. Additionally, Siddle credits him with clearly anticipating the notion of the Ainu as an indigenous people in his writings.⁵²

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of anti-assimilationist Ainu activist appeared, who borrowed their tactics from domestic movements, in particularly from those of the burakumin 部落民⁵³ and left-wing activists. They also formed strong connections to and gained additional inspiration from the international network of indigenous peoples. These new connections irreversibly altered the state of Ainu affairs in Japan.⁵⁴ The changing climate eventually led to the reinterpretation of the *Ainu Shinyōshū*'s chants in the 1990s, as noted by Siddle. For instance, a character from the most well-known chant of the collection is reinterpreted as a stand-in for the Ainu people in their entirety. The aforementioned chant is titled 'The Chant the Owl Spirit Himself Sang' (in Ainu: Kamuycikap Kamuy Yayeyukar カムイチカプ カムイ ヤイエユカラ, in Japanese: Fukurō no Kami no Mizukara Utatta Utai 梟の神の自ら歌った謡). It tells the story of a boy of noble character, whose originally wealthy family has come upon hard times. After his fine qualities are recognized by the Owl Spirit, it rewards him with the restoration of the wealth and social standing of his family. In this new

⁵⁰ Siddle 1999: 128–129.

⁵¹ Howell 2004: 21.

⁵² Siddle 1999: 128–131.

⁵³ The burakumin are a Japanese minority group that is theorized to descend from the outcast communities of the Edo period (1600–1867). Although their social limitations were officially lifted in 1871, they have suffered the consequences of continued stigmatization. Their circumstances improved markedly during the 20th century, partly due to the rising tide of activism that swept through their ranks. Some observers credit these significant improvements with ending discrimination against the burakumin, while others reason that it did not disappear but instead transformed into a more sophisticated form (Neary 2008: 59–60).

⁵⁴ Siddle 1999: 176, 192.

interpretation, the boy's meagre circumstances are equated with the dispossession of the Ainu, while his salvation by the Owl Spirit is seen as analogous to real-life spiritual resistance.⁵⁵

Up to this point, it was established that Yukie's life and work have an inspiring air of quiet resistance about them for a variety of reasons. First, she wrote the *Ainu Shinyōshū* to defy the dying race narrative of her present, and in doing so, she pre-emptively rejected the dying culture rhetoric allegedly employed by the National Ainu Museum and Park. Second, her book was a leading inspiration for Iboshi Hokuto, one of the more prominent activists of the early pre-war Ainu movement. Third, her chants came to be reinterpreted as an allegory for the dispossession and spiritual resistance of the Ainu. These factors make her biography an ideal topic to be dramatized as a literary place of memory and witnessing, opening the possibility for *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* and *Song of the Kamuy* to become historical comics that radically subvert readers' common-sense knowledge about Ainu-Wajin relations. However, as it will be discussed below, the manga in question both gloss over the role Japanese imperialism and colonialism played in the depicted injustices, just as they leave out that Yukie could be considered a victim of the colonial power imbalance between herself and Kindaichi Kyōsuke.

The issue of the special Ainu schools

Ogawa Masahito 小川正仁 refers to the separate educational system that was established by the previously mentioned Protection Act of 1899 and the Regulation about the Education of Former Native Children (Regulation) of 1901 as the early modern Ainu school system (*kindai ainu kyōiku seido* 近代アイヌ教育制度). In accordance with these regulations, so-called primary schools for former natives (*kyūdojin shōgakkō* 旧土人小学校)—or with Ogawa's terminology, special Ainu schools (*tokusetsu ainu gakkō* 特設アイヌ学校)—were established around Hokkaidō. The early modern Ainu school system remained in operation until the Regulation and the relevant article of the Protection Act were repelled in 1922 and 1937, respectively.⁵⁶

Emori regards the early modern Ainu school system as one of the two load-bearing pillars of the Protection Act, with the other being the provision of small patches of land to interested Ainu families to encourage the adoption of agriculture as a main source of livelihood.⁵⁷ He criticizes special Ainu schools as

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁶ Ogawa 1999: 7, 10–11.

⁵⁷ Emori 2015: 441–442.

instruments of a discriminatory and assimilationist education system for two reasons. First, Ainu students were expected to abandon their mother tongue⁵⁸ and native traditions for the Japanese language and customs, while receiving a patriotic education that was aimed at transforming them into dutiful subjects of the Japanese emperor. Second, students' adult relatives were required to attend all ceremonies and various lectures at these schools, which were meant to instil so-called Japanese values in them. The subpar quality of education Ainu children received in these institutions invites further criticism from Emori. In accordance with the Regulation, only six subjects with a limited curriculum—ethics, Japanese language, mathematics, physical education, needlework for girls, and agriculture for boys—were taught to students, who did not receive any instruction in history, geography or cooking. Following a 1916 amendment, Ainu children were required to start school a year later and leave it two years earlier than their Wajin peers. They started first grade at the age of seven and completed compulsory education in just four years.⁵⁹

These differences in educational requirements are explained by the widespread ideal of separate education. According to Ogawa, the idea that Ainu children needed to be educated separately was universally accepted as true at this time and was a core ideological component of both the Protection Act and the Regulation. Although the true objective of the separate Ainu school system was the erasure of Ainu children's cultural and linguistic roots, it was frequently framed as an act of kindness. Proponents argued that it would be cruel to educate Ainu and Wajin children together, since the former were allegedly not intelligent enough to keep up with the latter, and would therefore suffer greatly if forced to compete with them in the same classroom.⁶⁰ It is quite astonishing then, that the same line of reasoning is used to justify the existence of special Ainu schools to the readership of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu*: 'The Meiji government came to the conclusion that it would be difficult for the Japanese and Ainu children to learn together'.⁶¹ Conversely, *Song of the Kamuy* emphasizes the assimilationist nature of the school through the irate monologue of a teacher, rudely instructing his pupils on writing Japanese characters: 'You lot suck at this! If you can't

⁵⁸ It was acknowledged by teachers at the time that some Ainu proficiency was required to instruct Ainu children in the classroom. This was the only instance when the Ainu language was allowed to be used. Ogawa quotes a teacher from Nibutani 二風谷, who advocated for this restricted use of the pupils' mother tongue up until the beginning of the third grade, from which point forward it was to be strictly prohibited (Ogawa 1999: 146).

⁵⁹ Emori 2015: 444–447.

⁶⁰ Ogawa 1999: 139–140.

⁶¹ Hikono–Sanjo 2018: 31.

「明治政府はアイヌと日本人の子どもがともに学ぶことは困難だと判断しました。」

write well, you won't become Japanese! I'm trying to make Japanese people out of you natives! Be grateful!'⁶²

After spending a short time in an institution where Ainu and Wajin children were educated together, young Yukie continued her schooling in one of these special Ainu schools, namely the Kamikawa Fifth Elementary School in the heart of Chikabumi 近文, an Ainu settlement located in Asahikawa.⁶³ She witnessed here an unfortunate incident, during which a frustrated teacher resorted to excessive physical violence to discipline one of Yukie's schoolmates called Michi ミチ. Fujimoto Hideo 藤本英夫 describes this incident as follows: Michi returned late to class after taking her lunch break at home, because the clock there did not show the correct time. To make matters worse, she could not excuse herself properly in Japanese. Her transgression of the school's rules angered the teacher so much that he slapped the trembling child without asking any questions. Michi fell over from the force of the blow, so terrified that she lost control of her bladder in front of her classmates. She was then helped by Yukie, who escorted her to the corridor and cleaned her up. As a physical reminder of this incident, Michi lost her hearing in one ear because of a ruptured eardrum.⁶⁴

The previously introduced approaches taken by the creators of the examined manga influence the way this incident is adapted into comic-book format. The scene in *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* follows the outlines of the bibliographical account quite closely. The most prominent difference between the real-life incident and its depiction lies in the moment when Michi—the character—hurriedly bursts into the classroom while apologizing in perfect Japanese. From the description given by Fujimoto, it is not entirely clear if the teacher was provoked by Michi's tardiness or her inability to apologize in the mandated language. This interpretation clearly attributes his reaction to the former reason. While threateningly towering over the crying girl, the teacher character balls his hand into a fist and yells: 'You have some nerve being late! I'll beat the laziness out of you!'⁶⁵ This small change moves the emphasis from the problematic nature of special Ainu schools to the personal prejudices and unsuitable conduct of a single individual. This impression is strengthened by a remark of the omniscient narrator: 'In that moment, Yukie understood that the severe corporal punishment was not for the sake of instruction, but was born out of the teacher's disdain for

⁶² Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 39.

「この下手くそが!上手に書けんと日本人になれんぞ!おまえら土人を日本人にしてやろうというんだ!ありがたく思え!!」

⁶³ Fujimoto 2002: 70, 92.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

⁶⁵ Hikono–Sanjo 2018: 31.

「遅刻とはいい度胸だ!たるんだ精神を叩き直してやる!!」

the Ainu'.⁶⁶ The seriousness of the actual incident is belied by the fact that this fictional version of Michi does not suffer any lasting physical consequences. The weight of the scene is further negated by the children's eventual return to the normalcy of their school life, which is portrayed as idyllic and joyful, after the aggressive teacher leaves.

The assumption that a teacher would have abused his power because of his personal dislike for the Ainu is not unrealistic. According to Ogawa, most teachers who were employed at special Ainu schools probably did not see themselves as educators fulfilling a meaningful vocation. Some of them carried out their responsibilities with complete apathy towards their charges, while others regarded their position as a form of retirement or even demotion. Teachers' negative attitudes could have been fuelled by several factors, including the inferior conditions at special Ainu schools and the contempt Wajin settlers had for their Ainu neighbours.⁶⁷ Ogawa speculates that a common reason why many of them disliked the Ainu is closely related to the Protection Act and the parcels of land that the Ainu were entitled to apply for through it. Disadvantaged Wajin settlers were jealous of the Ainu, because they saw them as the scary, undeserving recipients of the state's generosity, who were too ungrateful and drunk to do anything meaningful with the land they were provided with for free.⁶⁸

The creators of *Song of the Kamuy* do not let their readers' attention linger too long on the racist outburst of a single individual. Their different interpretation of the incident highlights the existence of systemic discrimination that could potentially elude readers' attention in the previously discussed version of the scene. The moment when Moto モト—the character who is partly based on Michi—runs through the classroom door starkly contrasts with *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu's* depiction. Anxious Moto begins to splutter an apology in Ainu, but is swiftly cut off by an irritated teacher, who then strikes her with his cane while yelling: 'Speak Japanese! How many times do I have to tell you that Ainu is forbidden!'⁶⁹

The assumption that a young child would resort to using its mother tongue if pressed for words in a foreign language is quite believable, and the teacher character's comments highlight the forcibly assimilationist nature of the early modern Ainu school system. There is no attempt to narratively soften the teacher's blow, which leaves Moto deaf in one ear. If possible, the punishment appears

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

「この時、幸恵は先生のひどい体罰は指導のためではなく、アイヌをさげすむ気持ちからきたことを知りました。」

⁶⁷ Ogawa 1999: 251.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁹ Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 41.

「日本語で話せ! アイヌ語は禁止だと言っているだろうが!!」

even more unjust in this version of events, given that Moto's reason for going home is to take care of her sick mother. Presumably to further impress upon the reader the injustice of discrimination, this sad episode from Yukie's childhood is transformed into the beginning of Moto's tragic storyline. In a later scene, she does not hear the rumbling of an approaching horse-drawn carriage or her brother's warning cries and gets hit, her limp body falling into a river. She succumbs to her injuries shortly thereafter. The carriage speeds away, carrying the bounty of grave robbers in the employ of Professor Kojima 小嶋, a famed Wajin anthropologist.

When dramatizing Yukie's experiences in a special Ainu school, the focus of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* remains anchored in the interpersonal conflict between a racist teacher and his student. Quoting the social psychologist Deguchi Makiko 出口真紀子,⁷⁰ Kitahara defines this type of discrimination as direct discrimination (*chokusetsu sabetsu* 直接差別). This is the most easily condemnable and identifiable form of prejudice, since the aggressor directly shows his contempt for his target.⁷¹ To the contrary, *Song of the Kamuy*'s dramatization of the incident focuses on the assimilationist nature of special Ainu schools, underscoring the systemic issues at hand. Based on its systemic nature, Kitahara classifies the early modern Ainu school system as a form of systemic discrimination (*seidōteki sabetsu* 制度的差別), which is a lot harder to detect in day-to-day life. Deguchi defines it as the totality of discriminatory mechanisms woven into the fabric of society, influencing everything from its laws and schools to the economy. In the case of systemic discrimination, it is the system of society itself that is biased against the minority population, who remain disadvantaged regardless of the actions taken by members of the majority on a personal level.⁷²

However, *Song of the Kamuy*'s overreliance on tragic developments to elicit empathy is not without its own limitations. To begin with, the story's emotional impact may be cheapened by the fatigue that readers are likely to experience under the weight of incessant tragedies. Another, much more pressing point is

⁷⁰ The third form of discrimination identified by Deguchi is called cultural discrimination (*bunkateki sabetsu* 文化的差別), which takes the form of common-sense notions that are generally accepted by its members. Here, Kitahara mentions the misconception that Ainu children and young people are simply not suited to enter higher education as one of his examples (Kitahara 2023: 54–55). According to Fujimoto, this sentiment has likely prevented Yukie in continuing her education at a prestigious all-girls school that was mostly attended by students from influential or military families. It was rumoured around town that although she received full marks on her entrance exams, she was still rejected because of the school's unwillingness to let an Ainu girl from a Christian family enter its ranks (Fujimoto 2002: 111). Interestingly, the rumour is treated as somewhat credible in both *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* and *Song of the Kamuy*'s dramatization of Yukie's biography.

⁷¹ Kitahara 2023: 48–49.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 49.

that the narrative's forceful assault on readers' emotions may lead to the depoliticization and dehistoricization of Ainu issues, negating the previously mentioned focus on systemic issues. Michael concedes that not everyone evaluates the affective engagement with distant suffering as favourable as Sarah Jones, her source about secondary witnessing's capacity to foster an other-oriented empathy in readers. Conveying the opinion of several other scholars on refugee narratives, Michael cautions that a systemic issue—such as population displacement for instance—may transform into a matter of personal ethics in the readership's mind, once their empathy is successfully engaged by a narrative. While being preoccupied with questions of hospitality, generosity and empathy on the personal level, readers are unlikely to notice the systems—such as the power imbalance between certain regions of the world or the imperialist history between the home country and the destination of asylum seekers—at the root of the problem.⁷³

It was theorized above that the engagement with a place of memory and/or witnessing could potentially prompt readers to reevaluate their opinions on Ainu-Wajin shared history and their own involvement in it, seeing these issues in a new light of historical truthfulness. However, this process is halted in both analysed manga. In the case of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu*, the emphasis on direct discrimination is likely to leave readers with the illusion that Ainu issues can be solved by merely being a kind person in their day-to-day life. Although *Song of the Kamuy* portrays special Ainu schools as a systemic problem, the overly tragic plot may hijack readers' attention and lead them to the same mistaken conclusion. The violation of the Ainu's indigenous rights that was the early modern Ainu school system is not connected to Japanese imperialism or colonialism anywhere in the manga narratives: the Japanese words for imperialism (*teikokushugi* 帝國主義) and colonialism (*shokuminchishugi* 植民地主義) do not appear in these texts, not even once. While *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* does not explicitly give a reason for the Wajin presence on the island, *Song of the Kamuy* names the need to ensure Japan's safety as the rationale for Hokkaidō's incorporation into the empire: 'The Sisam [an Ainu synonym for Wajin] came to Hokkaidō because they thought Japan might be attacked by Russia'.⁷⁴

Rather than elucidating that the violations of the Ainu's indigenous rights were intimately connected to Hokkaidō's status as a settler colony, the manga in question continue imperialist narratives about the island's history that originated in the Meiji period. According to Michele M. Mason, Hokkaidō was retroactively naturalized as one of the four main islands of Japan after it came under

⁷³ Michael 2023: 4–5.

⁷⁴ Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 17.

「シサムたちは日本がロシアから襲われるのではないかと思って北海道に入ってきたの。」

Japanese rule in 1869, which was partly achieved by the government pretending that the Ainu were always Japanese citizens and repopulating their homeland with Wajin settlers from the mainland.⁷⁵ By not mentioning imperialism as the reason of the Wajin presence, *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu* leaves this assertion unchallenged. *Song of the Kamuy*'s focus on the Russian threat is not entirely inaccurate, as the so-called *tondenhei* 屯田兵 soldiers were officially stationed on the northern island for this very reason. In Mason's words, they belonged to 'a Meiji-era farming-militia unique to Hokkaido' and were hailed as patriotic defenders of Japan in the face of imminent Russian aggression at the end of the 19th century.⁷⁶ However, Mason identifies a more prosaic cause for their presence. Early on, the soldiers guarding Japan's first colony were recruited exclusively from the ranks of disgruntled and impoverished former samurai, redirecting their disruptive energies into a new, state approved direction.⁷⁷

The issue of physical anthropology

Unlike the problem of special Ainu schools and their assimilationist curriculum, the defilement of Ainu graves is addressed only in *Song of the Kamuy*, where the storyline of Moto and her brother, Hisashi ヒサシ, exposes the unethical beginnings of physical anthropology in Japan. After his grandfather's bones were stolen by grave robbers, Hisashi tries his best to get them back while protecting other Ainu graves from desecration. Unsuccessful, he enlists the help of Kaneda, who is appalled by the conduct of his fellow scholars. A newspaper article leads him to Kojima's office, where every available inch of space is covered by a display of Ainu skulls and grave goods. During his second visit, Kaneda only succeeds in getting back the remains of Hisashi's grandfather after he emotionally blackmails Kojima, who was travelling on the carriage that killed Moto.

Physical anthropology is one of the earliest subdisciplines of Ainu Studies. As insinuated by the above-mentioned storyline, its early practitioners often conducted their research in an unethical manner, but Morris-Suzuki observes that this was not a phenomenon unique to Japan. For instance, Franz Boas (1858–1942) was pioneering American anthropology in 1888 by journeying to British Columbia, where he collected about 200 ancestral remains that belonged to the local indigenous groups. Moreover, the first people to rob Ainu graves in the name of science were all Westerners, along with the first contributor to the discipline of Ainu Studies. In 1864 and 1865, a small group of foreigners—

⁷⁵ Mason 2012: 8, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

including the British consul himself—robbed several Ainu cemeteries under the cover of darkness. Their disrespectful actions incited a major diplomatic incident. While his transgression only cost the consul his position, three other participants were sentenced to penal servitude by the British legation in Tōkyō. Three years later, Georg Busk's (1807–1886) paper entitled 'Description of an Aino skull' marked the beginning of Japanese physical anthropology. Despite its controversial and foreign origins, the practice of desecrating Ainu graves for science was continued by Wajin researchers for at least a century thereafter.⁷⁸

Koganei Yoshikiyo 小金井良精 (1859–1944) is a Wajin researcher from this century of controversy who could serve as a likely inspiration behind the character of Kojima. Koganei was the first Professor of Anatomy at Tōkyō University. Siddler describes him as a follower of Erwin von Bälz (1849–1913), who was responsible for the introduction of physical anthropology to Japan. In 1887 and 1888, Koganei undertook two expeditions to Hokkaidō to collect Ainu remains. He argued for the ancient Jōmon 縄文 people to be Ainu based on the bones he collected. His theory was opposed by Tsuboi Shōgorō 坪井正五郎 (1863–1913), who theorized that the tiny Korpokkur コロボツクル people of Ainu legend are analogous to the indigenous neolithic population of Hokkaidō. Ultimately, it was Koganei's theory that gained widespread acceptance.⁷⁹

However, it is not his theory about the Jōmon roots of the Ainu that makes Koganei a likely model for Kojima: not unlike his fictional counterpart, Koganei was also infamous for robbing fresh graves to further his research. Reporting on his unethical and disturbing conduct, Ueki Tetsuya 植木哲也 vividly describes the varying degrees of decomposition in which Koganei found and collected his specimen. During his first visit, he admittedly did not shy away from knowingly opening the graves of people who died only three to five years prior. These bodies were still adorned in the clothes they had been buried in, and Koganei had to take them to a nearby river to wash off the remnants of their skin, hair and brain matter before he could get to the bones.⁸⁰ Hisashi's storyline about the remains of his grandfather being stolen by a Wajin scientist is not as outlandish as it may appear in the eyes of the uninitiated reader.

According to Ueki, physical anthropology was still in its infancy during the Meiji and Taishō periods, when Koganei himself was active. Following Edward S. Morse's (1838–1925) discovery of a shell mound from the Jōmon period, Western researchers residing in Japan and Japanese university students alike became increasingly interested in the origins of the Japanese people, which inspired them to embrace the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology, both

⁷⁸ Morris-Suzuki 2014: 3–5.

⁷⁹ Siddler 1999: 81.

⁸⁰ Ueki 2019: 48–49.

previously unknown in Japan. Enthusiastic students—the above-mentioned Tsuboi Shōgorō among them—established the Anthropological Society in 1884, which is described by Ueki as a ‘gathering of hobbyists’ (*shumijin no atsumari* 趣味人の集まり) instead of a ‘group of professional researchers’ (*shokugyōteki kenkyūsha no dantai* 職業的研究者の団体).⁸¹

The wider Japanese academia remained sceptical about the merits of physical anthropology for a long time: its practitioners were regarded as mere enthusiasts, who enjoyed collecting antiques and learning about folk customs while failing to attain the level of rigour that is expected of a modern scientist.⁸² Despite the widespread scepticism, Koganei pursued physical anthropology with unwavering commitment. He reportedly believed that it was his duty as a Japanese scientist to put his country’s name on the radar of the international scientific community, and he came to regard physical anthropology—and specifically the research on Ainu remains—as the ideal avenue through which to make a uniquely Japanese contribution to global science.⁸³

The sentiments described in the paragraph above are echoed by Kojima’s tirade during his confrontation with an appalled Kaneda. One can practically hear ambitious Koganei’s voice, when Kojima defensively yells about how important his research is for mankind: ‘This research could be a major breakthrough for humanity!’⁸⁴ When Kojima justifies his grave robbery by the potential value it could bring to Japan and the Ainu alike—‘All this research is for the sake of our country, and for the Ainu people...’⁸⁵—it reflects Koganei’s theory about the Jōmon and the Ainu people being one and the same and his contemporaries’ search for the origins of the Yamato race. Yet, Kojima simply ends up sounding like a raving madman if the reader does not possess the required background knowledge to interpret him, his portrayal failing to convey that the desecration of Ainu graveyards was more than a strange personal project for a delusional scientist: it was fuelled by the rise of Japanese imperialism. The symbiotic relationship between the development of Japanese anthropology and the expansion of Japan’s empire in the early 20th century is observed by Ueki. Every time a new colony was incorporated into Japan’s territories, researchers were dispatched by their universities to study the local populations, receiving the recognition of wider society for their efforts. Although Ueki does not regard anthropology as a tool of colonial administration, he observes that it began to

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40–42.

⁸⁴ Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 130.

「この研究は人類にとって大発見になるかもしれないんだ!」

⁸⁵ Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 93.

「すべては我が日本国のためアイヌのための研究であり...」

receive unprecedented public attention in the 1930s, coinciding with the Japanese government's heightened interest in colonial policy. This elevated degree of prestige was clearly signalled by the establishment of Japan's first anthropology department at Tōkyō University in 1939.⁸⁶

A linguist and his informant

There is one character in both examined manga that is essentially portrayed the same despite the different approaches taken by both sets of creators to telling their story: Kindaichi Kyōsuke—or his more fictional counterpart, Kaneda—is consistently depicted as an absent-minded but loveable genius, whose infectious enthusiasm inspired Yukie to write the *Ainu Shinyōshū*. According to Fujimoto, the pair first met in 1918, when Kindaichi visited the small church in Chikabumi where Yukie lived with Monasnouk and Matsu, who was also a Christian missionary. Initially, Kindaichi was there to listen to Monasnouk's stories, and he ended up spending the night at the church after missing the last train, engrossed in deep conversation with the three women around the fireplace. As a testament of him also being a somewhat absent-minded character in real life, he mistakenly monopolized the family's only mosquito net during the night, expecting the women to join him under it. While listening to Matsu's motherly boasting about Yukie's grades the following morning, he became aware of her remarkable proficiency in both Japanese and Ainu. This prompted Kindaichi to invite Yukie to study with him in Tōkyō. Although she did not immediately accept the Wajin professor's invitation, his enthusiasm and apparent love for Ainu oral traditions—to which he admiringly referred as a 'treasury of [Ainu] words' (*hōten* 宝典)—inspired Yukie to give her life to the research of the Ainu epics.⁸⁷

This decisive episode in Yukie's life holds a prominent place in both manga narratives, transpiring similarly to the biographical account. Without any background information, these scenes position Yukie/Teru as an unofficial assistant to Kindaichi/Kaneda, while portraying the character based on the Wajin linguist as a goofy lover of Ainu orature, animatedly singing its praises to anyone who is willing to lend him an ear. Although overly positive, his characterization suffers from the same lack of complexity as that of the racist schoolteacher of *Chiri Yukie and the Ainu*: the colonial power relations underlying his relationship to Yukie are obscured by the narratives' persistent emphasis on his personal commitment for his research subject. This is especially true for *Song of the Kamuy*, where Kaneda is depicted as someone who is vehemently opposed to

⁸⁶ Ueki 2019: 79

⁸⁷ Fujimoto 2022: 130–138.

the inhumane practices of physical anthropology. This implies that his commitment includes an interest for the welfare of the Ainu people.

During his confrontation with Kaneda, Kojima appeals to their shared scholarly interest in the Ainu people: ‘If you really are a university professor and a researcher of the Ainu language, you should understand me’.⁸⁸ While the fictional linguist is baffled by Kojima’s attempts to draw a parallel between them, the real Kindaichi’s motivations for studying Ainu orature were surprisingly similar to the rational that led early Wajin anthropologist to commit grave robbery. Just as they sought the biological origins of the Japanese people, Kindaichi’s work with Ainu orature was intended to support his mentor’s search for the origins of the Japanese language.

Yasuda Toshiaki 安田敏朗 introduces Kindaichi’s mentor, Ueda Kazutoshi 上田万年 (1867–1937) as a professor of Tōkyō University, overseeing an ambitious project called Japanese Imperial University Linguistics (Nihon Teikoku Daigaku Gengogaku 日本帝国大学言語学). Ueda’s aim with this project was to elevate Japanese linguistics to a Western scientific standard by applying the methodology of comparative linguistics to determine the origins of the Japanese language. The project was supported by his students’ groundwork, comparing Japanese to one of its neighbouring languages: Ogura Shinbei 小倉進平 (1882–1944) focused his attentions on Korean, while Iha Fuyū 伊波普猷 (1876–1947) and Gotō Asatarō 後藤朝太郎 (1881–1945) specialized in the Ryūkyūan and Chinese languages, respectively. Additionally, a fellow professor named Fujioka Katsuji 藤岡勝二 (1872–1935) contributed his expertise on the Manchu and Mongolian languages to the project. The late-comer Kindaichi was left with the study of the Ainu language, looking to ancient pieces⁸⁹ of Ainu orature for a suitably old version of it.⁹⁰

As for Kindaichi’s supposed concern for the welfare of the Ainu people, he is often criticized along with other contemporary linguists specializing in the Japanese language and its dialects for caring solely about the language he studied, without any further regard for the challenges faced by its speakers. As Yasuda succinctly states, Kindaichi required only the Ainu language itself to conduct his research, not necessarily the Ainu speakers. This kind of disinterest

⁸⁸ Nakahara–Sugawara 2023: 94.

「先生も大学の教授でアイヌ語の研究者ならそのあたりのことはおわかりでしょう。」

⁸⁹ The epics of Ainu orature are indeed quite old. Quoting Donald L. Philippi (1930–1993), Chiri Mashiho 地理真志保 (1909–1961) and other scholars, Wallner dates the creation of most *kamuy yukar* to the period between the 10th and 16th centuries, while he describes *yukar* as a likely product of a period characterized by either intensifying conflict or trade with the neighbouring populations, which took place either between 650 and 1150 CE or after the 15th century, respectively (Wallner 2017: 153, 201–202).

⁹⁰ Yasuda 2007: 159–162.

in the Ainu people themselves is presumably a product of his time: like many of his contemporaries, Kindaichi uncritically accepted the idea that the Ainu were destined to vanish from the modern world. This belief left him with a sense of urgency to record the Ainu language as quickly as possible, preferably under favourable conditions.⁹¹

Conditions favourable to him, that is. Strong states that the reason for Yukie's early death was a tragic combination of circumstances: the humid heat of Tōkyō's summer, combined with the childcare, sewing, and transcription duties she had to fulfil at the Kindaichi household, was too taxing on her fragile health, which had been compromised by congenital heart disease. She never returned to Hokkaidō, dying of heart failure on 18 September 1922.⁹² Yasuda goes a step further and asserts that Yukie was the victim of Kindaichi's distinctive research approach, which he refers to as imperial capital linguistics (*teito gengogaku* 帝都言語学). Ever since attending the Tōkyō Colonial Exhibition in 1912—where he received some uncredited assistance with his translation work from the exhibited Ainu that led to his first breakthrough—Kindaichi preferred to invite his informants to the capital, rather than undertaking the costly and exhausting journey to visit them in the field. As Yasuda observes, this made him something of a hypocrite: in his later years, he was recorded stressing the importance of fieldwork, as if attempting to obscure his own practices.⁹³ Based on Kindaichi's involvement in Ueda's project, his distinctive research method and his disinterest in the Ainu people, Yasuda argues that Yukie was merely an informant⁹⁴ for the Wajin linguist: a uniquely capable, but ultimately misused one.⁹⁵

Conclusion

During the Meiji period, the homeland of the Ainu people was colonized by an emerging Japanese Empire, which forcefully brought them into the fold of its citizenry as a subordinated population, transforming Hokkaidō into a settler colony in the process. Japanese imperialism and colonialism impacted Ainu people's life in a variety of ways. A notable example of this is the case of the early modern Ainu school system, where Ainu children were cut off from their

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹² Strong 2011: 2–3.

⁹³ Yasuda 2007: 180–183.

⁹⁴ While the nature of Yukie's relationship to Kindaichi is actively debated here, her younger brother named Mashilho was without a doubt a true protegee of Kindaichi, becoming under his tutelage the first Ainu to gain entrance to the University of Tōkyō and later an accomplished linguist in his own right, specializing in the Ainu language (Refsing 2014: 196–197).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159, 183, 187.

indigenous roots while still being denied a quality education. Additionally, one can point to the desecration of Ainu graveyards by the first generation of Wajin anthropologist. These injustices can be retroactively interpreted as a violation of Article 14 and Article 12 of the UNDRIP, respectively.

Chiri Yukie and the Ainu and *Song of the Kamuy* are both Japanese comics that introduce their readers to these dark parts of Ainu-Wajin shared history, while dramatizing the biography of Chiri Yukie, an Ainu epic poet whose potential was stifled by her tragically early death. By depicting the violation of indigenous rights from the Ainu characters' point of view, the creators of the aforementioned manga position their—presumably mostly Wajin—audience on the Ainu side of history, effectively transforming them into secondary witnesses, who are invited through the mediation of comics to empathize with the distant suffering of others. By being graphic life narratives that facilitate secondary witnessing, this paper argues that the manga in question possess the potential to highlight or obscure the connection between Hokkaidō's status as a settler colony and the violation of the Ainu people's indigenous rights during Yukie's lifetime.

In a presumed attempt to not alienate any readers, both manga obscure the fact that the special Ainu schools and the desecrated Ainu graveyards were a product of Japanese imperialism. The colonialist roots of Japanese linguistics are also left unacknowledged, hiding behind the friendly face of Kindaichi Kyōsuke. Yet, these manga were created with the clear intent behind them to form and reform their readership's historical consciousness, which transforms them into places of memory. However, their interpretation of Ainu history seems more in line with the Japanese government's current Ainu policy than the subversive potential of Yukie's legacy, leaving their readership with nothing but bittersweet feel-good stories about perseverance and sacrifice, while sneakily propagating Meiji-era narratives about the supposed benefits of separate education for Ainu children and the patriotic *tondenhei* soldiers. Although the empathy of readers is likely moved by the trials and tribulations of an overwhelmingly Ainu cast of characters, it is liable to remain stuck on a personal level, obscuring from their view the Japanese state's domineering position over the indigenous Ainu that connects the dying race narrative of the past with the dying culture narrative of the present. Echoing Komai's doubts about the capacity of the PPA to facilitate Ainu cultural revitalization without a political dimension, this paper concludes with the question if simply fostering empathy for the Ainu people's past plight without facing Hokkaidō's colonial legacy in the spirit of historical truthfulness is enough to transform the manga about Yukie's life into an effective vehicle for deepening the Japanese majority's understanding of current Ainu issues? The shorts answer is likely no, since directionless empathy is rarely a catalyst for change.

On a final note, this paper is not meant to deny Kindaichi's enduring personal devotion for the Ainu epics, which Kirsten Refsing credits as the driving force behind the transformation of Ainu-language research into an established branch of Japanese linguistics.⁹⁶ However, being passionate about one's research subject is not the same as actively advocating for the rights of the indigenous minority one studies, as Kaneda's storyline in *Song of the Kamuy* may imply. Additionally, this paper is not intended to portray Kindaichi as a cartoon villain without any care for Yukie's wellbeing. Although conducting a thorough study of his character would necessitate the incorporation of more material about his own life, the general impression one is left with after reading Yukie's biography is that he was mostly kind—or the very least cordial—to her. What this paper argues for then, is that their interactions on the personal level do not matter much in the grand scheme of things. Similarly to the time when he unintentionally monopolized the Kannari family's only mosquito net, Kindaichi probably did not harbour any bad intentions when he misused Yukie's talents by inviting her to the capital. His decision was most likely the result of a colonial power imbalance that emboldened an esteemed Wajin academic to cut the costs of fieldwork by placing the burden of relocation on his teenage Ainu informant.

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⁹⁶ Refsing 2014: 196.

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