

11 Hokkaido as imperial acquisition and the Ainu in popular culture and tourism

Ryo Koarai

Following the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japan was involved in many overseas wars under the ‘Rich country strong army’ policy. Japan’s colonization of Hokkaido was an important part of colonial policy to protect Japan’s northern border with the Russian empire. One work depicting imperial Japan’s northern area is the manga *Golden Kamuy* (2014–present) by Noda Satoru, which is set in Hokkaido and Sakhalin just after the Russo-Japanese War. One of the main characters is Sugimoto Saichi, a veteran of the Imperial Japanese Army, and another is Asirpa, an Ainu girl. The two join forces to search for hidden Ainu gold. In this action-adventure tale, they fight over the gold with other Ainu, former members of the Imperial Japanese Army, former members of Shinsengumi, and Russians. An anime television series based on manga extended to three series. The work is popular among both young men and especially women.

The story is set across much of Hokkaido and Sakhalin, including Otaru, Sapporo, Asahikawa, Abashiri, and southern Sakhalin. On the official anime home page, audiences can use an interactive feature to see where the action takes place in each episode (TV Anime *Golden Kamuy* Official Site 2020). The story includes some clearly fantastical elements, for example, one character is an elderly Hijikata Toshizō (who actually died during the Battle of Hakodate in 1869 – see Introduction; Chapter 10). But, in other ways the story attempts to be highly accurate or authentic: for example, it introduces Ainu culture in great detail and explains how the Ainu were affected by the Meiji government’s imperialism in Hokkaido. It also depicts the Imperial Japanese Army Seventh Division, which was based in Hokkaido at that time.

Hokkaido is a popular Japanese destination for both domestic and international tourists. But how have fans travelled the narrative world of *Golden Kamuy*? And how does this contents tourism relate to Hokkaido war history?

Golden Kamuy tourism and Ainu culture

Fan tourism relating to *Golden Kamuy* typically involves experiencing traditional Ainu culture, including history, clothing, food, and housing. Many Ainu characters, including Asirpa, Inkarmat, Kiroranke, and others, appear in *Golden Kamuy*. The Ainu villages (*kotan* in the Ainu language) in the story are fictional, so tourists cannot visit them in real life. But tourists can gain insights into these characters by visiting general sites introducing Ainu culture, such as Upopoy, the National Ainu Museum and Park in Shiraoi, Hokkaido.

Tourists can also eat traditional Ainu dishes. *Golden Kamuy* has lengthy scenes introducing Ainu cuisine. Some of the dishes featured in the story, such as *citatap* and *ohaw*, are served at Ainu restaurants in Hokkaido. Fans go to try them out. One key effect of *Golden Kamuy*, therefore, is that fans are visiting Ainu restaurants. Although there are Ainu restaurants in Tokyo and Osaka serving the dishes that appear in *Golden Kamuy*, fans give special importance to dining experiences in Hokkaido. The traditional Ainu dishes appearing in *Golden Kamuy* are ‘food and drink as paratexts’ (Williams 2020: 155) for fans and have a connection with Hokkaido. When fans eat the Ainu dishes appearing in *Golden Kamuy* in Hokkaido, they connect contents and food, food and destination, and destination and contents. By doing so, the fans achieve strong ‘immersion’ (Jenkins 2006: 286) in the narrative world story.

Furthermore, some Ainu restaurants have displays about Ainu culture featuring items such as clothing and household items. Fans who travel to Hokkaido on the trail of *Golden Kamuy* can experience Ainu culture via dining experiences. The reverse pattern also exists. The National Ainu Museum and Park, Upopoy, has a restaurant called Hinna Hinna Kitchen. Most dishes served there are made with ingredients commonly used in Ainu dishes, but the phrase ‘hinna hinna’ often appears in *Golden Kamuy* when characters express gratitude for the food they are eating (Hadakadenkyu 2018). While the museum does not appear in *Golden Kamuy*, nevertheless fans can feel a connection to the narrative world and learn about Ainu culture there. In actuality, young fans visit the town of Shiraoi where Upopoy is located, and *Golden Kamuy* has influenced visitation rates (Seaton 2017).

Golden Kamuy tourism and the Imperial Japanese Army Seventh Division

Most fans of *Golden Kamuy* also visit sites linked to the Imperial Japanese Army, especially the Seventh Division, which was based in Hokkaido.

Golden Kamuy has many fictional characters connected with the Seventh Division and they are associated with sites in Otaru, Sapporo, and Asahikawa. For example, at the Hokkaido University Botanic Garden (Figure 11.1) fans can visit the building which was the model for a taxidermist's home that Lieutenant Tsurumi visited in *Golden Kamuy*. The Historical Village of Hokkaido, an open-air museum in Sapporo, also contains various historical buildings that were models for buildings in *Golden Kamuy*, and some of them relate to soldiers and army deserters from the Seventh Division.

These buildings appearing in *Golden Kamuy* were inspired by extant buildings, but in actual history the Seventh Division did not use them. Furthermore, *Golden Kamuy's* characters in the Seventh Division are completely fictional. However, many fans gain an interest in the real Seventh Division by reading and watching *Golden Kamuy*. When these fans become tourists they can visit sites related to the real Seventh Division. Many fans visit the Hokuchin Memorial Museum in Asahikawa, a museum operated by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force whose exhibits focus heavily on the prewar Seventh Division. Despite making no appearance in *Golden Kamuy*, the museum is introduced in some fan



Figure 11.1 The model for a taxidermist's home in *Golden Kamuy*. Author's photo.

blogs and YouTube videos (for example, Yuruyuru Hokkaido 2020) as a pilgrimage site for *Golden Kamuy* fans. At the Hokuchin Memorial Museum, there is a board signed by Noda Satoru on display and *Golden Kamuy* comics are put out for visitors to read. In addition, the museum has also put on a special exhibition for fans' visits (Minna no Asahikawa 2019).

As these examples demonstrate, fans visit buildings which were models for places in the story with no link with the real Seventh Division, and also places which do not appear in *Golden Kamuy* but are connected to the actual Seventh Division. However, using Godwin's (2017) understanding of fan tourism as a fan practice that is motivated by a tourist's desire to be closer to or to make the connection with a narrative world, it can be said that visitation to such sites is a form of fan tourism. In addition, these practices exemplify typical characteristics of contents tourism, whereby fans 'attempt to experience a fictional narrative world in the real physical world' (Yamamura 2021: 56).

Conclusion

Fans visit Hokkaido to see sites connected to *Golden Kamuy*, and during this tourism fans also experience Ainu culture, which was affected by the Meiji government's imperialism and the history of the real Seventh Division. As with other forms of fan tourism, *Golden Kamuy* tourism is motivated by tourists' desire to be closer to or to make a connection with a narrative world. Such visits are only for fun and give the appearance of being completely free of the more serious side of war-related tourism and war history. However, *Golden Kamuy* fan tourism also has the potential to overlap with heritage tourism, war-related tourism, and so-called dark tourism connected to Japanese imperialism through fans' desire to know more about the background to *Golden Kamuy*. This includes how the Ainu were affected by Japan's colonization of Hokkaido in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the role of the real Seventh Division in the 'pacification of the north' (*hokuchin*, which is the name of the museum). This potential of *Golden Kamuy* fan tourism does not derive from fans' desire to consume war and imperialism as entertainment but instead derives from fans' respect for the culture and history related to *Golden Kamuy*.

References

- Godwin, V., 2017. Theme park as interface to the wizarding (story) world of Harry Potter. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2017.01078>.

- Hadakadenkyu, 2018. *Hinna hinna suru? Ainu ryōri wo honba Hokkaido de tannō!* Meshitu. <https://www.hotpepper.jp/mesitsu/entry/hadakadenkyu/18-00204>.
- Jenkins, H., 2006. *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York: NYU Press.
- Minna no Asahikawa, 2019. 'Gōruden Kamui' ni tōjō no daishichi shidan 'nichiro tokushu' ni fan zokuzoku Asahikawa Hokuchin kinenkan de tokubetsu tenji. *Minna no Asahikawa*, 3 December. <https://medoasa.com/n-15/>.
- Seaton, P., 2017. Poroto Kotan. *International Journal of Contents Tourism*, 8 July 2017. <https://contents-tourism.press/postcards/poroto-kotan/>.
- TV Anime Golden Kamuy Official Site, 2020. *Story*. TV anime Golden Kamuy official site. <https://kamuy-anime.com/story/36.html>.
- Williams, R., 2020. *Theme park fandom: spatial transmedia, materiality and participatory cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Yamamura, T., 2021. Kontensu tsūrizumu de yomitoku kakuchō genjītuka suru shakai: kakuchō shitsuzukeru monogatari sekai to tsūrizumu jissen ni tsuite. In: Y. Yamada and R. Okamoto, eds. *Ima watashitachi wo tsunagu mono: kakuchō genjitsu jidai no kankō to media*. Tokyo: Kōbundō, 41–60.
- Yuruyuru Hokkaido, 2020. 'Gōruden kamui seichi junrei', dai-shichi shidan no ashiato, Hokuchin kinenkan wo tazunete. YouTube. https://youtu.be/hM_1oujCMMU.