

Reflection of Ainu Tribe's Culture in Anime *Golden Kamuy*

Achmad Fajar Ori Kharisma^{1*}, Yuliani Rahmah¹

¹Japanese Language and Culture Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. In the world, Japan is regarded as a homogeneous nation with distinct racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. In contrast, there are minority groups in Japan, such as the Ainu tribe in Hokkaido and the Ryukyu tribe in Okinawa. The Ainu tribe is a native Japanese ethnicity that is not highlighted and even discriminated against by Japanese society. Nowadays, there are many efforts to eliminate this discrimination, including introducing the Ainu tribe through various media, especially anime. The anime entitled *Golden Kamuy* introduces the culture and existence of the Ainu tribe to the world. This study aims to analyze how the *Golden Kamuy* anime reflects the culture of the Ainu tribe. The research method used is the sociology of literature method using a cultural anthropology approach focusing on universal culture to identify and analyze the elements of Ainu culture in the *Golden Kamuy* anime season 1. Of the seven universal cultural elements, the author takes three cultural elements, including belief, social system, and livelihood, because these three cultural elements are clearly reflected in the *Golden Kamuy* season 1 anime. As analysis results, the author finds that the *Golden Kamuy* anime can accurately reflect the Ainu culture. All elements of Ainu culture shown in this anime have the same meaning and understanding as those of Ainu culture in the real world.

¹ Corresponding author: achmadfajar767@gmail.com

1 Introduction

Every nation has elements that make up its culture, known as universal cultural elements. There are seven elements of culture found in all world nations: belief, social system, knowledge system, language, art, livelihood, and technology [1].

The world perceives Japan as homogeneous, with uniform racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. Behind this uniformity is a minority group in Japan, namely the Ainu tribe in Hokkaido, which is in the world's spotlight. The Ainu tribe is an indigenous Japanese tribe living in the Hokkaido region of Japan. According to Batchelor, the Ainu are the Japanese version of Aborigines [2]. The Ainu were considered a "Mysterious Proto-Caucasian Group" unrelated to the Japanese. However, DNA research revealed that the Ainu are direct descendants of the Jomon people, who created the first culture in Japan and one of the world's oldest surviving pottery cultures. Therefore, the Ainu and the current Japanese people are biologically related [3]. The Ainu have various cultures passed down from their ancestors. However, due to the absence of laws and regulations that protect the existence and culture of the Ainu, there is not only discrimination experienced by the Ainu people but also their culture is slowly being forgotten and even unrecognized by the younger generation of Japan. Some examples of discrimination experienced by the Ainu, for instance, during the Meiji period, the Ainu were prohibited from speaking their language or practicing some of their cultural rituals. So in later times, many Ainu people hid their identity to avoid discrimination in crucial aspects such as education or the opportunity to get a decent job [4]. In 2014, mangaka Satoru Hoda created a manga called *Golden Kamuy* to preserve and introduce the existence and culture of the Ainu tribe; in 2018, the manga was adapted into an anime by Geno Studio and directed by Hitoshi Nanba.

The *Golden Kamuy* anime tells the story of a former soldier named Saichi Sugimoto who is looking for a golden treasure believed to be hidden by the Ainu tribe in the Hokkaido region, Japan, during the Meiji Restoration. Saichi meets an Ainu girl named Asirpa, and together they explore the Hokkaido region and face various conflicts and difficulties to find the treasure. The Ainu tribe itself is considered an essential element in this anime story. In addition to telling the story of adventure and treasure search, the *Golden Kamuy* anime also features many elements of Ainu culture and traditions, such as their belief, social system, and livelihood.

Since there are various representations of the Ainu culture in the *Golden Kamuy* anime, the researcher would like to delve deeper into the Ainu culture to understand the cultural values of the Ainu tribe reflected in the *Golden Kamuy* anime. This research was conducted based on the illustrations of the culture of the Ainu people contained in the *Golden Kamuy* anime. The illustrations form the background for this research, which focuses on the reflection of Ainu culture.

This research applies a literary sociology approach that connects events or occurrences in literary works with events that occur in the real world. This approach is a scientific discipline that involves sociology as a tool for understanding and analyzing literary works. Ratna suggests that there are three different models of literary sociology, namely, 1) Extrinsic aspects of literary works that refer to the process of analyzing social issues in literary works and connecting them to the real-world context, 2) Dialectical approach in analyzing social issues contained in literary works by involving the search for relationships between the structures that exist in it, and 3) Analyzing literary works to obtain specific information [5].

Based on this explanation, the reflection of the Ainu culture in the *Golden Kamuy* anime can be categorized as an example of the first analysis model and then supported by Koentjaraningrat's universal culture theory to analyze the Ainu culture contained in the *Golden Kamuy* anime season 1. The data in this research is obtained through literature study using relevant literature to analyze the problem being studied. In addition, other books are also used as secondary data sources. The results of data analysis are presented using the descriptive method.

2 Result and Discussion

2.1 Reflection of Ainu Tribe's Culture in *Golden Kamuy* Anime

2.1.1 *Belief*

Beliefs are about metaphysical or non-material things held by individuals or groups. It can be a belief in the spirits of ancestors, gods, goddesses, or other supernatural beings. Beliefs not only explain complex natural phenomena but also strengthen identity and solidarity in society [6]. The Ainu adhere to animism, which believes that every object on earth has a spirit. Despite living in modern times, the Ainu still maintain animism. In the Ainu language, they refer to gods as *Kamuy*, which can be animals, plants, minerals, or natural phenomena. The Ainu believe that divine powers surround them and often help humans [7].

In the *Golden Kamuy* anime, Asirpa explains Ainu's beliefs to Saichi, including the concept of *Kamuy*, in conversation:

アシリパ : 私たちは身の回りの役立つ物、力の及ばない物、全てをカムイ、神としてお使い、感謝の儀礼お当して良い関係を持ってきた。飼料を生業としている私たちにとって、動物のカムイは重要な神様、動物たちは神の国では人間の姿をしていて、私たちの世界いえば動物の皮と肉を持って遊びに行きている。

(*Golden Kamuy*, Season 1, Episode 3, 17:24-17:52) [10]

Asirpa : We care for everything around us that helps us or anything beyond our control, like *Kamuy* or God. The rituals we perform are to maintain a good relationship with them. We live by hunting, so *Kamuy* animals are essential deities. In the land of the gods, they have a human form. They travel to our world, bringing us animal skins and meat.

The dialogue above is Asirpa's explanation to Saichi about *Kamuy*, a figure of God for the Ainu tribe. The Ainu people care for everything around them because they think it is *Kamuy*. They also believe that *Kamuy* animals have a human form in the land of gods.

2.1.2 Social System

A social system is a social order involving relationships between individuals, groups, and social institutions. It is formed through complex social processes with various factors such as values, norms, social status, and social structure. It involves interactions, relationships, and associations between people over time, based on patterns of behaviour established by custom [6].

The Ainu live in groups, most of whom inhabit the northern island of Hokkaido [8]. They live in their village. Ainu villages are called *kotan*, which means village in the Ainu language. Each *kotan* or village is an independent community. Within the *kotan* are the houses of the villagers called *chise*. Ainu settlements are usually located near coasts, estuaries, and rivers. *Kotan* can also be located in the forest so that the Ainu can utilize the natural resources of the forest [7].



Fig. 1. Kotan is made from nature resources and located in the middle of the forest near the foot of the mountain (Episode 3, 12.43) [10]

In the *Golden Kamuy* anime, the Ainu live in a *kotan* with some *chise*. The *kotan* is located in the middle of a forest near the foot of a mountain. In it, groups of several families live near each other and help each other daily.

2.1.3 *Livelihood*

Livelihood is an activity or work carried out by humans to earn a living and fulfill economic needs. Livelihood is essential to human life because livelihoods allow humans to survive and develop their culture. Livelihoods are also a manifestation of culture and social structure in society. Livelihoods can reflect differences in social status, gender roles, and patterns of social relations in society [6].

Most Ainu people live by hunting and fishing. Besides hunting on land, the Ainu hunt at sea or become fishermen. At sea, they catch whales, seals, sea lions, and other animals [7]. The Ainu catch whales using a heavy harpoon called a toggling harpoon, whose cutting edge has been dipped in aconite poison [9].



Fig. 2. Asirpa skinning a bear that has been hunted (Episode 1, 20.04) [10]



Fig. 3. Asirpa is casting a toggling harpoon for whale hunting (Episode 9, 10.43) [10]

In the picture above, Asirpa is shown skinning the bear he hunted, and Asirpa is hunting whales at sea. This shows the livelihood of the Ainu tribe in the *Golden Kamuy* anime.

Thus, the overall results of the analysis of the universal cultural elements of the Ainu tribe above prove that the three cultural elements contained in the anime *Golden Kamuy* season 1 are reflected based on the Ainu tribe in the real world.

3 Conclusion

The following results were obtained after analyzing the *Golden Kamuy* anime season 1. Of the seven cultural elements mentioned in Koentjaraningrat's theory of universal cultural elements, three cultural elements are clearly reflected in the *Golden Kamuy* season 1 anime. The three elements include beliefs, social systems, and livelihoods.

In the element of belief, the Ainu tribe in the *Golden Kamuy* anime believes that everything around them has a God figure. God for the Ainu is called *Kamuy*. They believe that *Kamuy* animals have a human form in the land of gods. In the social system element, the Ainu are described as a group of people who live in *kotan*, the name of the village for the Ainu. In the village, there are some *chise*, which is the name of the house for the Ainu. *Kotan* is located in the middle of the forest near the foot of the mountain. In this anime, the element of the Ainu tribe's livelihood is hunting, both hunting on land and at sea.

Based on the analysis of cultural elements in the *Golden Kamuy* anime season 1, the anime can accurately reflect the culture of the Ainu tribe. All elements of Ainu culture that appear in this anime have the same meaning or understanding as those of Ainu culture in the real world. It can be concluded that the purpose of the *Golden Kamuy* anime to preserve and introduce the Ainu culture to the world has been achieved.

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