Japanese Empire from the Centre and Periphery

Rethinking “Japan”

- “Japan is a ‘homogenous’ nation.” Discuss.
- “Japan is an island nation, therefore its geographical boundaries and political border are clear.” Discuss.
- When did the Japanese empire begin? When did it end?
- What are the issues that affect Japan’s “centre” (broadly speaking Kanto + Kansai) differently from Japan’s peripheries?

Ainu Mosir / Hokkaido

- When was Hokkaido created?
- What is the significance of Hokkaido in Japanese history?
- Who are the Ainu? What is Ainu Mosir?
- When and why did Japanese settle in Hokkaido?
- What do we expect the image of Hokkaido history will be in Japanese popular culture?


“I miss home”, “I want to eat rice”, “It’s hard for everyone” ... settlers on the losing side in the Boshin War.

1872: “Look what I got from my Ainu friends” (shoes from salmon skin).
1868: Defeated samurai from Sendai contemplate their move to Ezo/Hokkaido.

1870: Cutting down trees to make the early settlements.

1872: Ryukyu fishermen killed in Taiwan. Even though Ryukyu is under the jurisdiction of Kagoshima, they pay tribute to China, too.

Kuroda Kiyotaka and his plans to make Sapporo a modern, Western-style city.

Horace Capron arrives from the US. Beginnings of Tondenhei (farmer soldiers).

1876: Sapporo Agricultural College established. Clark arrives to be principle.

Hokkaido’s climate is similar to the US. We should set up an agricultural school.

We must take a strong stance. But, the colonization (kaitaku) of Hokkaido is costing a lot...
Clark wants to teach Christianity. Confrontation with Kuroda, but Clark does it anyway.

The classes are all in English. But Clark is a passionate teacher.

The curriculum covers many things, and physical/military education, too.

Time for Clark to leave. "Boys be ambitious." He had an influence on Inazo Nitobe, Kanzo Uchimura and others.
“But what happened to the Ainu...?” The ecological hunting practices of Ainu.

Orders from Japanese to quit hunting. Protests: “How will we eat?” “But they kill animals with their guns...”

Forced into agriculture. Fishing restrictions. The shamo (Japanese) are taking the land. “What future does this boy have?”

Hokkaido Centennial Memorial Tower

- In Nopporo Forest Park.
- Dedicated on 2 September 1970.
- A landmark clearly visible from central Sapporo.
Hokkaido celebrated its Centennial Anniversary in the 43rd year of Showa (1968 A.D.). The Hokkaido Centennial Commemoration festival was held on September 2 of the same year in the presence of the Emperor and Empress. On that occasion, the inhabitants of this island, made a fresh determination to continue the establishment of a glorious and prosperous Hokkaido. We have observed remarkable progress in the fields of industry, economy, and culture since the commencement of Hokkaido’s development. But unforgettable and beyond our imagination are the hardships that our ancestors suffered exploiting the primeval forests and enduring severe winters. The present status of Hokkaido was achieved solely by the incessant efforts of its pioneers. We, the inhabitants, have inherited this unshakable pioneer spirit and will continue to make our best efforts to build a great Hokkaido where active industries and cultures are well incorporated. Based on our intention, and with the unanimous desire of the people of Hokkaido, the Centennial Memorial Tower, which is the symbol of the firm determination to realize a bright future, will manifest the great accomplishments of our forerunners from generation to generation and dedicate our humblest respects to their departed souls.

We earnestly hope that the Tower, which is the symbol of boundless development in the future, will instill in the minds of the 5,200,000 people of Hokkaido, especially of the young generation, the essence of the inherited pioneer spirit and that it will become a guide mark for the further advancement of our beloved island.

What do you think of the inscription on the tower?

Hokkaido Centennial Memorial Tower

- The blockbuster version of settler history.
- There’s an Ainu character on the front cover, but …
- A much more “complicated” look at Hokkaido settlement.
- Two clips: 00:26:00 (with the Ainu elder) and 1:00:00 (at the Ainu village)
- What comparisons are appropriate with America’s “wild west”?
- In what ways might anime be particularly (in)effective at portraying Japanese history?
- How do anime differ from films, manga, novels in their ability to portray history?
- How does anime’s position within “Cool Japan” affect its history-telling abilities?
Let's watch 2 scenes from Golden Kamuy:

1. The opening sequence about the Russo-Japanese War,
2. A scene between the two main protagonists, Sugimoto and Ashiripa (00:36:00).

What do you think was the reaction in the Ainu community to this manga / anime?

Let's compare with just a few pages from the manga ...

How do they compare to the depiction in the anime?