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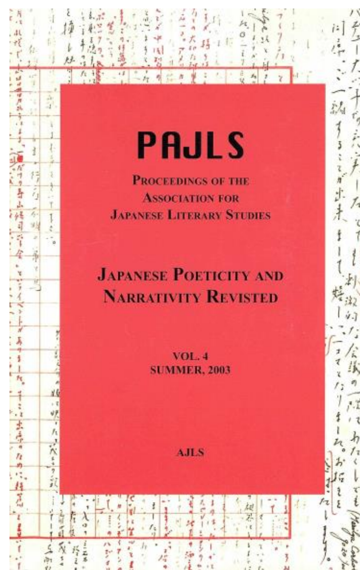

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"WHO EVER SAID SPRINGTIME WAS FOR BLOSSOMS? *KOKINSHŪ* POETICS, AINU ORALITY, AND CHIRI YUKIE'S PREFACE TO THE *AINU SHIN'YŌSHŪ*"

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In the early spring of 1922 the nineteen-year-old Ainu woman, Chiri Yukie (1903-1922), sat down at her desk at her aunt's house in the Ainu *kotan* (village) of Chikabumi near Asahikawa to write the preface to the *Ainu shin'yōshū*, her manuscript of thirteen *kamui yukar* (songs of the gods) which she had transcribed from the oral Ainu and translated into Japanese. The kamui yukar she included were all ones in her native Horobetsu Ainu, a dialect of southern, coastal Hokkaido. They were among the many forms of oral performance that she had learned from her maternal grandmother within the informal setting of the home, often in the company of friends and family gathered around the hearth.

While the origins of the work she was seeking to introduce were intimate, rooted in family and daily experience, Chiri had a keen sense of historical mission in what she was seeking to do. The idea for the book project had emerged from her contact with the *wajin* (ethnic Japanese) linguist and enthnographer, Kinda'ichi Kyōsuke, whom she had met for the first time when he visited Chikabumi in August of 1918. According to Kinda'ichi's later account of that visit, he pressed upon the talented and bilingual sixteen-year-old a sense of the high cultural value of the yukar and other Ainu oral art forms, and the pressing need to write them down "to prevent their extinction in the future" (*inmetsu o mirai ni fusegitome*).[1] Two years later, after her graduation from the Asahikawa Girls' Vocational School in 1920, Kinda'ichi sent Chiri three blank notebooks in which to begin making her transcriptions. At the same time, Chiri set about learning Rōmaji as the medium for transcription. In a letter to Kinda'ichi written in June of 1920 she expressed her strong commitment to help in the project to protect what she called "the mountains of sundry legends from the past" (Chiri Yukie 1996: 49), and she reassured him again in a letter in September of that year that she "understood the weightiness of her responsibility"(51).

[1] Kinda'ichi gives an account of this visit in "Chikabumi no hito yo" (1993a: 54–59) and in a passage from his later biography, *Watashi no aruitekita michi* (1993b: 411-412).

When Kinda'ichi received the completed notebooks in 1921 he was impressed by her work and showed the set to the noted folklorist, Yanagita Kunio. Yanagita shared Kinda'ichi's enthusiasm for Chiri's accomplishment and he proposed the publication of the thirteen kamui yukar included in them as a book in the *Fireside Series* (*Rohen sōsho*) that he edited (Chiri Yukie 2000: 3). Upon hearing of this plan, Chiri set about polishing the transcriptions and translations and preparing notes and front matter for the book.

While convinced of the importance of what she was doing and supported by culturally mainstream and very well-respected sponsors, Chiri nevertheless faced a difficult task in making the *Ainu shin'yōshū* a success. For the act of writing down what had heretofore been strictly oral, communal and performed to be the genuine act of cultural rescue that Chiri sought, she would have to do more than "just" transcribe and translate the kamui yukar; she would also have to make sure that they were read, that they found an audience in their new, written medium. An unread written yukar was hardly more recuperated than an unrecited oral one.

As someone exposed to the degrading strategies of racial prejudice since childhood and well acquainted with the tenants of social Darwinism that allowed the Ainu to be grouped among the "inferior" (and hence disposable) races of the world, Chiri clearly knew how difficult it would be to find a sympathetic wajin readership for her book. Even when she limited that imagined audience to the more friendly grouping of "the many people who know us" (Chiri Yukie 1923: 3), she was still left with a daunting task. She needed to find ways to coax readers, whose expectations were shaped entirely by the literary, the Japanese literary in particular, to want to read and to find meanings in the texts that she offered, texts that until now had endured exclusively in Ainu oral performance format. The two sets of cultural codes involved could not have been more different.[2]

The Preface to the *Ainu shin'yōshū* is short, a little more that two pages in the original 1923 edition of the book, but it is a complex document offering rich material for discourse on the idea of nature, poetics, nationalism, Ainu experience and racism in Taisho Japan. The reading I am proposing here—one of many potential interpretations—

[2] While much of what we think of as Japanese literary tradition—waka, *setsuwa*, medieval war epics, etc.—has its origins in whole or in part in oral performance, it has been written, copied and read for generations. Twentieth century responses to these forms tend to be highly literary in nature.

focuses especially on the second paragraph of the introduction and sees the text as a measured act of seduction and instruction by Chiri of her assumed wajin readers.[3] I will argue that Chiri refers with sufficient frequency to the legitimizing cultural codes for "high" Japanese literature, especially those of the *waka* tradition iterated in the *Kokin waka shū (Kokinshū)* and its famous preface, to provide a sense of familiar ground for her readers, and to assure them what they are about to read is, in some very "genuine" way, "poetry." But I will also argue that Chiri retains enough of what is Ainu and oral in what she says about the yukar and Ainu culture to unsettle her wajin readers even as she reassures them. I will show how she rephrases the familiar *Kokinshū* poetics in unfamiliar ways, uncoupling traditional associations, shifting emphases, and rearranging priorities so that the familiar becomes subtly un-familiar. I propose that, in this way, she is able to alert the more thoughtful reader of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* that she or he is about to enter a different sort of world, one shaped by different rules.

Chiri opens her Preface with a nostalgic appeal to a vanished and idealized past in which she sees her Ainu ancestors "living as innocently and spontaneously as children in the embrace of the beautiful, vast natural world" of Hokkaido. Her second paragraph then offers a representative list of the sorts of seasonally governed activities that these ancestors engaged in. The opening sentence of this paragraph is exceptionally long, employing parallel construction as well as a sense of loosely linked phrasing and delayed resolution that is reminiscent of Heian prose. She begins with a depiction of winter: "on land in winter to push through the deep snow blanketing the fields and forests, and, without a thought for the cold congealing heaven and earth, to cross mountain after mountain to hunt bear." She then shifts to summer: "on the sea in summer, to float small, leaf-shaped boats upon green waves swept by cool breezes, and, with the song of the white gulls for company, to fish the whole day long." It is only when she is halfway through her list that she refers to spring, the opening season in the traditional East Asian lunar calendar: "in spring when blossoms open, bathed in gentle sunlight and accompanied by the ceaseless chirping of birds, to gather butterbur and pick mugwort." She closes with fall, the season that shares with spring an aesthetic priority in waka tradition: "in red-leaved fall, after pushing through the pampas grass, its plumes marshaled by the

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[3] A copy of the Japanese text and English translation of this paragraph is given in the appendix .

autumn gales, with the evening salmon-fishing fires extinguished, to dream beneath the round moon as outside the deer calls to his mate in the valley." She then arrives at the final destination of her long sentence: "ah, what a pleasant life that must be!" (aa, nanto iu tanoshii seikatsu deshō), an exclamation that renders these many activities, not something strictly of the past, but alive in the eternal present of cultural memory and the oral narratives.

If we are willing to give Japanese rather than sinicized readings to such expressions as 寒気, 深雪, 涼風 and 紅葉, we can say that all but four of the twenty-two seasonal tropes (nouns and/or their related activities) mentioned in Chiri's long sentence are part of the traditional waka seasonal lexicon and are used in one or more of the imperially ordered waka anthologies (*chokusenshū*). Some of her figures, in addition to using a "correct" metonym as seasonal indicator, are also phrased in traditional syllabic meter. 花咲く春は、さえずる小鳥、鹿の音を、まどかな月に can all be scanned as lines of waka verse and some occur verbatim in the imperial anthologies.[4] The four non-canonical lexical items mentioned above are all names for animals or plants intimately connected to traditional Ainu life practices and were important sources of food: bear 熊, butterbur 蕗, salmon 鮭, and fish 魚.[5]

Walter J. Ong, in his study of the pyscho-dynamics of orally based thought, has stressed, among other things, the functional rather than abstract nature of knowledge in oral cultures. He writes that "oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld" (49). These situationally based patterns of thought pay close attention to what is useful: thinking that does not yield practical results for the survival of the individual or community is held to be "not important, uninteresting, trivializing" (Ong: 52 citing Luria 1976: 54–5). In this regard, he recalls Malinowski's observation that oral peoples "have names for the fauna and flora that are useful in their lives but treat other things in the forest as unimportant, generalized background" (Ong: 52 citing Malinowski 1923: 507). Kohara Toshihiro makes a similar observation regarding the functional nature of Ainu knowledge of plants:

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[4] For example, the phrase *hana saku haru wa* is used in *Shinzoku kokinshū* 52.

[5] None of the pre-modern words for fish—*io, uo, irokuzu, urokuzu, mana,* etc—seem to be used in the imperial anthologies although a few specific species of edible fish and some fishing techniques (such as cormorant fishing) are mentioned.

> Ainu believe that everything edible....[is] given to the human world by the gods (kamui) that represent these species....In most cases the Ainu name plants according to their uses: if they are collected when their flowers are in bloom, Ainu remember them by their flowers, but if they did not eat the blossoms or use them to identify the plants, they often had no knowledge of them. Plants that were of no use to the Ainu were frequently left unnamed, and sometimes similar or identical words were given to different plants (202).

Chiri, who had an astonishing ability to recall orally performed Ainu narratives and song, but who was also highly literate in Japanese would not be termed someone of “primary orality” in Ong’s sense of a person whose mode of thought is unaffected by knowledge of writing and print (11), but her grandmother arguably would be, and the culture evoked in the kamui yukar Chiri recorded could certainly be so termed. An important genre of the kamui yukar is that spoken by animal and plant kamui in the first person. All kamui yukar, whether those spoken by animal kamui, gods of fire and natural phenomena, or the culture hero, have a very important, practical function in Ainu life; they offer instruction on how properly to treat the natural world on which life depends. As Chiri’s brother, the scholar Chiri Mashio has noted, “there are many narratives [in the kamui yukar] that can be interpreted as showing that when the humans venerate the gods according established form and celebrate them with proper etiquette, the gods in turn protect the human’s means of life and provide them with the bounty of the sea and mountains” (Chiri Mashiho 1978: 165).

The animals—fish owl, fox, rabbit, wolf, orca, frog, salmon, deer, river otter, and freshwater mussel—whose stories are told in the kamui yukar of the *Ainu shin’yōshū* were ones important to the human community at Horobetsu as sources of food or utensils or as potent forces whose power to bring prosperity or harm needed to be controlled. While closely observed and reverently invoked, the value of the animals depicted in these yukar rests in the role they play in the survival of the human community. The kamui yukar’s response to the richness of the natural world is functional, situational, and also magico-religious; it cannot, for the most part, be characterized as lyric.

Kirsten Refsing has described the Ainu sense of time as non-linear and unmeasured. She describes Ainu culture as one in which “only changes in the surrounding nature (the seasons) and the changes from night to day and day to night function to structure the experience of time” (95). The climate in all areas of Hokkaido exhibits sharply defined

seasonal changes and the four words for the seasons in Ainu—*paykar* (spring), *sak* (summer), *cuk* (autumn), and *mata* (winter) correspond comfortably enough to the four seasons in Japanese or, for that matter in English and other European languages. While an Ainu year (*pa*) is comprised of all four seasons there seems to be, as Refsing notes, "no fixed beginning or end of a pa—it may stretch from one summer to the next or from one winter to the next, as long as it includes one occurrence of each of the four seasons" (100).

It is easy to see that in these observations on traditional Ainu culture we are moving rather far from the literary world of waka poetics and the *Kokinshū* preface. While it is increasingly realized that the composition and use of waka in the *Kokinshū* age involved incantatory, magico-religious aspects (Okada: 89–90), the poetics in the *kana* preface of the *Kokinshū* are deeply involved with literary notions that can be termed lyric (expressive of personal feelings). These poetics link the expression of human feeling with responses to the natural world. The famous opening lines of the kana preface make this clear: "The seeds of Japanese poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of ten thousand words. Many things happen to the people of this world, and all that they think and feel is given expression in description of things they see and hear" (Rodd: 35). While the things that happen to people in this world might be largely social, the things that that are seen and heard that provide the substance for the expression of feeling necessarily feature the natural world. In a passage from the *Kokinshū* Preface's historical discourse on waka that follows this opening section, the natural world gains an even stronger position as the source of poetic feeling in and of itself: "Since then (i.e. the age of humans when Susano-o composed his Izumo song) many poems have been composed when people were attracted by the blossoms or admired the birds, when they were moved by the haze or regretted the swift passage of dew..." (Rodd: 36).

Many literary historians have pointed out the impressively enduring and pervasive influence of the *Kokinshū* on Japanese culture. In particular, it is important to note the persistence over time of its seasonally related clusters of associated images. The *uguisu* in the plum blossoms or the deer with the colored maple leaves depicted on *hanafuda* playing cards can be seen as a *Kokinshū* legacy. It is indeed difficult to overestimate the influential power of these clustered images, each a metonym for the other and the season in which it occurs (Okada). While the kana preface articulates the important connection between the natural world and the lyric expression of feeling, it is the body of the anthology

itself that details the particulars of those aesthetics, defining the list of privileged natural images, their relationships and sequencing.

We are now in a position to examine the way Chiri manipulates in the long first sentence of the second paragraph of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* these two very different sets of nature-based poetics, those of the kamui yukar and those of the *Kokinshū* and waka tradition.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of this passage is the way it disrupts the traditional Japanese ordering and prioritizing of the seasons. Free to begin her year when she chooses in terms of Ainu organization of time, Chiri selects the Japanese year's end to be her beginning, and she unsettles expectations of seasonal sequencing by bypassing spring for summer. She thus begins her reflection by privileging precisely the two seasons least favored in waka aesthetics.

Having begun with a strike for Ainu differentness, Chiri continues to play Ainu culture as the stronger card. While her first three seasonal descriptions (winter, summer and spring) all begin with strings of seasonal figures endorsed by waka tradition and readable in lyric terms as sources of personal meaning, emotional response and aesthetic pleasure, each description ends with a functional activity drawn from the traditional Ainu lifeworld: bear hunting, fishing, the gathering of butterbur and mugwort. Unlike the aestheticized and often metaphorically employed references to rustic activities mentioned in waka—such things as the seaside production of salt, or the spring burning of the fields—these activities are presented as necessary and functional (albeit also pleasurable and even exciting); were they not to take place, the lives and well-being of her ancestors would be at risk.

Both Chiri's passage on winter and her passage on summer possess a vigorous quality foreign to waka. While cold and deep snow are both given frequent mention in the *Kokinshū* winter poems and the snow is, on occasion, "stepped through" (*fumiwakete*), snow is never "kicked" in the lively maner Chiri assigns to her ancestors, and the *Kokinshū* poetic persona is much more likely to spend his or her time indoors waiting for the visitor who does not come than to cross mountain after snow-covered mountain.

Chiri creates a similar sense of unfamiliar robustness and risk-taking in her description of summertime fishing. Tree leaves (*konoha*) and small boats (*kobune*) are both standard lexical items in waka, but Chiri's "small, leaf-shaped boats" (*konoha no yōna kobune*) are a clear reference to the *cip* (Ainu dugout). In Chiri's home area of Horobetsu these slender craft were used for sailfish and sea mammal fishing on the open ocean,

an undeniably perilous undertaking regardless of the beauty of the green waves and mewing white gulls.

Chiri enters more deeply into the waka mode in her handling of spring and fall, the two favored seasons in that tradition. In her passage on spring her wajin readers could feel themselves on familiar ground with the mention of blossoms, gentle sunlight and chirping birds, all standard metonyms for spring and canonically endorsed objects for lyric response. The gathering of butterbur and picking of mugwort mentioned at the close of the section were traditional women's activities in the Ainu lifeworld. While butterbur appears to be non-canonical in waka,[6] mugwort (*yomogi*) is used. Known in classical Japanese language literature as a rampant garden weed and hence as a signifier of abandonment and neglect, mugwort might seem an unlikely candidate for spring herb to wajin readers. But its use here is more surprising than startling, and the act of gathering spring plants itself would seem reassuringly standard for wajin readers.

Chiri is most complex and ostensibly most weighted on the side of waka convention in her handling of autumn. Here she lines up eight seasonally governed figures and closes the sequence with something other than an Ainu food gathering activity, namely the act of dreaming beneath the round autumn moon. She does insert a specifically Ainu lifeworld activity—evening salmon fishing by firelight—halfway through the sequence, but her use here of the word *kagari*—a suspended metal basket used to hold burning firewood and a standard waka lexical item often associated with summer cormorant fishing—works to retain the reader within the sphere of lyricized nature. The fact that the fires are already extinguished and the fishing over for the night sets the vigor and immediacy of the scene at a further distance. Beginning in daylight but ending in moonlit darkness, the autumn passage grows progressively subdued and wistful in tone. Chiri's ancestors appear to move through a world that offers to engage them individually in a personal, lyric response to the deepening season. But are they really so distant from the functional world of the kamui yukar?

The act of dreaming mentioned at the close of the passage, while not involving food gathering activities, is nevertheless one of emphatic importance in Ainu culture. The Ainu word for dream, *tarap*, is composed of two phonemes, *tara*, meaning "to show, indicate" and "*p*" meaning "thing." Dreams were a source of information about the future,

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[6] Although butterbur was part of the pre-modern Japanese diet and is a seasonal word in *haikai* tradition, it is not, as far as I can tell, used in the chokusenshū.

of impending good fortune or bad. Good dreams were never spoken of so as not to put at risk the good fortune they brought, but the events of bad dreams needed to be told immediately to family members and the dreamer taken outdoors and purified (Chiri Mashiho 1954: 434). Even the Christian Chiri appears to have treated her bad dreams with considerable care, recording them in detail in letters home or in her diaries.[7]

The dreams that Chiri has her ancestors weave beneath the round autumn moon as the stag bells in the valley belong both to the Ainu lifeworld and to the world of waka nature lyricism. Chiri's and our own knowledge of the troubled future that lay ahead for the Ainu ancestors she so lovingly imagines makes any reflection on the possible substance of their dreams all the more poignant.

Chiri perhaps succeeded too well in her accommodations to the cultural codes and expectations of her assumed wajin readers. While the kamui yukar of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* have not gone unread, they have not been as well read as the preface Chiri wrote to introduce them. As Maruyama Takamori has commented, all too often Chiri's Japanese language preface is lopped off from the body of kamui yukar and cited separately, in, it should be noted, a fully Japanese language context (76). There is even a tendency to use the preface orally as a voice overlay in media productions. This paper, too, it should be noted, is complicit in that same process of truncation and avoidance, looking at the preface but not the texts it introduces.

It is not too late to relinquish the comfort of the familiar and to plunge more deeply into the richness of the "other" cultural world that Chiri offers. A new facsimile edition of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* was published in July of 2002.[8] The door that Chiri sought so carefully to unlock remains open.

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[7] See, for example, Chiri's report to her parents via letter of a nightmare she had during her overnight stay at the John Batchelor compound in Sapporo in the spring of 1920 (Chiri Yukie 1996: 40–42) and her diary accounts of troubled dreams in the summer of 1922 (143–44 and 173–74).

[8] The publishers are the Chiri Mashiho o Kataru Kai of Noboribetsu City in Hokkaido. An essay by Kitamichi Kunihiko on the *Ainu shin'yōshū* is included at the end of the volume.

APPENDIX

The second paragraph of the *Ainu shinyōshū* Preface (Chiri Yukie 1978: 3):

冬の陸には林野をおおう深雪を蹴って、天地を凍らす寒気を物ともせず山又山をふみ越えて熊を狩り、夏の海には涼風泳ぐみどりの波、白い鷗の歌を友に木の葉の様な船を浮べてひねもす魚を漁り、花咲く春は軟かな陽の光を浴びて、永久に囀ずる小鳥と共に歌い暮して蕗とり蓬摘み、紅葉の秋は野分に穂揃うすゝきをわけて、宵まで鮭とる篝も消え、谷間に友呼ぶ鹿の音を外に、圓かな月に夢を結ぶ。嗚呼なんという樂しい生活でしょう。平和の境、それも今は昔、夢は破れて幾十年、この地は急速な變轉をなし、山野は村に、村は町にと次第々々に開けてゆく。

> Inland in winter to push through the deep snow blanketing the fields and forests, and, without a thought for the cold congealing heaven and earth, to cross mountain after mountain to hunt bear; on the sea in summer, to float small, leaf-shaped boats upon green waves swept by cool breezes, and, with the song of the white gulls for company, to fish the whole day long; in spring when blossoms open, bathed in gentle sunlight and accompanied by the ceaseless chirping of birds, to gather butterbur and pick mugwort; in red-leaved fall, after pushing through the pampas grass, its plumes marshaled by the autumn gales, with the evening salmon-fishing fires extinguished, to dream beneath the round moon as outside the deer call to their mates in the valley, ah, what a pleasant life that must be! A realm of peace! But that is now a thing of the past; the dream was ruptured decades ago. This land has undergone rapid change as development goes on progressively turning mountains and fields to villages, villages to towns.

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