

A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis of Feudalism Representation within the World Government in the Anime Series *One Piece* Episode 886

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Abstract

Episode 886 of the anime series *One Piece* portrays a system of feudalism through the political and social structure of the world created by Eiichiro Oda. In this fictional world, power is centralized under the World Government, which is controlled by the Celestial Dragons, known as the Tenryuubito—descendants of the twenty original kingdoms that founded the regime. The Tenryuubito occupy the highest tier of a feudal hierarchy, enjoying extreme privileges without accountability for their actions. This study aims to identify the denotative, connotative, and mythological signs related to feudalism in *One Piece*, specifically Episode 886. The research employs a qualitative method using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis framework. Data were collected through scene observation and documentation of dialogues, visual symbols, and narrative elements as units of analysis, while validity was ensured through source triangulation and interpretive consistency. The findings indicate that at the denotative level, feudalism is depicted through the dominance of the Tenryuubito, who are regarded as gods and protected by Cipher Pol Aigis Zero (CP0), while common citizens and even other nobles are positioned as inferior. At the connotative level, the World Government is represented as a symbol of absolute power and modern feudalism, with the Tenryuubito portrayed as untouchable rulers and CP0 functioning as an apparatus safeguarding elite interests. At the mythological level, feudalism is constructed through the Tenryuubito as symbols of political and economic authority who naturalize injustice, commodify Shirahoshi, and reinforce CP0's role as protector of elite privilege. These findings imply that popular media such as anime can function as a critical medium for reflecting and challenging hierarchical power structures, thereby contributing to broader discussions on social inequality and ideological control in contemporary society.

Keywords: *One Piece*, Feudalism, Representation, Semiotics, Roland Barthes.

1 INTRODUCTION

The anime series *One Piece* implicitly portrays a system of feudalism through the political and social structures of the world created by Eiichiro Oda. The world of *One Piece* is governed by the World Government, which is controlled by the Celestial Dragons (Tenryuubito), descendants of the twenty original kingdoms that established the regime. The Tenryuubito live as the highest feudal class, enjoying extreme privileges without accountability for their actions. They treat ordinary people as slaves, and even the Marines submit to their authority, creating sharp social and legal inequalities.

Feudal elements are also reflected in territorial structures such as the Goa Kingdom, which emphasizes social stratification and inequality. This depiction reinforces the broader critique of hierarchical power systems within the series. As Siswanto [1] notes, the concept of feudalism in land control encompasses an unequal relationship between landowners or ruling elites and the communities whose livelihoods depend upon that land. Feudalism describes a rigid hierarchical system in which landholders exercise comprehensive authority over the use of land and the natural resources attached to it.

Beyond battles and adventures, the series presents narratives that reflect real-world social conditions. Through its representation of the World



Government, the anime mirrors systems of oppressive power that generate social inequality. Elements such as clothing symbols, body gestures, and architectural structures in Episode 886 function as signs that represent elite dominance and feudal relations between rulers and commoners. These elements are particularly compelling when analyzed through the semiotic framework of Roland Barthes, who conceptualizes signs across three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. However, despite the richness of symbolic representations in *One Piece*, previous studies have largely focused on general themes of power and inequality without specifically examining how feudal ideology is constructed and naturalized through semiotic processes within the World Government system. This indicates a gap in the literature regarding the detailed semiotic interpretation of feudal power representation in specific narrative contexts.

Based on this background, the present study seeks to examine how struggles for life and power are represented in *One Piece* through Barthes' semiotic analysis. These three dimensions—denotation, connotation, and myth—form an integrated unity within Barthes' theory of signification, generating a global coherence that ultimately leads to conclusions regarding the meanings embedded in the series. The researcher selected this object of study because the series contains numerous layered signs that offer valuable insights for broader society. The signs presented in *One Piece* convey profound messages worthy of scholarly exploration.

The decision to analyze feudalism within the World Government stems from the depiction of a hierarchical power structure that closely resembles classical feudalism. The World Government is controlled by the Tenryuubito as the highest hereditary elite, exercising absolute authority over the military, legal system, and global resources. This analysis is significant because it demonstrates how inherited power without accountability produces inequality, oppression, and exploitation—central themes that motivate the resistance of protagonists such as Monkey D. Luffy against a corrupt world system. Although previous studies have examined feudalism in *One Piece*, this research focuses specifically on the representation of feudal power within the World Government as portrayed in Episode 886, highlighting its relevance to both historical and contemporary social realities.

Ultimately, Episode 886 not only advances a narrative of power struggles but also conveys social criticism through visual and narrative signs. By employing Barthes' semiotic framework, this study reveals how *One Piece* utilizes signifiers—such as clothing, royal symbols, and character behavior—to communicate signified meanings of social inequality and to construct myths that justify injustice within the fictional world and, implicitly, in real-world contexts.

Thus, *One Piece* is not merely entertainment; it embeds critiques of oppressive hierarchical systems in which elites such as the Tenryuubito wield unchecked authority while ordinary people endure fear and injustice. By examining this system, the researcher aims to demonstrate how popular culture, particularly anime, can reflect and critique feudal structures in society while promoting values of justice, freedom, and resistance against tyranny.

In line with these considerations, this study investigates the signs of feudalism in *One Piece* Episode 886 by analyzing filmic elements—including objects, context, and textual components—through Barthes' semiotic method. Barthes distinguishes two primary levels of signification: denotation and connotation, which facilitate access to a deeper level of meaning known as myth [2]. Denotation refers to the literal definition of the object under study, while connotation involves its emotional or subjective associations. Myth, according to Barthes, is not merely an idea but a mode of signification that naturalizes particular ideological meanings [3]. Through this semiotic approach, the researcher seeks to uncover the signs and myths embedded within the elements of *One Piece* Episode 886, encompassing its objects, contexts, and textual dimensions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Communication

Communication is a means of conveying messages, intentions, or purposes from one person to another. It can be carried out through various methods and symbols. When communication is directed toward large audiences, it is referred to as mass communication. According to Alamsyah et al. [4], the digital era has generated challenges such as the spread of unverified information, opinion polarization, and complex data privacy issues. However, it has also created opportunities for active public participation and broader access to information.

The advancement of information and communication technologies has driven significant transformations in the ways individuals interact. According to Komunikasi Digital, digital communication not only accelerates the exchange of information but also enables broader interactions without geographical and temporal constraints. This development reinforces the central role of digital communication in everyday life. Within this framework, representation becomes a critical tool for analyzing how power operates symbolically. In the context of *One Piece*, visual and narrative elements do not merely tell a story but function as systems of signs that construct and legitimize feudal power relations. Through semiotic analysis, these representations can be decoded to reveal

how hierarchical authority, domination, and inequality are normalized within the World Government structure.

2.2 Representation

Representation refers to the linguistic process through which events or realities are presented clearly through language. Language plays a crucial role in constructing acts of representation, which are often supported and disseminated by media through news and other forms of publication. Therefore, the use of language in media deserves critical attention, as it shapes how reality is written, framed, and interpreted by the public.

Representation may appear in the form of words or written text, and it can also be manifested visually, such as in the anime series *One Piece*. Fundamentally, representation concerns how meaning (the signified) is attributed to the object being depicted. It may also refer to forms of digital communication in contemporary media contexts.

2.3 Anime

Anime is a term used in Japan to refer to animation. The word “animation,” in Indonesian, means “animasi.” According to Vaughan, as cited in Ni Wayan Eka Putri Suantari, animation is an effort to transform static presentations into dynamic, lifelike forms. Animation is created through continuous visual changes. In the book *The Animation World*, Ni Wayan explains that animation consists of images containing objects that appear alive due to sequential changes in regularly displayed frames. The objects in animated images may include text, shapes, colors, and special effects.

Anime enthusiasts are drawn to anime because of its distinctive visual styles and graphics, including 2D, 3D, and special visual effects, which are typically produced by different animation studios. These visual elements create an effect that closely resembles reality, making the animated scenes appear vivid and lifelike.

As a visual medium, anime presents icons, images, individuals, and groups in ways that appear alive, even though these figures are merely electronic constructions. This perception informs how audiences interpret representation in film and animation [5].

2.4 Feudalism

Feudalism refers to one of the oldest political systems in the world, historically implemented by noble classes, often under monarchic rule. The structure of this system is based on hereditary lines, in which rulers possess supreme authority, and relationships between lords and vassals are founded on subordination.

Feudalism represents one of the largest and oldest social systems in human history. According to Mulya

[6], feudalism encompasses three forms of social systems: primitive social systems, traditional or feudal social systems, and modern social systems that have been adopted by many major nations.

Feudalism has also undergone transformation into what is often referred to as neo-feudalism, a more sophisticated form of power that permeates various sectors—from territorial governance to societal structures. In neo-feudalism, it becomes difficult to recognize and escape the system due to its deeply embedded and subtle mechanisms of control.

Within a feudal order, peasants are bound to the land, burdened with heavy obligations, and deprived of autonomy, thereby creating deeply rooted structural inequality.

Thus, it can be understood that feudalism is an ideological and structural system exercised by the nobility to control territories they claim, characterized by the concentration of substantial power in the hands of landowners.

2.5 Semiotics

Semiotics is the study or analytical method concerned with signs. Etymologically, the term “semiotics” derives from the Greek word *semeion*, meaning “sign.” A sign is defined as something that, based on socially constructed conventions, represents something else.

According to Rorong and Suci [7], semiology seeks to examine how humanity signifies things. In this context, a sign cannot be equated merely with communication. A sign implies that objects not only convey information—through which they communicate—but also constitute a structured system of signs. Thus, signification is understood as a total process within an already structured arrangement. Signification is not limited to language; it also encompasses phenomena beyond linguistic expression. Barthes regards social life as a form of signification; in other words, social life in any of its forms constitutes its own system of signs.

Semiotics, or in Barthes’ terminology, semiology, fundamentally aims to study how humanity produces meaning. This suggests that objects not only carry information but also function communicatively. According to Barthes, semiology is a science of forms, as it studies systems of signification independently of their specific content. He further argues that images tend to be more imperative (emphatic) than written text. An image can present a sign in its entirety without analyzing or diminishing it; in this sense, images function as a kind of writing. However, like writing, images require a vocabulary to be interpreted. Roland Barthes emphasizes the interaction between text and the personal and cultural experiences of its users, highlighting the interplay

between conventions embedded within the text and the conventions experienced and anticipated by its audience.

In Barthes' semiotic theory, semiotics is understood as the science of humanity that studies signs in all aspects of life. He maintains that a sign is not merely something to be interpreted but also a vehicle for conveying information and facilitating communication. Barthes asserts that all social life constitutes a distinct sign system. Moreover, he argues that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not naturally given but arbitrary [8].

Roland Barthes emphasized three central elements in his analysis: denotation, connotation, and myth. Barthes developed a semiotic theory focusing on how signs operate within popular culture.

In *One Piece* Episode 886, the feudal system depicted through global elites such as the Tenryuubito and the hierarchical structure in Mary Geoise is saturated with symbols of power. Barthes' semiotics allows these signs to be read critically—not merely as elements of fictional storytelling, but as visual and symbolic representations of oppressive social structures.

2.6 *One Piece*

One Piece belongs to the adventure and fantasy genres. The series originated as a Japanese manga written and illustrated by Eiichiro Oda. The story follows the adventures of a pirate named Monkey D. Luffy, a young man with a unique body possessing elastic properties similar to rubber after consuming a Devil Fruit known as the Gomu Gomu no Mi.

The Devil Fruit grants its user extraordinary powers and unique abilities. However, in exchange for this strength, the user permanently loses the ability to swim. Through Luffy's journey and the broader narrative world, *One Piece* presents not only adventure and fantasy but also complex social and political themes embedded within its storyline.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method. The primary object of this research is Episode 886 of the anime series *One Piece*, which is selected due to its explicit depiction of hierarchical power relations within the World Government. The units of analysis in this study consist of visual symbols and narrative elements, including costumes, body gestures, spatial settings, and dialogues that represent power relations within the episode. Data were collected through documentation techniques, including screenshot capture of selected scenes and transcription of relevant dialogues, as well as literature review to support the theoretical framework. Qualitative research is often

described as research conducted in natural settings. It is an approach chosen by the researcher to collect information or data in a comprehensive and contextual manner.

Qualitative research methods are grounded in the philosophy of post-positivism and are used to examine phenomena under natural conditions (as opposed to experimental settings), where the researcher serves as the key instrument. Data sources are selected purposively, and data collection techniques involve triangulation (a combination of methods). Data analysis is inductive and qualitative in nature, and the findings emphasize meaning rather than generalization [9].

By employing a qualitative method, the researcher aims to produce a comprehensive and in-depth study. The findings are presented descriptively using established scientific procedures. This methodology was selected because the researcher seeks to explore, examine, and understand the phenomenon of feudalism in the anime series *One Piece*. This understanding is closely related to social experiences that have occurred historically and continue to be relevant today. Therefore, qualitative research enables a descriptive explanation of the phenomenon under study. Moreover, the researcher applies a data analysis approach that is thorough, in-depth, and extensive in order to clarify the meanings embedded in the signs being examined.

The analytical approach used in this research is the semiotic framework developed by Roland Barthes. Semiotics—or semiology, in Barthes' terminology—seeks to understand how humanity creates meaning. It assumes that objects not only convey information but also communicate meaning. According to Barthes, semiology is a science of forms, as it studies systems of signification independently of their specific content. He further argues that images tend to be more imperative or emphatic than written text. Images can convey meaning simultaneously without necessarily analyzing or weakening it; however, like written language, images also require a kind of vocabulary to be interpreted.

Barthes emphasizes the interaction between text and the personal and cultural experiences of its users. Meaning arises from the interaction between conventions embedded within the text and the conventions experienced and expected by its audience. In his analytical model, Barthes highlights three central levels of signification: denotation, connotation and myth.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the representation of feudalism within the World Government system in *One Piece* Episode 886 using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The findings are structured according to three

levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Each level reveals how feudal ideology is constructed, reinforced, and simultaneously questioned within the narrative.

4.1 Denotative Level

At the denotative level, meaning is constructed through literal and observable elements within the episode. The analyzed scenes depict explicit hierarchical interactions among the Tenryuubito (Celestial Dragons), Princess Shirahoshi, King Neptune, Rebecca, CP0, and other world leaders during the Reverie.

The Tenryuubito are visually distinguished through luxurious white aristocratic clothing and transparent bubble helmets. One Celestial Dragon is shown riding a chained human slave, a direct visual representation of domination. Dialogue explicitly expresses ownership over Shirahoshi, while King Neptune physically shields his daughter. CP0 agents stand behind the Tenryuubito, silently guarding them. Rebecca displays visible anger but refrains from direct confrontation.

These literal signs construct a rigid social hierarchy consisting of absolute rulers, submissive subjects, and a small number of morally resistant individuals. Feudalism is clearly presented as a system of stratification where authority operates vertically. The Tenryuubito occupy the highest position, protected by institutional power, while other characters display fear, restraint, or forced submission.

Table 1. Denotative Representation of Feudalism

Scene Element	Signifier (Visual/Textual Form)	Denotative Meaning
Tenryuubito riding a slave	Noble sitting on chained human	Physical domination and ownership
Transparent helmet and white attire	Distinct aristocratic costume	Noble identity separated from others
Claim over Shirahoshi	Verbal assertion of possession	Ownership claim over a person
Neptune shielding Shirahoshi	Protective gesture	Defense against threat
CP0 standing behind nobles	Masked agents guarding elites	State security protecting elite
Rebecca's restrained anger	Emotional protest expression	Moral objection within fear

Denotatively, the structure appears inflexible: rulers command, others obey. Human beings are reduced to objects, representing extreme feudal domination.

4.2 Connotative Level

At the connotative level, these signs generate deeper associative meanings shaped by cultural and ideological codes. The depiction of the Tenryuubito riding humans does not merely show slavery; it signifies dehumanization and the normalization of systemic oppression. The bubble helmet symbolizes ideological separation, suggesting that the elite consider themselves superior and untouchable.

Shirahoshi's position carries strong connotative significance. Although she is a princess, she remains powerless before the Tenryuubito. This paradox reveals that in a feudal hierarchy, dignity and protection apply only to the highest elite. Her vulnerability symbolizes marginalized groups whose social status does not guarantee safety under absolute power.

The silent presence of CP0 connotes institutional complicity. Their function is not to ensure justice but to preserve elite privilege. Rebecca's anger, quickly restrained, reflects collective fear within society—an emotional indicator of hegemonic control.

Thus, feudalism is represented not merely as a political system but as an ideological structure that legitimizes inequality. Power operates not only through physical force but also through psychological submission and institutional reinforcement.

Table 2. Connotative Meanings of Feudal Signs

Denotative Sign	Connotative Interpretation
A chained human used as transportation	Normalization of dehumanization within hierarchical power relations
Transparent helmet	Social exclusivity and superiority ideology
Shirahoshi's helplessness	Vulnerability of marginalized classes
CP0 protection	Institutional preservation of elite interests
Neptune's resistance	Moral opposition emerging within an oppressive structure
Rebecca's restraint	Fear-induced compliance with hierarchical authority

Through these connotations, the episode functions as social criticism. It mirrors historical and contemporary systems where inherited authority and unchecked power create structural injustice.

4.3 Myth Level

At the myth level, meaning evolves into ideological naturalization. According to Barthes, myth transforms historically constructed power relations into something perceived as natural and inevitable. In Episode 886, the Tenryuubito are presented as descendants of the original twenty royal families who founded the World Government. This lineage produces the myth of divine or sacred authority.

The fear and silence of other characters reinforce the myth that elite supremacy is unquestionable. Institutional structures such as CP0 and the Marines further naturalize inequality by presenting authority as inherently legitimate. Economic privilege, extravagant lifestyle, and unrestricted control over others construct the myth that certain individuals are “born to rule.”

However, the narrative simultaneously destabilizes this myth. The visible discomfort of other leaders, the moral stance of Neptune, and the suppressed anger of Rebecca suggest cracks within the ideological structure. These reactions function as semiotic disruptions, exposing the constructed nature of elite divinity.

Table 3. Myth Construction of Feudal Ideology

Sign System	Myth Produced	Ideological Implication
Noble lineage of Tenryuubito	Divine right to rule	Inherited power is natural and legitimized
Public fear and obedience	Elite authority is absolute	Oppression becomes normalized
Institutional protection	Authority equals justice	State legitimizes inequality
Economic privilege	Wealth signifies superiority	Class hierarchy appears natural
Moral resistance	Possibility of awakening	Myth can be deconstructed

Through this mythic layer, *One Piece* portrays feudalism as an ideology that intertwines political power, economic control, and symbolic dominance. Yet, by presenting resistance and discomfort, the anime challenges the permanence of that ideology.

5 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that feudalism in *One Piece* Episode 886 is constructed through layered systems of signs operating at denotative, connotative, and mythological levels. Rather than merely depicting hierarchy, the anime presents feudal power as a

normalized and ideologically sustained structure, reinforced through symbolic representation and institutional authority. These findings indicate that media texts function as sites of meaning production that both reflect and legitimize social inequality.

Theoretically, this study contributes to communication and media studies by bridging representation and semiotic analysis, showing how popular culture encodes complex power relations through visual and narrative signs. By applying Barthes' framework in a focused and systematic way, the research offers a model for examining ideological structures within media discourse.

The originality of this study lies in its micro-level analysis of a single episode to uncover broader socio-political meanings. It highlights the potential of anime as a critical medium for understanding contemporary forms of symbolic power and ideological control, opening pathways for future research using comparative or alternative critical approaches.

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