

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Strong/Ainu Spirits Singing

is published by University of Hawai'i Press and copyrighted, © 2011, by University of Hawai'i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Preface

I was introduced to the life of the Ainu writer Chiri Yukie (1903–1922) and to her collection of Ainu chants of spiritual beings, the *Ainu shin'yōshū*, rather abruptly on an occasion that I remember well and in a manner that made these topics deeply intriguing to me. Professor Andō Toshihiko, a specialist in environmental education, had kindly agreed to give a guest lecture to my small class of Bates College students who were completing a semester of study in Tokyo in the fall of 1998. At the conclusion of his talk, which focused on the history of green space use and protection in Tokyo, Professor Andō told the students that there were two writers he wanted to recommend because he felt that they portrayed the natural environment of Japan most effectively and compellingly in their works.

The first name, Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933), came as no surprise. I was already aware of Miyazawa's poems and stories set in the rural landscapes of northern Japan and informed by his Buddhist worldview, his knowledge of early twentieth-century science, and his delightful and often whimsical animism. The second name Professor Andō offered, however, was entirely new to me: Chiri Yukie. Professor Andō explained briefly that she was of Ainu descent (in other words she was a member of a group indigenous to northern Japan and other areas of northeast Asia) and that she had transcribed and translated some of the oral traditions of the Ainu people. It was her collection of these oral traditions that Professor Andō was recommending.

Our group was scheduled to leave Japan and return to the United States in early December, not long after Professor Andō's talk. While aware that oral traditions represented a very different kind of literary ex-

pression from Miyazawa's modern personal lyricism, I was intrigued by Professor Andō's recommendation. I wanted, if possible, to get a copy of her book before leaving Japan. On December 4, my last day in Tokyo, I located the facsimile edition of Chiri Yukie's *Ainu shin'yōshū* (Collection of Ainu chants of spiritual beings) as well as Fujimoto Hideo's biography of Yukie, *Gin no shizuku furu furu mawari ni* (Silver droplets falling, falling all around), in two different secondhand bookshops in the Jimbōchō section of Tokyo. I dove with pleasure into both volumes on the long trip back to my home in Maine.

My initial reading of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* confirmed Professor Andō's endorsement of it as a remarkable depiction of elements of the natural environment of the Japanese archipelago, specifically of the northern island of Hokkaido. The thirteen chants of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* portray the natural world on a much bigger and bolder scale than is normally found in Japanese literature, with its finely tuned images of "small nature" or "garden nature" familiar to readers of *haiku* and *waka* verse. In these chants, majestic Blakiston's fish owls, one of the largest of all owls on the planet, with a wingspan of up to six feet, circle serenely in the sky; foxes bound over the length of long ridges that stretch from just beneath the mountain peaks to the tips of ocean promontories; Hokkaido wolves, now regrettably extinct, still pace along the banks of streams; and orcas rise and dive through vast plains of sparkling sea.

In addition to being "wild," the natural world portrayed in the *Ainu shin'yōshū* chants is strikingly intimate and animate; animals and even plants at times possess emotions and cognition similar to those of humans. In the chants salmon laugh and shout for joy as they ascend streams of crystal-clear water, lighthearted snowshoe hares chuckle at the jokes they play on humans, and even freshwater mussels can be heard commiserating together over the consequences of a prolonged drought. Strikingly, eleven of the thirteen chants are narrated by animal speakers using the first-person voice. Humans respond to these thinking, feeling, and aware animals not just in practical ways but socially as well; they communicate with them either directly or in prayers and concern themselves with what the animals are feeling.

The natural world portrayed in the *Ainu shin'yōshū* is clearly not a modern landscape. It bears no trace of modern technology and its capac-

ity to work profound changes on the land and its biotic communities. The techniques of hunting and fishing referred to in the chants are all ones that kill only a few animals at a time, human transportation is either by foot or by dugout canoe, and houses, even “grand” ones, have earthen floors and thatched roofs. Although the degree of its antiquity cannot be pinned down with any precision, the world depicted in the chants is unmistakably an ancient one.

As deeply engaging as the chants of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* are, they are also, in places, puzzling. For example, it is difficult at times to grasp the motivation for actions taken by both humans and nonhumans. In some situations humans and animals treat one another with deep respect, but they can also respond to one another with seemingly unprovoked violence. In addition to the puzzle of poorly understood motivation, there are conventions, regularly occurring patterns of behavior on the part of both humans and animals, that are obviously considered normal in the context of the chants yet whose implications are likely to be unclear to modern-day readers. Why, for example, do some animals host wine feasts in homes that are just like human houses, while others behave like “real” animals, trotting, or hopping, or swimming through their environment? Why, if an animal has been killed, does it always “sit in the space between its two ears?” Why do humans inevitably respond to a frog with a sense of fear but appear unconcerned when confronted by a seemingly more dangerous animal such as the wolf? These and many other similar questions will occupy us in the pages that follow.

One of my principal aims in writing this book has been to read these short narratives of the natural world well; in other words, to read them with a grasp of not only the formal expectations of their genre but also the practical circumstances and the cultural worldview in which they were produced. Doing this involves knowledge of Ainu culture, history, and language, of the landscape and natural world of Hokkaido, and of the conventions of Ainu oral performance genres and of oral performance in general. The academic disciplines involved include not only my “home” area of literary criticism but also anthropology, ethnology, oral performance theory, natural history, history of religion, and linguistics, among others.

In addition to the compelling nature of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* chants, I have been motivated to write this book by the poignant story of Chiri

Yukie's life, profoundly fruitful and consequential despite its brevity of nineteen years. Understanding the circumstances in which she grew up, deeply knowledgeable of her people's traditions and fully bilingual in Ainu and Japanese despite the policies of assimilation promoted by the Japanese local and national governments and the colonialist culture of discrimination, has led me to become more aware of the situation of indigenous peoples around the globe whose histories are marked by similar struggles.

In researching this book I have made four journeys to Hokkaido, including Chiri Yukie's hometown of Noboribetsu. The first of these was in September of 2000, followed by two trips in 2003, the centennial of Chiri Yukie's birth, and one in the spring of 2009. These trips allowed me to collect important research information and to talk with Chiri Yukie's niece, Ms. Yokoyama Mutsumi, to her biographer, the late Mr. Fujimoto Hideo, and to others knowledgeable about Chiri Yukie's life and work. They also gave me the opportunity to study firsthand the landscapes of southwestern Hokkaido (in their present state) and to observe some of the animals and plants that inform the natural-world context of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* chants.

The book that has come from this research places animals—in their status as “real” animals playing critical roles in the ecology of premodern Hokkaido and as spiritual beings living lives similar to those of humans—in a central position. This is the same place they occupy as first-person narrators of the *Ainu shin'yōshū* chants. It seeks also to provide readers with the multifaceted context they need to conduct their own nuanced readings of these and other chants while, at the same time, illuminating the circumstances, both historical and personal, in which the *Ainu shin'yōshū* came to be written down and published.

As an indigenous people now living largely within the Japanese archipelago the Ainu occupy a unique historical and cultural space. Their experience has not been written about extensively in English, and there are relatively few established conventions for handling the unique aspects of their culture in an English medium. In writing this book I have needed to make a number of stylistic decisions about how to convey things Ainu. These are judgment calls on my part; they could be handled differently and indeed in some cases have been by other writers. The more consequential among them merit some explanation here.

Ainu-identified people in Japan today live lives integrated within the dominant *wajin* (ethnic Japanese)¹ society and participate in a modern material culture not markedly different from that of the mainstream. Thus, in writing about traditional Ainu culture I refer to the practices related to material culture—such things as the layout of a house, hunting techniques, or grain harvesting, for example—in the past tense in order to avoid giving the erroneous impression that these practices are descriptive of everyday lifestyles of today.² On the other hand, in writing about intangible culture—such things as cosmologies, religious beliefs, ethics—I use the present tense. Using the present tense with regard to these topics seems accurate in that it conveys the fact that Ainu identity—being Ainu—is a reality for some in the current, twenty-first-century world. In using the present tense for such topics, however, I do not wish to imply that all Ainu-identified people today necessarily hold all these beliefs and views or that as a group they all “think alike.” Using two different tenses to discuss the same general topic of traditional Ainu culture can lead at times to some awkward switching of tense. I ask for the reader’s indulgence in this regard.

Several of the individuals I discuss are Ainu born in the nineteenth century who have both an Ainu name and a *wajin*-style name that was and is needed for the official registry of families maintained by the state. Ainu names consist of one name only (if needed, individuals could be further identified by their home community), while *wajin* names must have a family name followed by a given name. When individuals appear to have been known in their communities largely by their Ainu names I have used them and give the *wajin*-style names in parentheses. However, when individuals, such as Chiri Yukie’s aunt, Kannari Matsu, appear to have been known both within and outside their communities largely by their *wajin* names, I have used those names to refer to them and give the Ainu names in parentheses.³ In giving *wajin*-style names throughout the book, both for *wajin* and Ainu individuals, I retain the original order of family name first. I should add too that Chiri Yukie, born in 1903, has no Ainu name. In referring to Chiri Yukie and her brother, the linguist and ethnographer Chiri Mashiho, I have used the given name (i.e., Yukie or Mashiho) when using only one name is appropriate.

One of the major stylistic questions I have faced in writing this book is how best to transcribe Ainu words. As an exclusively oral language,

Ainu has no traditional writing system. In 1920, when Chiri Yukie began to write down samplings of the oral legacy of her home community of Horobetsu Ainu, she relied on the guidance of her mission-school-educated aunt in using the Latin alphabet to transcribe Ainu phonetically. Chiri Yukie's manner of using the Latin alphabet probably reflects the influence of the popular Hepburn system for recording Japanese, a system that uses "sh" and "ch" to indicate the palatalization of "s" and "c" and is generally easy for English readers to pronounce.⁴ Current systems for transcribing Ainu using the Latin alphabet do not expressly indicate such palatalizations and also have other differences, such as the use of *y* to transcribe a sound represented by Chiri Yukie with *i* and *w* for a sound represented by Yukie with *u*.⁵ Because it is easy for English readers to pronounce with some accuracy and because Chiri Yukie's text is the primary focus of this study, I have chosen to retain her transcription system when rendering Ainu words in this book. This, with a few adjustments, is also the system used by Kubodera Itsuhiko in his well-regarded *Ainu jojishi shin'yō, seiden no kenkyū* (Research on Ainu narrative verse: *Kamui yukar* and *oina*). Readers should keep in mind, however, that some Ainu words in this book may have slightly different spellings from those of the same words encountered elsewhere. For example, "Ainu" in this book may appear as "Aynu" elsewhere; the shaved-wood offerings referred to here as *inau* may be written as *inaw*; and the word for the red fox, *chironnup*, may be rendered *cironnup*. All non-English words mentioned in the book are Ainu unless specifically indicated otherwise.

The years I have spent researching and writing this book have coincided almost exactly with the successful campaign led by Ms. Yokoyama Mutsumi to build a memorial museum dedicated to Chiri Yukie in her hometown of Noboribetsu. Now, as I ready this manuscript for publication in the fall of 2010, the construction of the Chiri Yukie Gin no Shizuku Kinenkan (Chiri Yukie Silver Droplets Memorial Museum) has just reached completion; the museum opened its doors for the first time on September 18, the anniversary of Chiri Yukie's death. Arrangements are in place so that all royalties generated by this book will be contributed to the museum.