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## Land, Language, and Liberation: The Politics of Ainu Self-Representations

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Land, Language, and Liberation: The Politics of Ainu Self-Representations

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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*For Jane, whose spirit will live on with me always.*



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## Introduction

Kayano Shigeru and Chiri Yukie, through their efforts in the preservation of language, effectively fight back against Japanese efforts to restrict the personal expression and cultural integrity of the Ainu colonial subject. As Kayano's *Our Land Was A Forest* was the first memoir ever written by an Ainu author, and Chiri's *Ainu Shinyoshu*, a collection of translated *kamuy yukar* (songs of the gods) was "the first book in or about the Ainu language to be written from the point of view of an actual Ainu speaker," these texts break new ground in being able to assert the intellectual and personal authority of the Ainu despite radical efforts by the state to limit it (Peterson). Yet, how might Kayano's memoir and Chiri's collection of songs be situated within the colonial histories that have been inflicted upon its authors, and how is this problem reconciled differently within the content of these two texts?

Following the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, Kayano describes the moment he realized he would be forced to relinquish all written materials that he had kept, altering not only the trajectory of the text but of his own relationship to culture and language on the whole;

One of our orders then was to burn all diaries. Such war records could apparently be used against us should the U.S military occupy the area. The diaries I had kept from 1941 to August 14, 1945 were confiscated and burned before my eyes. In them I had recorded my continuous struggle as a forestry worker, surveyor, and charcoal burner, followed by my experiences in the war. This was a greater shock to me than our defeat. For one year after that, until May 5, 1946, I did not resume my journal. As I write what could be termed a record of a half life, my profound regret over the loss of those diaries intensifies. (85-6)

The burning of Kayano's diaries is emblematic of the many efforts of the Japanese state to restrict the free expression of its oppressed colonial subjects for the prioritization of state interests. The political outcomes of the state are immediately prioritized, whereas the personal expressions of the soldiers who have just served the nation are completely disregarded. As the content of Kayano's diaries involves navigating the emotionally and physically taxing experiences of being an indigenous person in exploitative economic and military institutions, the burning of these materials serves as a representation of active and ongoing efforts of suppression. This also speaks to the fact that what appears in the memoir following this erasure is not a full account of the intricacies of the Ainu experience. What was within these lost materials that would have radically transformed this text into a "record of a half life," and how might Ainu self-expressions be informed by these cites of suppression? How does *Our Land Was A Forest* navigate and reject the suppression of language in order to use documentation and preservation as means of Ainu persistence?

Although through radically different means, Chiri Yukie's *Ainu Shinyoshu*, a collection of translated *kamuy yukar* (songs of the gods), grapples with similar questions of maintaining the cultural integrity of the colonial subject through traditional forms of language and self-expression. Her romanization and translation of Ainu songs is an effort in the preservation of culture that bridges the past to the present and allows cultural legacies to live on despite these challenges. Like Kayano, however, her text must address the suppression and diminished agency of language due to circumstances that are outside of her control;

The language that we use each day to share our feelings with our beloved ancestors has become worn with use. Even the beautiful words that have been handed down to us are mostly timid things, things which will surely be

extinguished along with their weak, doomed users. Oh what a heartbreaking thing  
- and almost already only a memory (“Prologue” in Peterson, *The Song the Owl  
God Sang*)

Spoken language becoming “worn with use” evokes the sense that Ainu speakers feel the immense pressure of the efforts of suppression that have been inflicted upon them, becoming defeated in their ability to maintain their voice and express themselves through the tools which remain. Chiri expresses that it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain self-expression in the same ways as older generations due to the increase of outside influence. Yet she does not necessarily account for the fact that these changing circumstances are a result of suppression from the Japanese state, as she seems to place more blame and responsibility onto the Ainu themselves. Despite these external circumstances, she posits that it is up to remaining generations of Ainu to continue on these forms of expression.

Ainu words being reduced to “timid things” with “weak, doomed users” articulates Chiri’s frustrations with the Ainu in being unable to preserve and maintain the Ainu language and its surrounding oral traditions. It is a personal responsibility which she feels has been neglected, urging future generations to pick up the pieces from what has been previously lost. Her suggestion that Ainu language is “almost already only a memory” implies that the access to language and culture is rapidly decaying, but at the same time is not entirely gone. Thus, it is up to Ainu who have remaining knowledge of these traditions to work towards their restoration. While Chiri seems to place responsibility on the Ainu subject, she also potentially speculates on the role of outside political actors. The sense that the language will be “extinguished” is curious, as it implies a forceful, violent act of linguistic erasure. Is this extinguishing as she describes it at the hands of the Ainu subjects themselves, or a result of the Japanese state’s efforts of cultural

erasure? Despite her mournful account of the Ainu being unable and unwilling to preserve cultural integrity, how might her text be situated within the Japanese settler colonial project?

The act of “extinguishing” language is one of the major goals of the Japanese settler colonial project, as it aims to suppress and reject indigenous cultural expression to the point where the dominant culture is the only one which can be expressed through speech and writing. Japan’s final aims are not only to make the experiences of the colonized inexpressible, but also to reject remaining knowledge of the settler colonial system itself. This can be best understood through the differences between colonization and settler colonization. Whereas the colonizer structures its colonial project around visible hierarchies of power and the extraction of natural resources, the settler colonizer, in its acquisition of land and culture, aims to erase its power dynamics from public view entirely. As Veracini theorizes in *Introducing Settler Colonial Studies*, “Colonialism *reproduces* itself, and the freedom and equality of the colonised is forever postponed; settler colonialism, by contrast, *extinguishes* itself” (3). The suppression of free expression and preservation of Ainu language is one step along a larger process of erasing the tracks of this oppressive system entirely. Language and self expression are tools to assert one’s claims to indigeneity and personal agency, and when the Ainu are left without these resources to adequately express their experiences, the recognition of larger colonial structures becomes more difficult to observe.

When those with no knowledge of indigenous studies think of Japan, its history, and its present politics, the question of settler colonialism is unlikely to come up. This is a testament to the nation’s ability to ‘extinguish’ its own settler colonial circumstances and the indigenous peoples that make it up from public view. It is possible to think of race and nationhood as homogenous concepts within the borders of Japan, but such a perspective is altogether ahistorical

as these are invented concepts developed through active political projects. Japan's colonization of Ainu Mosir for the establishment of Hokkaido involves not only the acquisition of land and resources for industrial gain, but also the gradual erasure of language and cultural expression. By forcing the Ainu subject to become a citizen, assimilate into the dominant culture, participate in Japanese economic and political institutions, and denounce their language and spiritual beliefs, Japan effectively replaces Ainu identity with being Japanese. The state posits Ainu identity as something worth discarding for the development of a national identity. Simultaneously, as this process of forced assimilation reaches its final stages, the ability to recognize Japan as a settler colonial power becomes more difficult, and the Ainu loses a sense of immediate connection to their identity. Most importantly, through this process of colonial erasure, their ability to preserve cultural expression and document their experiences as oppressed subjects becomes radically diminished.

Yet, although it has progressed at an alarming rate, and continues on into the present moment, this process of "extinguishing" will never fully be complete, as the past colonial legacies inflicted upon the Ainu will always reverberate through the self-representations that remain. By combatting the suppression of cultural memory through language, the Ainu subject reasserts itself and allows for cultural memory to be revitalized and sustained. It is through literary representations that the life experiences, struggles, and cultural memories of the Ainu can be immortalized. This effectively rejects the narrative that they are a people of the past that have already been removed by the Japanese state. Language is thus the ultimate tool for Ainu efforts in decolonial activism because it demands a permanence amidst efforts to artificially reconstruct the past and present. Ainu cultural expressions and preservations, by way of concretizing

spiritual traditions and experiences of oppression, effectively reclaim and deny these ahistorical narratives, making the final goal of extinguishing impossible to ever fully achieve.

This project will explore the efficacy of language as a means of Ainu decolonial resistance and perseverance through Kayano Shigeru's *Our Land Was A Forest* and Chiri Yukie's *Ainu Shinyoshu*. While Kayano's documentation of his experiences growing up as a Ainu in Japan differs greatly from Chiri Yukie's collection of translated Ainu songs of the gods, these texts both center the preservation of language and expression as a means of holding onto culture. Through personal and cultural expression, and through efforts towards the restoration of Ainu language, these texts can be seen as a testament to the strength of the Ainu in resisting narratives of erasure against all odds. The differences between these two texts, by way of subject matter, process, and form, highlight the pluralities that are possible within Ainu self representations. While it is possible to read Chiri's adaptation of oral tradition as 'archaic' and Kayano's memoir as 'modern,' the project will argue that such a reading is altogether too limiting, as these works, through their adaptation into literary form, collapse such boundaries of time. As Kayano and Chiri adapt literary and cultural traditions into modern forms, they resist the assumption that the Ainu are of a distant past and allow for these important cultural legacies to continue on into the present.

## PART ONE

### On Identity and Persistence in Kayano Shigeru's *Our Land Was A Forest*

#### Introduction

As the first-ever published memoir from an Ainu author, Kayano Shigeru's *Our Land Was A Forest* allows its readers to understand the social, political, and economic implications of being Ainu within Japan's borders, as well as the psychological and emotional tolls of systemic oppression. For one who is previously unfamiliar with certain perspectives within Japanese and Ainu studies, reading this text might be the first time that one considers the concepts of settler colonialism and indigeneity in the context of Japan. The nation's homogeneity is something that is often overlooked as automatically predetermined, rather than something which is a byproduct of an ongoing political project of ethnic and cultural assimilation. By writing and publishing an Ainu memoir about his experiences growing up in Japan, Kayano puts the experiences of the Ainu on full public display in ways that perhaps were not conceived of before.

Kayano's text is pioneering in its ability to connect the larger theoretical and political concerns of Ainu studies to his own personal navigation of exploitative Japanese institutions. In some regards, he can be seen as operating within a liminal, in-between space within such institutions, as he is both assimilated into these social and economic spaces while also retaining parts of his identity. This is made apparent by how he accepts the neglect of certain Ainu spiritual beliefs and practices for the purposes of work and survival. Regardless of this sense of relinquishing to shifting circumstances, though, he is defiant and transparent in his rebuke of the settler colonial structure. He comes to acknowledge that the neglect of certain cultural practices



is not something that is up to individual choice and is rather something that is imposed upon him by the state.

Kayano's rejection of imposed settler colonial narratives appears particularly through a denial of naming that attempts to make the Ainu an identity entirely of the past. He rejects being constructed as belonging to an identity formation that no longer exists, and his text serves a reminder of the fact that Ainu connections to cultural identity remain in the fight for sovereignty and recognition. One such moment of Kayano's rejection of imposed narratives is his reflection on the semantics of the Hokkaido Former Aborigine Protection Act of 1899. The act, which was a part of the Japanese legislature for almost a decade, was essentially designed to finalize the assimilation of the Ainu into Japanese society by way of both its policy initiatives and its rhetoric. Kayano highlights the dangers of being classified as a "former aborigine," effectively destabilizing the notion that Japanese settler colonial historical narratives are something permanent and unquestionable; He asserts that "we are no "former aborigines." We were a nation who lived in Hokkaidō, on the national land called Ainu Mosir, which means "a peaceful land for humans." The "Japanese people" who belonged to the "nation of Japan" invaded our national land" (59). Kayano's strongly worded refusal of the Protection Act's rhetoric is both a reclamation of his own identity and a denial of being conceived of merely as part of a history which has already ended. The fixed notions of past and present that are represented through the law are an ahistorical attempt to complete the process of Japan's settlement by erasing it from memory and language. The use of "former" implies that the relations of power between colonizer and colonial subject no longer exist, but Kayano's statement helps to challenge this oversimplification. Through declaring that "we are no 'former aborigines,'" he posits that there are generations of Ainu that still live on and carry on the legacies and traumas of the generations

which precede him. Despite efforts to make the aftermath of settler colonialism in Hokkaido invisible, the ways in which it still creates social and economic struggles makes it an omnipresent, unavoidable component of Japanese social formations.

While Kayano rejects the idea of being a “former aborigine,” he also writes of the Ainu in the past when describing their cultural legacy, stating that “we were a nation that lived in Hokkaidō.” The use of “were” and “lived” suggests that despite not being “formerly” indigenous, through their diminished access to land, economic resources, and language, the Ainu are not living as they once were in the present day. As a result of the 1899 act, population rates decreased rapidly, through inadequate food and agricultural resources and the spread of disease (Eto). Alongside these physical effects of the legislature, the Ainu’s sense of personal agency and cultural connection that once was has become diminished as well. Regardless of his solemn acceptance of the fact that the circumstances of the Ainu have changed, Kayano still asserts that the land that was appropriated is indebted to the people who once fully inhabited it, destabilizing the idea that the Japanese have any kind of legitimate claim to owning and maneuvering it for the purposes of nation-building.

Not only does he reject the Japanese’s claim to the expropriation of land, but he also criticizes theoretical perspectives which think of Japan and Japanese identity as something innate rather than actively constructed through ongoing political processes. The phrases “Japanese people” and “nation of Japan,” through Kayano’s use of quotations, hint at the fact that the concept of nationality is something which is invented through naming. Japaneseness is itself a fraught concept as it relies on defining itself by those who fall outside of its borders ethnically and culturally. Through Kayano’s close investigation of how language operates to legitimize the nation-building efforts of Japan through settler colonialism, he is both able to decenter concepts

which may seem as though they cannot be challenged and also assert his own experiences and political positionings as an indigenous person. While the goals of the settler colonial project are to legitimize the seizure of land and eventually remove such practices from public consciousness, Kayano's text demands that an awareness of these settler colonial circumstances live on through him.

Part one of this project will explore how the form of the Ainu memoir can be seen as an attempt to preserve colonial memory and assert the political authority of the settler colonial subject. Kayano's dedication to language as a means of colonial resistance can be explored in two ways. Firstly, the use of documentation and cataloging of Ainu experience through personal description of oppressive structures allows for a certain sense of transparency in understanding Japan's historical foundations. Secondly, through Kayano's efforts in the preservation of the Ainu language, he is able to fight back against the restrictions that are placed upon indigenous self-expression in a fundamental way by reclaiming the tools of expression that have been stolen. Through Kayano's experiences as an Ainu in Japan, he comes to understand language, both through preservation efforts and self-expression, as the most crucial means of retaining his cultural integrity and rejecting assimilation as something final. This allows settler colonial studies in the context of Japan to be considered on an individual and structural level, and to consider how self-expression through language is both a reflection of settler colonial circumstances and a means of imagining political alternatives.

## Chapter 1: Land, Ownership, and Assimilation

Kayano's *Our Land Was A Forest* resists the settler colonial strategy of erasure by asserting that the cultural foundations of the Ainu will always be present within the land of Hokkaido, both because of cultural and spiritual connections, and because of political rights to ownership. As the *kamui* (Ainu gods) are conceived of as being embodied in every component of the physical environment of Hokkaido, the Ainu have claims to the physical land of Hokkaido in ways that the Japanese cannot prove through adequate cultural means. For one, this appears through Kayano's family passing down tales to him in his early childhood which display these intimate, unbreakable connections to the landscape. He describes that his grandmother often told him *kamuy yukar* in which "a god dwells in each element of the great earth... in the mountains off the distance from Nibutani, the running waters, the trees, the grasses and flowers" (22). This conception of the gods appearing within every aspect of the natural environment suggests that Ainu connections to the land are not only a personal symbol of one's spiritual beliefs, but also something that is undeniable in its expansiveness. The fact that these inviolable connections to the Ainu landscape in its smallest and largest forms are passed down from generation to generation through storytelling is to imply that regardless of changing external circumstances of the Japanese settler colonial system, these beliefs must remain.

Through the Northern landscape being intrinsically tied to the Ainu's personal connections to *kamui*, there is the sense that its full cultural import will only be entirely understood and respected by those within the community. Kayano describes this through his sense of familiarity with the natural landscape of the region he grew up in, specifically

underscoring how such an experience of the environment is not something that may not be universal;

The Azure Horizon spreads in all directions, not a cloud in sight. The pine grove on the opposite shore of the Saru River is dark, but everything else in the vast landscape is pure white, covered with snow. The first time southerners see this Hokkaido winter scene, they are likely to feel it would somehow be wrong to step into it. I myself felt such reluctance when I first went south and faced the grass that everywhere made the earth green (xvi)

The sense of familiarity with a certain region of Japan because of lived experience figures as a metaphor for the intimacy the Ainu feel towards nature as opposed to the Japanese's distance from these spiritual connections. The horizon spreading "in all directions" is emblematic of the ways in which the influence of Ainu spiritual belief is everywhere regardless of one's lack of awareness. With this sense of familiarity comes the idea that those who have not ever inhabited the land should be mindful of the fact that they will never be able to understand the influence of Ainu gods and beliefs. The landscape being "pure white, covered with snow" implies that it is delicate and untouched, and the idea that it "would be wrong" for a foreigner "to step into it" evokes the sense that the pristine quality of the environment is something which must be maintained and would be interrupted by outside interference. Kayano remarks that he "felt such reluctance" when he "first went south," and expects that people unfamiliar with the North would feel the same sense of care and apprehension when entering the landscape for the first time.

While this passage specifically mentions the Northern and Southern regions of Japan, the logic and rhetoric of familiarity can be applied more specifically to the settler colonial context

and the ownership of land. Kayano expects that those who do not have access to the cultural connections that the Ainu have to the land would respect their boundaries and not assume that the land could possibly belong to them. The construction of a dichotomy between Northerners and Southerners, in this regard, serves as a representation of the Ainu and Japanese as insider and outsider. Through this conceptual framework, Kayano posits that it would be absurd for the Japanese to automatically assume that they had a political right to the ownership and desecration of Ainu lands because of their lack of connection to the environment and its surrounding belief systems. This process of nation-building and Japanese identity formation, then is a direct rejection of the humanity and sovereignty of the Ainu, as notions of respecting one's unfamiliarity are entirely disregarded.

Like other settler colonial formations, Japan's settlement in Ainu Mosir is justified through the logic of *terra nullius* which declares that indigenous land belongs to no one and can therefore be claimed and absorbed by the settler colonial power. This logic, which was first applied in the context of the European colonization of Aborigines in what is now Australia, is founded in the belief that because indigenous peoples are nomadic and have no form of structured government, they are not only inherently uncivilized but have no conception of private property, thus implying that their lands can be occupied without question (Wolfe). When this restrictive logic is implemented, however, it becomes clear that the concepts of ownership and sovereignty are applied in intentionally narrow ways to justify the self interests of the state. Similar to his earlier refusal of the rhetoric of the Ainu being a "former" people, Kayano rejects the proposed logic that the Ainu have no claims of ownership writing that if the "Japanese people" borrowed rather than invaded the land of the Ainu, there ought to be a certificate of lease; if they bought it, there ought to be a certificate of purchase. Since, moreover, that would

have meant a contract between two states, the witness of a third country would have been desirable” (60). Kayano rejects the rhetoric of *terra nullius* by asserting that the Ainu do, in fact, have ownership over their lands, and that the Japanese invasion is thus an outright act of theft. He rejects narratives that justify this exploitative act as something harmless, which often appear through land being described as something which is “borrowed.” Kayano’s transparent language when describing the insidious practices of the Japanese state points to the fact that the individual feelings and emotional connections that the Ainu form to their land are left unconsidered. He also describes Ainu Mosir as its own state rather than an unclaimed territory, denying the ingrained belief that the Ainu are ‘uncivilized’ and unable to consider questions of ownership on a structural level. Through Kayano’s reclamation of Ainu lands as its own sovereign “nation,” he effectively destabilizes the boundaries of civilized and uncivilized land that the Japanese use to justify their colonial theft. These declarations of personal ownership, although effective in challenging the settler colonial rhetoric deployed, are of course not enough to challenge the authority and perceived political and intellectual supremacy of the state in its nation-building endeavors.

The Japanese settler colonial project in Hokkaido, through its disregard of the Ainu’s spiritual and cultural attachments to land, places severe constraints on the persistence of these beliefs through generational storytelling and religious practice. It is important to consider the ways in which information about proper behavior and respect towards nature is conveyed to Kayano despite these radically shifting circumstances of ownership and agency. In addition to the *kamuy yukar* which provide Kayano with a sense of how the gods are manifested throughout the landscape, Kayano is also taught *uwepekere* (folktales) from his grandmother which are meant to relay crucial details about how to act within nature. Kayano writes that “there was a

great variety of stories, interwoven with practical bits of wisdom for carrying out daily activities and lessons for life: One must not arbitrarily cut down trees, one must not pollute running water, even birds and beasts will remember kindness and return favors, and so on” (22). These stories being “interwoven with practical bits of wisdom” suggests that it is through the practice of tales being passed down through generations that developing children gain a sense of responsibility in their own conservation efforts of the sacred Ainu land. Yet these moral imperatives, at least through the tales, are framed in a way that places an individual obligation upon Ainu youth and does not consider the role of external economic and political conditions. This shows the extent to which the invasion of Ainu Mosir is seen as something entirely unprecedented and thus cannot be accounted for through traditional forms of storytelling alone.

When these tales are brought into a modern settler colonial context, they beg the question of which “bits of wisdom” would leave the Ainu with no other choice but to discard as they enter Japanese institutions of labor and industrialization. For instance, something akin to not “arbitrarily” cutting down trees or not polluting drinking water may not be possible to follow in the face of Hokkaido being rapidly industrialized, as the careful attention and care the Ainu place on the natural environment may perhaps be lost on Japanese socioeconomic systems for development. Even if the Ainu disagree with the environmentally wasteful practices of these industries, they may be forced to work within them in order to survive and disobey their belief systems entirely. Not only does the access to telling such stories and speaking them in their original form grow increasingly obsolete, but the moral framework that these tales provide may have their foundations somewhat shaken by the imposition of systems which do not attribute the same kindness and gratitude to nature. As Kayano enters the field of forestry in his adolescence, he is forced to distance himself greatly from what has been passed down to him through these



stories. While he may believe in the lessons that have been ingrained in him on a personal level and hold true to the powers of language and storytelling, he is unable to fully act upon the lessons he has learned.

It is crucial to emphasize that these circumstances are not something are not a result of Kayano's individual choices but are rather caused by exploitative economic circumstances that are far out of his control as an Ainu youth. The gradual distance from moral wisdom is situated within a wider colonial history that predates Kayano's childhood and continues on during and after his lifetime. It is important to consider how the emergence of capitalist structures of labor forcibly separate the Ainu from their moral beliefs about the environment. Japan's expropriation and exploitation of the Ainu can be best described, at least within its earliest stages, in economic terms. While following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 there soon became a variety of assimilatory racial and cultural dynamics at play, the emergence and reinforcement of the uneven relationship between subject and colonial actor was at first motivated by the onset of industrial capitalism. The transformations of identity, selfhood, and the ability to recognize one's own indigeneity in the face of the nation-building process are consequences of the major economic shifts from feudalism to industrialization, as with the centralization of the Japanese state comes the centering of society around capital.

Marx describes such shifts through the terminology of "primitive accumulation," which, explained plainly, can be conceived of as "an accumulation not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point" (1). If the Japanese settler colonial project is to be conceptualized through such a framework, the natural resources of Ainu land and labor can be seen as a "starting point" for the establishment of industry and capital. The banning of hunting and fishing practices which force Ainu to become involved in agrarian labor is understood as a

necessary sacrifice for Japan's accumulation of wealth, although of course such an idea of sacrifice for the common good comes at the expense of the colonial subject and articulates whose interests are to be prioritized and maintained.

The beginning processes of this form of capitalist exploitation can thus be seen as “nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (2), which is to imply that the laborers are entirely disconnected from their work at the individual level. This holds significant weight in the case of the Ainu, as they are a people whose culture is so intrinsically intertwined with labor as both a means of sustenance and as a form of spiritual and environmental connectivity. The relationship between “producer” and “means of production” is something so culturally vital that it almost appears as an organizational principle. Even outside of economic terms, the Ainu are connected to the work of hunting and fishing because it is through such practices that they form communicative connections to their gods, and such relationships always aim to prevent the exhaustion of natural resources and to maintain adequate survival in local towns and communities.

When these connections to labor and sustenance are rewritten to prioritize the accumulation of capital wealth, the Ainu are forced to sacrifice their most important cultural and spiritual ideas around the environment in order to fund their survival. Nature can no longer be seen as something pristine and untouchable, and the ability for the gods to provide an adequate amount of natural resources becomes corrupted by the exploitation of an external force. “Divorcing the producer from the means of production,” in the case of the Ainu, ultimately entails separating a culture from its most distinct and formative cultural foundations. Rather than being something worthy of respect and behavioral integrity, the components that make up the natural environment become products for the development of capitalist goods.

Kayano's text notes the cultural impacts of such a "divorce" of "producer" from "the means of production," especially in how it restructures relationships with the spiritual world. The unfortunate reality of the Ainu being forced to relinquish themselves to such economic circumstances presents a pressing, internal conflict, especially for the older generation who hopes to maintain their relationship to the gods amidst these economic and societal transformations. As the structuring of society around monetary value is something entirely outside of the human-god relationship in Ainu culture, the Ainu are forced to reconcile with these changes and hope that their relationship with the gods can be adapted. There seems to be an immense sense of sorrow and grief in having to alter one's belief system and lifestyle for monetary gain, and Kayano's father is particularly cognizant of this. While chopping and burning wood for charcoal, he sits down to engage in "*onkami*, a special form of Ainu worship" (81). He prays to the "goddess of fire," and his message solemnly acknowledges the circumstances of interrupting the proper relationship between himself and the natural world;

An Ainu I,

in order to raise my children need what is called money;

so into the tranquil mountain

I have entered to cut standing trees

and harmed the divine mountain-dwellers' abode and garden

much to my regret.

But humans and gods alike

raise children.

I, too, have many children.

In order to feed them  
and keep them from hunger  
I must come to the highest  
mountain to work  
Oh god  
think of this  
and permit an Ainu's deed. (81)

Kayano's father's prayer can ultimately be read as a plea for forgiveness that both takes individual responsibility for his actions and also recognizes the external conditions by which he is forced to disobey the gods. He explains, in plain terms, the concept of acquiring wealth as a means of survival, which is something which is clearly not innate within Ainu systems of the environment and natural order. While the gods themselves are tasked with "human" responsibilities such as labor and the oversight and maintenance of other individuals, these roles have no inherent ties to anything monetary, and are something to do much more with social values and moral good. Ainu belief systems, forced to clash with societal structures which place emphasis on material possession as a means of sustenance and survival, is incompatible with modernity - and yet there seems to be an innate desire to hold onto and repurpose the past. The fact that Kayano's father is still inclined to call on the gods in such an instance is perhaps an indication that although economic and social circumstances have been radically altered, there remains a possibility of the human-god relationship somehow adapting to these changes. It is unclear how these altered relationships may manifest themselves in later generations, as cultural norms and values become increasingly obsolete and incompatible with modern industry. Kayano,

for instance, seems in a sense much more “divorced” from the means of production in that he is more resigned in his role as laborer in the Japanese economy, and more willing to accept the fact that he must abandon what has been taught to him about nature. This calls into question the viability of spiritual systems in the face of generational shifts, and can be more thoroughly understood through Kayano’s ‘in between’ status as both assimilated citizen and Ainu activist.

Kayano’s father’s assertion that “humans and gods alike raise children” and that he “too has children” serves as a way to appeal to the gods, a means of getting them to understand that cultural practices must be adapted in order to sustain future generations of Ainu. While the greater economic shifts are at the behest of an external, oppressive force, and do not reflect the desires of the Ainu and their gods, spiritual practices must be transformed in order for continued survival. While such an adaptation in regards to human-god connection may help to normalize practices which arbitrarily harm the natural environment, the emotional significance of such changes differs greatly by generation. For instance, the grief that weighs on his father seems to be somewhat lost on Kayano, who, rather than making pleas for forgiveness to the gods seems to accept the changing circumstances much more plainly. Having grown up in a generation of Ainu perhaps more distanced from traditional practices and only catching glimpses of spiritual belief from older relatives in childhood, the circumstances of poverty, scarcity, and of being forced to disrupt the natural environment are seen simply as parts of Ainu life.

As Kayano is accepting of changing circumstances regarding the preservation of nature, he is broadly in accordance with the fact that he must work to survive and that his economic conditions must be prioritized over his moral and spiritual beliefs. Within his reflections on his adolescence and his transition from student to laborer, there is a general tone of resignation; prioritizing full-fledged participation in the Japanese economy, especially in vastly exploitative

conditions of labor, does not seem voluntary but rather something compulsory. Upon graduation from primary school, he writes that “I should be working instead of going to school, constantly lacking food and clothing - that was all I thought about while I was in school...I had no desire to continue my education. Or, rather, I had probably suppressed all hope in the face of impossible odds” (70). Not having the basic, adequate means for survival, he is not able to think about his future outside of economic terms, and thus the conditions for cultural and personal identity formation become stunted. While he has “suppressed all hope,” he does not necessarily linger on the emotional impacts of such unrealized dreams. Kayano’s inability to think of the future outside of his own immediate conditions for survival speak to the broader issue of sacrifice, as the Japanese exploitation of the Ainu, even from its earliest stages, is predicated on whose priorities and aspirations matter.

In addition to being forced to distance himself from the moral lessons that were taught to him in childhood, Kayano’s work in forestry also can be seen as going against Ainu cultural beliefs in that it clashes with “untouchable” and “pristine” conceptions of nature. While the Japanese state is primarily responsible for disrupting and tarnishing the idealized landscape by its expropriation and extraction of the land, Kayano’s forestry in previously untouched areas is an example of how this disruption operates at the local level. When reflecting upon his transition from working as a woodcutter’s apprentice to becoming a surveyor, he is seemingly aware of the broader symbolism regarding intervening in nature but does not share the same resentments as his father. While the human-god relationship does not seem to impact his way of life, he begins to explore the ways in which sustenance practices may invite a more optimistic sense of cultural connectivity;

We went to a place called Nukanrai along the upper reaches of the Niikappu River. The area was one of pristine forests where no man had ever wielded an ax. Surveyors had to go on foot in those mountains, and we carried tents, provisions like rice and miso paste, and fishing poles to catch the river fish. Our guide was Sakamoto Santarō, an Ainu. Since he hunted from fall to winter in the mountains along the Niikappu upstream, he knew the terrain immediately. (75-76)

The fact that this is an area “of pristine forests where no man had ever wielded an ax” calls attention to the earlier conception of nature as so pure as not to be disrupted by outside forces. Unlike his father, however, Kayano does not seem to dwell on the fact that to work in untouched land would create disruptions in the human-god relationship. While he is not necessarily self-reflective on these cultural changes within the land itself, he is cognizant of the ways in which hunting and fishing practices may serve as a foundational connection to land and culture in ways that are more accessible to him than the maintenance of spiritual belief.

Kayano and the other surveyors carrying “fishing poles to catch the river fish” suggests that despite adamant efforts by the Japanese state to restrict fishing, the practice both as a form of sustenance and as an integral facet of one’s cultural identity persists. Even though the development of Japanese industry creates major shifts in the relationship between nature and the Ainu self, this suggests that the two are still somewhat intertwined. Sakamoto Santarō’s familiarity with the landscape being tied to his previous experiences of hunting suggests that it is through such sustenance practices that one develops a more personal sense of connection with nature and a particular ownership of and identification with the land. Despite the fact that Kayano’s role as surveyor ultimately leads to changes in the “pristine forests,” his experience

during this time is enriched by the cultural wisdom of Sakamoto, as he is taught how to hunt, fish, and survive in the wilderness. While Kayano is perhaps distanced from the spiritual aspects of his culture in a theoretical sense, he develops a more intimate connection to nature when this relationship is enriched by physical action.

Although Kayano's time working in forestry is brief, the impacts that Sakamoto's teachings have on his understanding and connection to Ainu identity are long-lasting. Having been taught the physical skills of sustenance practices, Kayano begins to develop a more intimate and fully realized sense of being Ainu that is tied to a physical relationship to nature. If the tales relayed to him from his grandmother in childhood feel somewhat distanced from reality and present memory, these experiences of learning to sustain himself in the wild feel much more crucial as they relate to survival and one's livelihood. He reflects on how he feels indebted to the lessons and guidance provided to him by Sakamoto, writing that "I worked as a surveyor for two summers, from May to October in 1941 and 1942 - twelve months altogether. This proved a precious experience for me as an Ainu. I had previously learned things here and there from my father, but during those twelve months I received a firm grounding in the basics of Ainu hunting wisdom" (75-76). It is striking that at this point in Kayano's life, this short period of working and living with an Ainu elder seems to have more immediate impact on him than a lifetime of teachings from his family, at least on a practical level. While it is undeniable that his grandmother and father are pivotal in informing his understanding of Ainu identity and behavior from the perspective of tales and prayer, what Sakamoto does for Kayano is apply such abstract knowledge to physical interactions with the landscape.

What makes the bond between Kayano and Sakamoto so special are the ways in which it bridges older and newer generations of Ainu together through cultural connection and



relatability. Sakamoto feels as though it is important to take the opportunity to instill practical skills to a younger AINU, both because of immediate survival and because of his desires to pass on practical AINU skills in hunting and fishing. Kayano is indebted to Sakamoto's desire to teach such skills because it allows him to feel a more literal connection to his experience of being AINU and to the natural landscape at large. The knowledge of sustenance practices allows him to develop a better understanding of what it might have been like to be AINU in the generations before him, as he is able to embody such experiences rather than only hear them through secondhand information. His relationship to being AINU and to AINU elders simultaneously extends beyond his own family, meaning that perhaps cultural and practical wisdom may hold a different kind of significance for him when it extends beyond his immediate social structures.

Kayano devotes several pages to describing the specific AINU hunting and fishing techniques that Sakamoto shows him during his time as a surveyor, but what is perhaps most compelling is that Sakamoto is also adamant about guaranteeing his survival. There is a particular moment when he shows Kayano his saved-up food resources for the event of an emergency, and while this may seem solely to be a practical gesture, there is a sense of emotional and cultural connection that comes with it;

One day, Santaro Acapo took me to the hunting shed he used in the winter... Adjacent to the hut stood a tall red elm with a hollow of approximately 1 meter at the base of its fat trunk. Santaro Acapo showed me the hollow and said, If you're ever stuck without food, look inside this hollow. I've hidden several ten-cup bottles filled with polished millet. The bottle openings are airtight, with melted wax to fend off dampness. You'll be able to survive for several days at

least.” He then went on: “I’ve shown you this because you’re an Ainu. I forbid you to tell anyone about this.” Feeling as if he had taught me the principles, or perhaps the spirit, by which a hunting people lived, I nodded with sincere gratitude, And I never had to rely on Santaro Acapo’s precious bottled grain. (78)

The lengths to which Sakamoto is willing to go in order to ensure that Kayano has access to his resources suggests that he feels a certain sense of personal responsibility in protecting him and ensuring his safety. By showing him the hollow, he gives Kayano a higher likelihood of survival alongside the hunting and fishing skills he has taught him. There is also a sense of exclusivity in showing him the hollow, which is inferred by the personal relationship between them especially in relation to being Ainu. Sakamoto’s assertion that “I’ve shown you this because you’re an Ainu” is indicative of this more intimate bond between them and the moral responsibility to look out for other Ainu, as the survival of Ainu youth is something that is neglected by the economic institutions of the state. There is the assumption here that certain access points to sustenance and to survival are only cultivated and understood within the inner world of the Ainu, and to disseminate them elsewhere would break such a bond.

Kayano’s use of the word “spirit” in this instance also suggests that what Sakamoto has taught him goes beyond practical skill and extends into the more symbolic aspects of Ainu identity. The sense that Kayano had learned “the spirit, by which a hunting people lived” suggests that he feels a deeper connection to past generations of Ainu through the physical experiences of fishing and hunting than he could from stories alone. Sakamoto’s teachings ultimately allow Kayano’s perception of himself as Ainu to be more of an embodied experience rather than something he feels distanced from. While his childhood certainly is informed by

traditional aspects of Ainu culture, this experience makes him reflect more on what it would be like to live off of the land and its resources as an Ainu of the past. It is worth considering, however, that there is a great deal of irony in the fact that he comes to such a transformative moment in the midst of work that may seem antithetical to Ainu beliefs around the preservation and care of nature. This highlights the extent to which he is a product of the circumstances that have been imposed upon him, and yet it is also a testament to his ability to find cultural connection despite these circumstances.

Kayano also bridges connections to Ainu sustenance practices when he and his family work in charcoal burning following the death of his oldest brother. There is a great sense of economic and emotional sacrifice, however, that he and his family are forced to make in the midst of these connections. While he perhaps does not share the same sentiments as his father in his prayer to the fire goddess, explaining the conditions by which the family is forced to chop and burn wood, he nonetheless recognizes how this is a connection to Ainu traditions. He writes that “if ever we lived as members of a hunting people, it was in this period”, but solemnly accounts for the fact that the “although the entire family worked hard, covered with soot, we never made any money. I suppose our earnings were cleverly siphoned off by our boss and others” (82). While this experience with sustenance and traditional life may have enriched his identity and connection to culture, his family’s economic exploitation is more pressing. Kayano’s disdainful assumption that their wages were being “cleverly siphoned off by our boss” points to a lack of sympathy regarding the family’s physical and emotional conditions. His family is desperate to make back what they have lost from the illness of Kayano’s brother, while simultaneously working through the emotional turmoil associated with this tremendous loss. Their bosses, however, are much more attuned to their own greed and the expansion of profit in

order to serve Japanese industrial development. This prioritization of self-interest is something which occurs both at the local level with industrial leaders, and at the national level with how Japan chooses to manipulate and maneuver its workforce for imperial aims. This is made particularly clear through the conceptual fusing of industrial capitalism and nationalism during the Second World War.

Kayano reflects on his family's earliest memories of the war, and what this implies for their work, writing that "we heard about the eruption of the 'Great East Asia War' on December 8, 1941, while working at our kiln. We worked hard, urged on by such slogans as 'Charcoal is indispensable for tempering cannons' and 'The soldiers at the front in cold, cold, Manchuria depend on the charcoal you produce'" (80). The fact that the family was "urged on" by such pro-charcoal labor slogans is ambiguous: it is unclear if they were persuaded that they must produce charcoal for wartime production, or if this was rather an act of self-motivation. It seems unlikely that Kayano and his family would naturally find inspiration in Japan's war efforts, considering their detachment from conceptions of Japanese national identity. "Indispensable" is curious, especially because of its reference to charcoal and not to the laborers themselves or their exhaustive efforts. In other words, it is the charcoal that is valuable and not those who produce it. Rhetorically, this serves as another means of divorce between producer and means of production in that Kayano's family has no personal connections to the work that they are doing. Not only are they undervalued and underpaid, but they also have no sense of connection to Japan's military efforts abroad.

The second slogan's reference to Japanese soldiers in Manchuria also adds another dimension to this sense of labor as necessity, as the production of charcoal and its links to the physical condition of soldiers calls to notions of national interest and concern. By emphasizing

the physical condition of the soldiers, little attention is drawn to the deeper significance of them being stationed in Manchuria to begin with. There is an assumption made that perhaps their role in Manchuria is unworthy of being questioned, and that providing charcoal for the vulnerable soldiers in “cold, cold Manchuria” is the main priority. In being “urged on” by such a slogan, Kayano’s family is perhaps inclined to align themselves with Japanese national interests simply because they have no other choice but to understand this as the broader purpose of their work. It is interesting that Kayano gestures toward his family being motivated by such politically charged slogans, however, considering the fact that the family worked in charcoal burning primarily to pay off medical expenses from his late brother. As Ainu, they have a considerable amount of distance from Japan’s imperial motivations in Manchuria, but nonetheless their labor is automatically bound up in the maintenance of Japan’s imperial endeavors. Sacrifice is what underlies Kayano’s family’s work in charcoal burning in the sense that they are not only forced to reconcile with the fact that they are arbitrarily harming nature to earn income but also working against their own agency. The production of charcoal for wartime supplies infers that the Japanese state utilizes the hard work of the Ainu for its own imperial aims, and thus ignores the physical and emotional conditions of Ainu families themselves.

Japan further restricts the free will of the Ainu through its process of war recruitment. Not only are Ainu meant to blindly serve Japanese economic interests through their labor, but they are also encouraged to sacrifice their lives in order to serve the country – regardless of the lack of personal belonging they may feel within its borders. This is made particularly evident by the moment when Kayano and other Ainu youth are persuaded to enlist in the army by a medical examiner;

In February, though I was not yet twenty, I had been called up for a physical, since the military had started to move up the draft age. The examiner made a speech to exhort us: “Japan now needs new weapons. There is no weapon superior to you, bursting into enemy ranks, carrying bombshells in your hands. Are you up to the challenge of serving as the ultimate new weapon? Let me see a show of hands. “I am!” We raised our hands simultaneously, pledging to become new weapons.”

(82-3)

As the draft age has moved up, the recruitment of younger soldiers in particular suggests that the medical examiner is preying upon those who are the most vulnerable and susceptible to pro-war, nationalist propaganda. Kayano’s use of “exhort” also infers a certain sense of urgent coercion in the examiner’s words, and that he is looking to use these young men as symbols of patriotic allegiance and sacrifice. “Weapons” adds a new dimension to this rhetoric of national sacrifice by implying that the soldiers are as destructible and disposable as objects, and that they are seen more so as objects used for imperial purposes than as youth with personal aspirations and desires. The soldiers becoming weapons themselves also assumes that they will be responsible for the deaths of their enemies, which confers a sense of urgency. With the death of enemies, of course, also comes the death of Japanese soldiers. The concept of there being “no weapon superior to you” indicates that there is no one to be more easily utilized and maneuvered to support Japan’s national aims in the war, and that with such young soldiers there is less care and consideration of the potential loss of life.

While this forceful, coercive rhetoric of becoming an “ultimate new weapon” targets Japanese youth as well, it has more pressing political implications when considered in relation to

Kayano's upbringing and experiences of indigeneity. The association of Ainu youth as "weapons" for imperial purposes calls to the longer history of theoretical linkages between the Ainu and ideas of disposability, which has appeared through labor and the restriction of cultural practices that sustain human life. What is most troubling is Kayano's inability to question what participation in the system of war implies for the ongoing oppression of the Ainu, especially in regards to cultural erasure. Why might he emphatically raise his hand to participate in an imperial system that has reduced him to the identity of a "former aborigine"? It seems as though it is by design that the examiner's words leave him with no other choice than to become a "weapon," perhaps because they are detached from the realities of such oppressive conditions. To Kayano and other youth, his speech frames the idea of war as something inspiring and productive, but to an outside readership it may read as a harsh reminder of Japanese tactics of exploitation and propaganda. It is only after Kayano's adolescence that he has the ability to recognize the broader implications of these exploitative circumstances and effectively speak out against them.

## **Chapter 2: Language as Modern Resistance**

While Kayano may be considered somewhat resigned in regards to assimilatory circumstances in adolescence, he finds his throughway to activism through his connections to language as a means of preserving one's cultural integrity. In a sense, the cultural material that has been passed down to him from his father and grandfather, while wavering in significance during his time as a surveyor and soldier, takes new shape and relevance in his adult life.

Although Kayano had once found meaning in being Ainu through the physical experiences of land and sustenance practices, it is undeniable that these physical experiences are difficult to hold

onto given the ways in which state policies have disrupted them. It is language and cultural artifacts, then, that give Kayano the sense of permanent attachment to culture that he longs for. Access to oral tradition and expression is something which is rapidly vanishing, and yet, with hard work and care, can be what immortalizes the Ainu and their claims to indigeneity.

Kayano's sense of urgency in working towards the preservation of culture is awakened when he discovers that an important folk object of his fathers is missing. This experience, although it may seem simple, invites important reflections on cultural ownership and the maintenance of Ainu life, especially in regards to who may potentially disrupt it;

If I remember correctly, it was when I returned from mountain work in the fall of 1953 that the *tukipasuy* (ceremonial wine offering chopstick) my father had treasured above all else was not in sight. The *tukipasuy* is a revered object, believed to ensure that our supplications are heard by the gods if, prior to prayer, it is soaked in wine. That such an important utensil was missing ... (97)

While much of the oppression of the Ainu within Japan has been predicated on theft, when this is applied on a more personal level, it is even more emotionally palpable. The loss of land and economic resources that the Ainu have experienced throughout generations is perhaps much more incalculable and abstract than the loss of a particular object, especially an object that has direct ties to one's own relationship with the gods and identity. The land and economic resources that have been stolen from the Ainu have created such immense grief that it is impossible to quantify it in simple terms. In some ways, then, the loss of the *tukipasuy* serves as a microcosm



for the other kinds of loss that the Ainu have experienced during and beyond their lifetimes, allowing for Kayano to understand how to resist settler colonial theft on an individual scale.

Kayano's inclusion of the fact that the *tukipasuy* is "believed to ensure that our supplications are heard by the gods" suggests that its absence would create disruptions in the communication between gods and humans, and further, would disrupt the potentiality for good fortune. Without the innermost desires and dreams of Kayano's father being heard by the gods through the offerings of this object, he would likely struggle to maintain the same spiritual and emotional connections, or would be forced to adapt and find new modes for spiritual communication. Kayano is frustrated and saddened by this object suddenly going missing, however, his emotional response to it is mediated through his father's closer relationship to its religious import. Kayano himself may not have been close to the experience of wine offering, and yet, it is because of the spiritual experiences of his father that he feels the weight of its absence. For him, it is less about the alterations in religious process and more about the awareness of a personal representation of Ainu culture being suddenly stripped away.

The sense of grief that arises in Kayano following the absence of the *tukipasuy* is something which extends beyond himself and his family. Although he is unaware of how exactly this utensil has gone missing, it allows him to consider important facets of culture are taken from the Ainu both in calculable and incalculable ways. As he develops a heightened awareness of the ways in which external forces continually objectify and dispose of the Ainu body, he begins to resent the oppressive force of the Ainu scholar as onlooker. His father's missing utensil directly correlates with the ongoing loss that these scholars inflict on the Ainu, and yet their theft extends far beyond the folk objects themselves. Kayano resentfully describes his scorn for these scholars and the suffering that they inflict upon the Ainu, writing that

There were a number of reasons I hated them. Each time they came to Nibutani, they left with folk utensils. They dug up our sacred tombs and carried away ancestral bones. Under the pretext of research, they took blood from villagers and, in order to examine how hairy we were, rolled up our sleeves, then lowered our collars to check our backs, and so on. (98)

There is a great sense of presumed authority over the Ainu people that these scholars possess in ravaging entire communities. The hierarchical relationship between settler colonizer and colonial subject informs these non-Ainu scholars to believe that the Ainu are subhuman and unworthy of personal agency. Not only do they leave with “folk utensils,” like the *tukipasuy* so personally significant to Kayano’s father, but they also enact theft on Ainu communities in a much more violent and forceful way. The fact that they “dug up our sacred tombs and carried away ancestral bones” suggests a complete disregard and disrespect of Ainu relationships to family and spiritual practices. It extends upon the logic of *terra nullius* by constructing Ainu bodies as belonging to no one and having no agency, thus being fit for study as a physical object. This also builds upon ideas of Ainu people being something of the past, thus not necessarily an ethnic group that is currently alive and feels the physical and emotional weight of these dynamics. In doing so, it emphasizes the epistemological and anthropological authority of those who are examining such an ‘object,’ further restricting the Ainu’s ability to control prevailing narratives surrounding nationhood and indigeneity.

The theft and examination of “ancestral bones” is something which bridges connections between artifact and invented historical narrative, which aids in producing settler-colonial

narratives rendering the Ainu as something inherently distinct and inferior. As Michael Roellinghoff notes in “Osteo-hermeneutics: Ainu racialization, de-indigenization, and bone theft in Japanese Hokkaido,” “quantitative measures of such things as cranial girth, the shape of the nose bridge, or the volume of the skull allowed researchers, they believed, to order, to classify, and so intrusively probed, to *understand* the Ainu as a ‘race’ and learn their history” (295). The ties between the examination of such specific aspects of the Ainu body and the desires to “learn their history” is to suggest that explorations of Ainu culture are made only through these gestures toward violent objectification, which intrinsically produces biased and constructed narratives around racial identity and cultural value. In this sense, the outside understanding of Ainu culture and its historical origins is produced only by this ‘object,’ as opposed to the personal accounts and oral traditions of the Ainu people themselves. The use of bones is evocative not only of something antiquated but of something which has long been disposed of, and thus only holds significance in the context of the Japanese scholar’s own inquisition.

Not only do these outside scholars use the dead as a form of artifact by which they impose certain cultural and racialized narratives, but they also perform similar, albeit more forceful actions upon the living. The taking of blood samples as well as the examination of body hair equates the Ainu to mere thing or animal to be studied by an external force. If the study of the specific features of skulls would inform scholars’ understanding of race and historical origins, these examinations of the living body would further stabilize narratives of inferiority and dehumanization. Rather than interview the Ainu and ask them about the origins of their oral traditions, these scholars’ “research” of the Ainu reduces them to their physical characteristics. They assume that the Ainu’s individual stories would be antithetical to prevailing narratives around cultural and racial hierarchies that arise from anthropological studies. Kayano’s text,

then, is a form of resistance against the suppression of humanistic narratives, as his documentation of the experience of Ainu life rejects the idea of the Ainu being an artifact to posthumously examine.

Kayano's witnessing of forceful examinations and the theft of bones and folk utensils raises broader concerns about what has been stolen from his culture both figuratively and literally. He bridges connections between these specific instances of theft to the longer history of Japan's exploitation of the Ainu, specifically through their stealing of land and language. Rather than adjusting to such circumstances, he is suddenly willed to act towards the preservation of the parts of Ainu identity that are able to maintained. Kayano first comes to this call to action through the preservation of utensils, which has greater symbolic import and value. He declares that "once I became actively conscious of my Ainu roots, I decided to start a collection of Ainu folk utensils, purchasing them myself to prevent them from being taken away for close to nothing" (99). By purchasing these cultural objects for himself, he protects against them against theft from outside visitors. As they lose their personal meanings when in the hands of a stranger who has no understanding of their spiritual significance, it is important that they remain with the Ainu. While this effort in cultivation certainly serves as a means of possession for Kayano - a way for him to physically hold onto culture amidst circumstances restricting ownership and agency - it becomes difficult to imagine how this physical collecting might have different connotations in intangible forms. Aspects of culture that do not exist in physical form, whether they be language, cultural practices, or folktales, have the potential to be stolen as well. While folk utensils can be purchased to ward off the theft from outside visitors, how might the "collection," or rather the active preservation, of more symbolic representations of Ainu culture, such as language, be made possible? In thinking about Kayano's text as a means of both cultural

memorialization and of resistance, it is important to consider both the personal and political weight that language has the power to hold, as well as the inherent challenges one might face in protecting it.

While Kayano continues to be invested in the collection of folk utensils and other culturally significant materials throughout his adulthood, he eventually also develops a more thorough understanding of how the cultivation of Ainu language is even more pressing. As the language is primarily oral, its persistence is predicated on future generations of Ainu continuing to speak it, or alternatively, aiding in more active efforts for written documentation. Kayano is made aware of these challenges by a professor he meets from Tōhoku University, who “warned us that unless more care were given to preserving the Ainu language, it might disappear from the earth” (112). This potential vanishing of the Ainu language has major implications for prevailing settler-colonial narratives, because if it is to “disappear from the earth,” then it gives the Japanese more definitive authority in asserting that the Ainu are both insignificant and a people entirely of the past. If the Ainu are left without the means to express themselves and their culture in their own original language, their narratives can be more easily co-opted by forces outside of their control. Language as a tool of resistance for Kayano, then, has the power to keep Ainu self-expression and cultural integrity alive in its authentic and original forms.

Kayano’s experiences with the preservation of language are greatly influenced by Ainu linguist and anthropologist Chiri Mashihō, who leads him to think more closely about the importance not only of preserving the Ainu language but also of the broader significance of documenting Ainu experiences. These written and recorded records, Kayano will learn, will serve not only as personal reflections, but simultaneously as a means to pivot away from controlling narratives of the Ainu as a people who are inept at self-description. Anthropology,

literature, and documentation that comes from Ainu themselves, as opposed to an Otherizing, outside force, has a particular power of reclamation that pushes back against Japanese social scientists that reduce the Ainu to mere body and thing. These larger connections to narrative are exemplified by a particular moment between Chiri and Kayano, where Chiri expresses the urgency of documentation;

‘In the future, please write down anything you hear about the Ainu, down to indelicate matters like what people of old used to wipe themselves. And record when and from whom you heard these details.’ It is no exaggeration to say that Professor Chiri’s words motivated me to undertake my present work on a more serious level. They proved a great encouragement and guide. (115)

Professor Chiri urging Kayano to “write down anything” that he witnesses regarding the Ainu suggests that there is an extreme gap in the documented experiences of Ainu life, ranging from the mundane to the more immediately significant. His suggestion of even including “indelicate matters” emphasizes this necessity for a wider breadth of written material, as there are thousands of generations of Ainu who have only had the power to express themselves orally. The fact that Chiri makes Kayano take on the writing of this text “on a more serious level” implies that he has begun to develop an understanding of the higher stakes involved in this undertaking. By documenting his own experiences as an Ainu, he has in some way ensured that the Ainu experience will continue on and be remembered by those outside of himself. Following Chiri’s death, he expresses that “it is because of the appearance of a great star called Chiri Mashiho that the Ainu people came to know and reflect on themselves” (115). Kayano’s writing can be seen as

an effort to continue on this important legacy of self-representation and reflection, while recognizing the challenges that might be faced in the active work of preserving language.

Kayano's relationship to language and its incalculable benefits for the persistence of Ainu culture and memory is further enlivened by Kindaichi Kyōsuke, a Japanese linguist whose focus on Ainu tales produces a wide array of research and Ainu literature that live on as important cultural materials. Although he is non-Ainu, and thus could perhaps carry the connotation of other exploitative onlookers, he is nonetheless incredibly significant to the preservation of the Ainu language, which Kayano himself recognizes. What is most compelling about Kayano's experiences working with Kindaichi to develop and catalog knowledge of the Ainu language is the level of respect and reverence that Kindaichi has for language itself. One moment between them displays the ways in which he considers the Ainu language just as important as physical artifacts;

On one of my early trips to Atami, I took along materials, and, as he watched, carved for him my most worthy *tukipasuy*. Saying, "Since you carved this for me, let me write something for you," he went into town to buy a calligraphy card and painted, "Intentions like iron, sentiments like jewels." I take this to be a guiding principle he handed down to me, and I value it as one of my treasures. (129)

Rather than take Kayano's generosity for granted, Kindaichi feels indebted to him and is inclined to somehow return the favor. Through this exchange of both literal and figurative gifts, Kindaichi establishes the fact that words have the potential to have as much personal value as physical objects, and that they too carry on distinct cultural meanings. The process of carving the

*tukipasuy* is equated to the time and devotion that Kindaichi takes to write something in return, which is to suggest that both language and folk objects are worthy of ample care and dedication. The phrase “intentions like iron, sentiments like jewels” displays to Kayano that what may be considered more abstract and expressive can be made into something concrete. The preservation and documentation of Ainu folk traditions through language, then, are just as ornate, decorative and impactful as the physical artifacts themselves. Although both hold significant cultural value, language has the ability to carry on distinct personal memories and feelings in ways that objects cannot. This is something which Kayano heavily internalizes and takes with him as he emphasizes the importance of language in bridging connection to other people - both Ainu and non-Ainu - through writing and personal documentation.

Not only is language something that holds a particular value for the transmission of culture, but it is also something which is embedded into the physical world itself. The preservation of the Ainu language, in some ways, can be conceived of as something which is intertwined with the connections to land that form Ainu culture, whether this be through names, stories, or personal expressions. The archival work of Kindaichi brings these broader connections to light, and this is made particularly clear through the text inscribed on the monument in his name that is established in Nibutani;

“The tanka inscribed on the monument was:

mono mo iwaji koe mo idasaji

ishi wa tada zenshin o motte onore o kataru

Saying not a word, raising not their voices,

rocks merely, with their whole beings, speak



their selves.” (131-132)

Regardless of the strict and expansive measures that Japan has taken to suppress the Ainu language and the expression of personal speech, the tanka inscribed on the monument evokes the sense that such expressions of language will always continue to be embodied in the physical environment. Self expression, whether it comes directly from the source of the Ainu or from the lands that they are indigenous to, will always be present regardless of if it is something which is audible or visible. The use of “beings” and “selves” confers a certain animation of the physical world, which is to suggest its connections to personal expression and the human experience of being Ainu. While this monument is dedicated to a scholar of Ainu studies who is himself non-Ainu, there is something about the words inscribed here which are evocative of Kayano’s larger undertaking in this text. It emphasizes his understanding of the fact that language is something which will always live on as a personal artifact of culture, especially in regards to a culture which must persist in order to survive.

As language is something that represents the physical world but is also immaterial, it has the power to carry on cultural legacies in ways that other forms of expression and identity cannot. It is this that makes it the most important tool for the persistence of the Ainu, and yet it is the most difficult and challenging aspect of culture to attempt to sustain. The conception of language as immaterial, and simultaneously something which must live on through future generations, is instilled in Kayano by the words of a stranger;

I am unable to forget the words of one old man who let me record him: “Mr.

Kayano, listen carefully. When you dig in the earth, you find stone and earthen

implements, but not words – not the words of our ancestors. Words aren't bruised in the ground. They aren't hanging from the branches of trees. They're only transmitted from one mouth to the next. I beg you please to teach young Ainu their own language." I must keep working for the renewal of Ainu, the language of a people who had no writing system (154).

The words of the old man display to Kayano the ways in which language may hold a deeper and more profound significance than physical aspects of culture can. The fact that when one extracts the earth one finds "stone and earthen implements, but not words" is to suggest that words cannot be stolen by outside visitors in the same ways that language and personal expression can. While the Japanese do make expansive efforts to "steal" and restrict the ability for the Ainu language to flourish, efforts towards preservation have the potential to combat this. While land, physical bodies, and cultural objects may be gone forever, language continues to live on through generations if it is given proper attention and consideration.

The old man's proclamation that "words aren't bruised in the ground" and that they "aren't hanging from the branches of trees" is suggestive of the fact that language does not carry on the same physical effects of the violence inflicted upon the Ainu, and suffers much more metaphysical, invisible damages. Words cannot be destroyed and removed in the same ways that land and physical Ainu bodies can, which means that they have more of a likelihood to persevere through future generations.. Kayano's insistence on "working for the renewal of Ainu," then, emphasizes his understanding of language as a last hope for the future of Ainu activism, culture, and identity. His awareness of the Ainu people being one "who had no writing system" emphasizes the urgency in making what may appear immaterial and out of reach something

much more obtainable in future generations. Preserving the language and documenting his experiences through writing, thus, serves as a means of concretizing a culture that in some ways has only continued to exist symbolically.

This text's devoted awareness to the fact that the Ainu lack a writing system is a testament to Kayano's ability to bridge the gap between the past and present, and more importantly the symbolic and physical aspects of Ainu culture. His extensive work in preserving language, as well as documenting his own personal experiences as Ainu, help to recontextualize the meaning of Ainu identity in modernity, adapting it to current political and social circumstances. By writing and publishing this text, Kayano is perhaps somewhat distanced from the traditional modes of oral storytelling that have been taught to him from previous generations. Out of necessity, he prioritizes documenting his personal experiences in written form because they are the only means by which the story of the Ainu can live on in future generations. He writes that "this book, written in Japanese by a man of the Ainu people, who have no writing system of their own, may be considered a monument to the Ainu" (157). By acknowledging that this "monument to the Ainu" is written in Japanese, he recognizes the ways in which his concretizing of a symbolic, fleeting culture may be distanced from traditional culture, existing in a liminal and assimilatory space. This text, while catering to ideas of modernity, civilization, and non-Ainu systems of knowledge production, helps to increase awareness of the settler colonial project in Hokkaido and its aftermath. It not only revitalizes the presence and persistence of Ainu culture in Japan, but it simultaneously reconsiders what might be involved in the activist work of decentering and gradually dismantling such settler colonial systems.

## PART TWO

### On Cultural Adaptation in Chiri Yukie's *Ainu Shinyoshu*

#### Introduction

Chiri Yukie's *Ainu Shinyoshu*, a romanized and translated collection of *kamuy yukar* (Ainu songs of the gods), is pivotal in its revitalization of Ainu oral tradition. Her text is symbolic of the fact that despite oppressive conditions which restrict the Ainu's access to language, culture, and self-expression, these traditions can live on when they are adapted and recontextualized into new forms. As this volume of oral songs continues to be relevant within the study of the Ainu, it refuses renderings of the Ainu as a past people whose traditions and language have completely vanished alongside their declining population. In the preface to *Ainu Shinyoshu*, Chiri reflects on the distance later generations of Ainu have taken from religious devotion due to the changing circumstances of the settler colonial system. As oral tradition has almost entirely been neglected, she hopes that there remain "just two or three strong persons among us" willing to act in order to preserve them, effectively rejecting the idea that Ainu culture has entirely died out. The transcription of *Ainu Shinyoshu*, then, can be seen as one step along a longer process which resists the cultural erasure of the Japanese state.

Unfortunately, Chiri was never able to see her dreams of cultural revitalization fully realized within her lifetime, as she died suddenly in 1922 when she was only 19. Sarah Strong notes in *Ainu Spirits Singing* that "completing the *Ainu Shinyoshu* for publication was, thus, quite literally the final act of her brief life" (3). While this text can be seen as part of a broader effort to revitalize Ainu oral tradition, her death meant that she was unable to continue on this important work, thus implying that her deepest concerns and worries about the future of the Ainu were left

to hands outside of her control. Would there be Ainu after her to continue on this crucial work of revitalization, or would the work of translation, study of cultural traditions, and colonial theory be co-opted and maneuvered by non-Ainu scholars and linguists? As she wishes for “just two or three strong persons,” it is clear that there are few remaining Ainu that would be interested in such an undertaking, which would suggest that this field of study could be easily appropriated by external forces. It is through these fields of inquiry that *Ainu Shinyoshu* and its surrounding scholarship in English may be conceived of as a product of settler colonial circumstances, but, as I will come to argue, this does not take away from the wide breadth of knowledge that Chiri had to teach us about these traditions. It is important to consider, however, the ways in which translations of *Ainu Shinyoshu* in English are distanced from the original adaptation of these tales, as they potentially center Western points of view.

Part two of this project will closely examine Benjamin Peterson’s *The Song the Owl God Sang* and Donald L. Philippi’s *Songs of Humans, Songs of Gods*, which are translations of Chiri Yukie’s *kamuy yukar*. I will particularly emphasize how these adaptations may distance themselves from - or shed light upon - the complex political and social histories that they are intertwined with, as well as the ways in which these adaptations may teach non-Ainu about Ainu-*kamui* interconnectivity. While the settler colonial circumstances of the Ainu are not present within the texts themselves, it is important to consider how developing an understanding of the Ainu-*kamui* relationship through these adaptations creates a distance from the source material and may center Western epistemological frameworks. I will examine the ways in which each of these translators, by way of language, make efforts to retain Ainu concepts and beliefs, or whether they impose Western systems of knowledge upon the tales. By using English translations of Chiri’s work to develop an understanding of the moral and social fabrics of Ainu

life, I am cognizant of the fact that I may be contributing to the very epistemological hierarchies I am critiquing, especially as a non-Ainu person. It is my hope that through my analysis of these translated stories, I am able to highlight Ainu perspectives and worldviews in order for them to be used as means of rejecting colonial hierarchies of knowledge, understanding, and culture in Japan as well as in the West. Even within the context of a rich oral tradition becoming confined to a published text, there should remain hope that these lasting literary fragments have the potential to sustain Ainu culture and reject the imposed beliefs of the settler colonial system. They have significant implications for teaching non-Ainu about the intricacies of spiritual belief systems, and it is through the continued production of this knowledge that Ainu worldviews can persist against systems of erasure.

### **Chapter 3: A Critical Reading of Ainu Oral Tradition**

As Ainu oral tradition dates back as far as the Jōmon period, the thirteen *kamuy yukar* which are published in the *Ainu Shinyoshu* can be seen as a testament to the aspects of moral and spiritual culture that the Ainu have sustained thousands of years later (Strong). The lessons that are embedded within many of the tales, often pertaining to proper fishing and hunting practices, maintaining one's moral integrity, as well as honoring the *kamui*, are ones which have remained crucial to the maintenance of Ainu culture and withstood the test of time. This, of course, begs the question as to what might have been altered as social and economic structures have shifted. The sense that only certain aspects of moral culture have been continually passed down is to suggest that Ainu oral culture is one of persistence, but also of gradual adaptation. Chiri Yukie's work is both an embodiment of a past history and an exemplification of what has remained,

especially as the diminishing impact of oral culture gives way to print publication as a means of retaining the songs.

In thinking about how adaptation functions in the translation and publication of the tales, Strong advises against notions that the *kamuy yukar* are fixed within space and time, aptly noting that “although we can think that the chants of the *Ainu shinyoshu* in general portray a world as it was experienced before the seventeenth century, we must also bear in mind that that world is not mechanically preserved in the chants and includes the possibility of accommodation to new developments over time...” (47). If *Ainu Shinyoshu* “includes the possibility of accommodation to new developments,” it is important to consider not only what aspects of Ainu tradition have remained important to the Ainu, but also whether or not what is readable from the perspective of an external audience is something which Chiri considers. Nonetheless, this notion of “development” speaks back to ideas that the tales are stationed within a past history and in turn represent the ability of the Ainu to continue to apply aspects of the past to the present moment, despite external challenges. Her work is ultimately a hybrid between the central facets of the oral tradition and a new type of cultural embodiment in written form.

One of the most crucial elements of the *kamuy yukar* is the concept of narration and the development of personal voice, especially in regards to how it relates to the communication between Ainu and *kamuy*. The tales, which are written in first-person narration from the perspective of the gods, cannot be reduced to literary inventions but are instead the product of Ainu reciters spiritually embodying the gods. As Philippi describes, within *kamuy yukar*, “the gods borrow the reciter’s lips,” and “through the mouth of the reciter, the gods describe their words and tell, in their own words, about their life and adventures” (3). Thus, Ainu tales are intimate in that they confer a specific human-god relationship that is embedded within the

language itself. This connection through personal utterance is emblematic of the wider relationships that exist between the human and spiritual worlds. For instance, communication between Ainu and *kamuy* affects the physical conditions of human life in regards to sustenance and the ability to acquire natural resources. As the tales will indicate, any actions of arbitrary disrespect towards the natural environment result in major alterations in the reliance of the Ainu on their gods, and thus affect the ability to sustain human life.

The impacts of *kamuy* on human sustenance are nowhere more immediate than in the “Song of the Owl God,” in which the Ainu’s disrespect for deer and fish results in the gods’ deliberate restriction of their food supply. The Owl God, who is known as “*kotan-kor-kamui* (god ruling the land)” (Philippi 108), acts as overseer to preside over the human world and ensure proper harmony between Ainu and *kamui*. Having observed that a community of Ainu is starving as a direct result of the gods, The Owl God is concerned and must send a message to the heavens in order to understand both why this has happened and how to address it through human intervention. The concerns of his message display the degree to which the gods have full control over the the natural environment, even to the point of creating deadly circumstances for the Ainu;

...in the world of men, the people were even now  
 About to die of starvation. And the reason was  
 That the god in charge of deer, and the god in charge of fish  
 Had agreed together that they would send  
 No deer and no fish. And the humans,  
 Whatever the gods told them to do,  
 Would just look blank; and so



When they went hunting in the hills, there were no deer.

When they went hunting in the rivers, there were no fish. (Peterson, lines 60-70)

In translating these lines, Peterson's use of "in charge of" is curious as it evokes the sense that these particular gods are tied to management and control of natural resources. In Philippi's iteration of the song they are referred to more simply as "God of the Game" and "God of the Fish," perhaps suggesting that this role of environmental control is something immediately connected to their identity (111). While each god resides over a particular resource, they work together to restrict both deer and fish, which is to suggest that these elements of the environment are interconnected.

Despite the gods attempting to relay information about proper hunting and fishing practices, the Ainu are unable to absorb the content of these messages and are left unaware of why they might be lacking resources at such an alarming rate. It is worth noting that Peterson's and Philippi's translations of the Owl God's message imply the responsibility and intent of the Ainu in slightly different ways. In Peterson's version, the fact that the humans "would just look blank" despite what the gods have told them infers a general inability to understand what they are being told. However, Philippi's translation of this line confers a sense of agency over the Ainu as they "would not pay the slightest attention" to what was being told to them (112). This makes it seem as though the Ainu are deliberately choosing to ignore the messaging of the gods, acting with reckless disrespect. In either reading of the song, it is evident that the restrictions the gods place on the available deer and fish are a direct result of improper human behavior, and it is because of lack of communication that this problem persists. The issue of sustenance in the song

is representative of one of the many ways in which the connection between humans and gods is not merely symbolic but is rather something which has lasting physical effects.

Although the contents of the Owl God's message are urgent and it is crucial that he understand why resources are being restricted in order to help the Ainu, he acknowledges that his old age limits his responsibilities as overseer and he must rely on other gods to relay his message. He admits that while his voice was once "like the sound of a strong bow / Bound with cherry bark / plucked at the very center," he has now "weakened and grown old" and now requires "someone with eloquence / someone having the confidence to be my messenger" (Peterson, lines 2-6). The fact that the Owl God searches for a messenger despite his wavering communicative skills suggests his commitments to mending the relationship between humans and gods. His reliance on others, however, points out the fact that his abilities deteriorate with age, conferring a certain mortal, human quality. This 'human' element of the Owl God perhaps alludes to his proximity to the human world as an overseer, but it is also something which reminds the reader of how *kamui* are anthropomorphized within the tales as beings with physical and emotional experiences indistinguishable from humans. His loss of confidence in his vocal and cognitive abilities is not unlike that of the human which faces similar difficulties, suggesting that while the gods are immaterial they are also no different from mortal, physical beings.

While the Owl God initially struggles to find an adequate messenger to communicate his worries to the heavens, he is in awe when a dipper swiftly returns his inquiry with a response. He recites that while waiting for his message to be received, he "heard a faint sound as if someone was coming" and "saw the beautiful young dipper, who now with a more beautiful bearing, / A more refined dignity than before, recited heavens reply" (Peterson, lines 75-76). The majestic beauty of the dipper is tied not only to his graceful ability to relay this information to the Owl

God, but it also appears to be related to his youth. The dipper's skills in communication are in contrast with the Owl God's earlier description of himself as being too old to confidently inquire to the heavens. This emphasizes the particularly 'human' quality of skill and gracefulness being tied to age. This is made even more evident by Philippi's translation, which refers to the dipper as "Dipper Boy," (111) calling attention to the fact that his youthfulness is inherently tied to his anthropomorphic nature. It is worth considering whether his skill is something tied to his proximity to the human, and if this is something innate within the song or if it is only reflected in Philippi's word choice in translation. Nonetheless, the communication he is able to achieve with the heavens is crucial to repairing the relationship between *Ainu* and *kamui*.

Through the *Ainu*'s cruel hunting and fishing practices, it becomes clear the extent to which the *kamui*-human relationship is not only embodied in every aspect of nature, but as it relates to sustenance is something transactional that must remain fully balanced. The counsel from the heavens reveals to the Owl God that while hunting for deer, the humans would "club it to death, flay its skin," (Peterson, line 79) and while fishing they would "club it to death with rotten woods" (Peterson, line 82). Rather than dying out as a result of these violent practices, it is revealed that "the deer returned to their god naked and crying / And the fish returned to their god carrying rotten wood" (Peterson, line 83). The use of "their god" implies a sense of belonging between these animals and the god that is responsible for protecting them from harm. This is also reflected in Philippi's translation of the song, as the deer and fish are described as having "come home" to the God of the Game and God of the Fish. It is unclear whether the use of "home" is something figurative or literal, although it is evident that the gods are stern in their protection of the particular animal they reside over.

The humans' cruel treatment of the fish and deer not only disrupts the connections between *kamui* and the animals they embody, but also the relationship of exchange between humans and *kamui* themselves. As Peterson notes, hunting is something that is considered to be fundamental to the spiritual traditions of the Ainu, as it "was seen as an exchange between humans and *kamui* whereby the human would obtain the dead body of the animal inhabited by the *kamui*, who in turn would receive decorations and *inau* which they could bring back to *kamui moshir*, the spirit world" ("The Song The Owl God Sang: "Konkuwa" In *The Song the Owl God Sang*). For the Ainu to arbitrarily harm the fish and deer, they are inherently disrupting the fluidity of this exchange and disrespecting the *kamui* which are embodied through these animals. Through their disrespect of the animal in their fishing and hunting, these Ainu are inherently disrespecting the *kamui* which inhabit them. They are prioritizing their own physical needs over the needs and desires of the *kamui*, and yet as their punishment reveals, it is impossible to only prioritize the physical sustenance needs of the humans without considering the impacts that these practices have on *kamui moshir*. Whether or not the Ainu are always immediately aware of it, the separate worlds of the human and *kamui* are always interconnected, and thus the actions of one realm will always have consequences for another.

While punishment for the improper behavior of the Ainu is something central, it is important to note the possibility for redemption is something which informs the Owl God's messaging to the humans. The *kamui* which reside over the deer and fish make it clear that "if the humans would treat the fish and deer courteously, / Then deer could be sent again, fish could be sent again," (Peterson, lines 87-88) which is to suggest that their harmful actions are not something which create irreparable damages and the exchanges between *kamui* and humans can be repaired with proper care and consideration. As overseer, it is the responsibility of the Owl

God to ease the confusion of the Ainu as to why their resources have been restricted and to ensure their proper behavior. Once the Ainu are made aware of the nature of this conflict and change their ways, the narrator describes that “the happy deer god and fish god gladly sent / Multitudes of fish, multitudes of deer” (Peterson, lines 103-104). The swift reversal of the physical conditions of the community suggests the degree to which they are reliant on their relationship to the gods on a fundamental level.

Upon hearing why they had received such strict punishment, The Owl God recalls that “so that this behavior would cease / While they slept I appeared to the humans in dreams And taught them, even until they / Understood the problem” (Peterson, lines 93-96). The fact that he receives messages from the heavens and is able to appear “to the humans in dreams” suggests his ability to traverse both worlds as a formless being. Something which distinguishes this song from many of the others in Chiri’s volume is the fact that his physical manifestation as an owl is never mentioned, which is to suggest that his responsibilities in guiding the Ainu and mitigating harm between *kamui* and Ainu is more important than his physical form. Strong notes that even though *kamui* are represented through particular animals, for the Ainu it is “not the static, taxonomic features of the animal (the sorts of things that can be illustrated in field guides) that matter for the Ainu but rather its behavior, abilities, power, sensory impact, and the perceived consequences of these things for their own human survival” (112). In this sense, the metaphysical qualities of the *kamui*, especially in the ability to communicate information and affect physical circumstances, are much more important than their literal form. The Owl God’s ability to teach the humans how to behave in accordance with the wishes of the *kamui* without ever making physical contact with them is a profound example of one of the ways in which not only the worlds of the humans and gods are intertwined, but also how *kamui* have the ability to be present everywhere, even when

they do not appear physically but only reside in the subconscious of the Ainu. The “Song of The Owl God” reveals to the reader that the Ainu-*kamuy* relationship is both one that surpasses physical form and is also something which impacts the circumstances of human life, especially as it pertains to survival. In a sense, the impacts that the gods have on sustenance display the fact that proper human behavior and respect of *kamui* is ultimately a matter of life and death.

The concept of behaving properly in order to receive an adequate amount of resources from the *kamui* is something which is also heavily reflected in the other Song of the Owl God that appears in Chiri’s volume. Once again, the reader is made aware of *kotan-kor-kamui*’s important role as overseer, especially as it relates to maintaining proper balance between the separate yet symbiotic communities of humans and gods by rewarding virtue. While this song does not focus on physical sustenance, it is still a major representation of how the *kamui* have the ability to affect both physical and emotional circumstances in the Ainu world. Its opening lines reveal the Owl God’s ability to observe the particular social dynamics of the communities he watches over;

*Silver drops fall all around, golden drops fall all around*

I sang as I glided above a stream and over a village,

And as I passed I gazed down -

Those who had been poor had become rich,

Those who had been rich were now poor, it seemed. (Peterson, lines 1-5)

While it is unclear what the exact meaning of the “silver drops” is, this opening line, which repeats throughout the song at several moments, is an evocation of The Owl God’s receiving and

bestowing of gifts. It also calls to the significance of decoration in the world of gods, and this these elaborate drops falling could be a means of declaring the physical presence of the *kamui* in the human world. While the Owl God is entirely non-physical in the previous song, his corporality is something central to this song and the reader is reminded of it throughout. The first indication of this, albeit subtle, is that he “glided above a stream and over a village,” emphasizing the physical aspect of his role as overseer as opposed to its more invisible qualities. Even though the capabilities of each *kamui* triumph any awareness of their physical form, an awareness of the Owl God’s physical presence as it relates to his role as an overseer is something quite central here.

What is most crucial in these opening lines, however, is his observation that “those who had been poor had become rich, / Those who had been rich were now poor, it seemed,” as it brings attention to the particular social fabrics of Ainu society as well as the malleability of social categories. It is important to understand, though, that the introduction of the concepts of “rich” and “poor” here are not so much literal as they are symbolic. To a Western reader, it may seem as though The Owl God’s observation implies that this reversal of roles is directly tied to the material wealth of the people being described. Peterson and Philippi both use the words “rich” and “poor” in their translations of these lines, although because these words carry certain modern economic connotations they might not be conceptually inadequate. Chiri Masihiro explains the Ainu’s particular relationship to the concept of financial status as such;

Poverty and wealth for the Ainu, instead of being economic concepts were, rather, moral concepts. (“Moral” here, of course, is used with the Ainu meaning of “moral,” in other words, not deviating from the precepts of the ancestors, not

being neglectful in venerating the *kami*, etc.). The Ainu think that if one is virtuous one will prosper, and if one is not virtuous, one will become poor. Thus, for the Ainu, wealth and rank are manifestations of virtue, while poverty and low rank are the consequence of lack of virtue. (Quoted in Strong, *Ainu Spirits Singing*, pp. 121).

Chiri's analysis of Ainu social relations as they relate to ideas of wealth reveals that one's prosperity has little to do with any material ownership, although improper behavior can affect physical wealth and poverty as well. As the previous "Song of the Owl God" revealed, the Ainu's lack of resources was a direct consequence of them behaving out of accordance with ideas of proper virtue and respect, and thus they can be seen as both physically and morally "poor." The reversal of their condition upon learning about their wrongdoing and acting differently, however, displays the degree to which these moral applications of the concepts of wealth and poverty are not fixed and can change at any moment due to human behavior. The Owl God's observation in the opening lines of this song, then is an indication that this reversal of moral standing in either direction is something that is not only common but happening at a systemic level.

Yet even though the concepts of wealth and poverty are moral rather than something necessarily economic within Ainu culture, in the context of the song, these qualities are reflected heavily in physical possessions and decorations. It is unclear whether these more physical associations are a result of this particular community prioritizing material possessions over their sense of virtue, or whether ideas of possession and decoration merely stand in to represent the more symbolic aspects of pride and prosperity. Nonetheless the song reveals that the social



identifiers of “rich” and “poor” are distinct markers of identity for the Ainu, bridging division and conflict among certain members of the community. As overseer, the Owl God not only observes these complicated social dynamics, but is also tasked with mending the tensions that arise within local communities.

The animosity between people of different statuses is introduced in the song via the interactions that the Owl God witnesses between children, and it becomes clear that poverty is something which is associated with lowliness and disarray. As the Owl God flies over the village and notices the reversal of poverty and wealth within the community, he notices that “on the beach, human children were playing / With toy arrows and toy bows,” (Peterson, lines 6-7) declaring to each other that “the one who hits the divine bird, the one who gets it first / Is a true hero, a true champion!” (Peterson, lines 14-15). The calls for violence here, although a form of play, are worth noting because they introduce the physical body of the Owl a something which is disposable. What is most crucial here, though, is that even in this scene of imaginative play with “toy arrows and toy bows,” there are representations of conflicting statuses. While there are children with “gold arrows” and “gold bows” which the Owl God narrowly avoids, he takes pity upon one boy in particular who has grown to become part of the lower rungs of society;

In the middle of that group,

One particular boy moved along them

With only an ordinary bow and ordinary arrows.

He seemed to be from a poor family; I could tell

From his clothes. But from his eyes

I understood that he was descended from noble ancestors,

Out of place in such company. (Peterson, lines 21-27)

The use of “only an ordinary bow and ordinary arrows” implies that visual representations of one’s status can be observed anywhere, even within this environment of childlike play. This is heavily contrasted by the “gold bows” adorned by the other children. The aesthetic component of poverty is also reflected in the Owl God observing that the boy was poor “from his clothes” alone. There is, however, the suggestion that one’s status goes beyond access to material possessions, as he describes that “from his eyes / I understood that he was descended from noble ancestors.” The Owl God being able to observe this from the boy’s eyes alone alludes to the fact that status is something far deeper and more ingrained within someone than what may appear on the surface. It also serves as a reminder of the fact that one’s status is something which is never static but is instead in constant motion.

While the Owl God takes particular care and consideration in observing the conditions of the poor boy, the rich children are much more scornful and dismissive. Their aggressive behavior towards him signals the degree to which status bridges animosity against those who live in poverty, despite the fact that these symbols of status were once reversed. When the boy attempts to shoot the owl with his “ordinary” tools, the other children quickly rebuke him, asking him “You filthy pauper, / That bird, the divine bird which / Would not take our golden arrows, do you seriously think / It will touch some peasant’s ordinary arrows, / Like your arrows of rotting wood?” (Peterson, lines 31-35). Within their insults, there is the implication that the children of higher status are inherently more worthy of the Owl God receiving their arrows, and that those of the poor boy are inherently faulty and decrepit. To think otherwise, as their words point out, would be considered ridiculous and outside of the natural order of how status operates among

humans and in their interactions with the gods. When the poor boy successfully hits the Owl God with his “ordinary” bow and arrow, the other children attack him with insults and physical violence, and their mounting anger appears to be reflected in the fact that he is unworthy of such an achievement. It seems as though they think that someone of a lower status hitting the owl with inadequate materials is not in accordance with what *should* happen, and thus this elicits them to attack him. Their primary fault in this instance, though, is their belief that ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ are necessarily fixed categories, as they are always susceptible to change. While the humans in this community view status as both something fixed and something which has certain positive and negative connotations attached to it, the Owl God appears to take a much more holistic approach in his observations, recognizing the malleability of these circumstances.

The connections between one’s status and one’s access to material possessions is something which continues to be central to the song, and there is a particular emphasis on the human-*kamui* relationship having the power to reverse these physical conditions. When the poor boy finally escapes the angry mob of other children, who are hurling physical objects and insults at him with increasing force, he (alongside the Owl God) finds refuge in the home of a poor family. As soon as the Owl God is brought into this space, he is made aware of their poverty through their physical conditions, but similar to the boy, he recognizes that there is more than meets the eye, describing that “from inside the house, an old couple / Came along, raising their hands up over their eyes. / To look at them they were obviously terribly poor / Yet they had a gentlemanly and a ladylike quality” (Peterson, lines 73-76). The fact that they were “raising their hands up over their eyes” suggests that they believe that because of their status, they are unworthy of being in the presence of a *kamui* in its physical form. The Owl God observes their

poor status by sight alone, but is also able to see beyond it and focus more closely on their character, suggesting that this is more important than their perceived physical state.

Although their internal sense of virtue and good character is more significant than their physical conditions, the ways in which the Owl God aids in altering the circumstances of the people he visits are tied much more closely to the accumulation decorative, material possessions than to disposition. This suggests that even though one's moral integrity is more crucial than what they physically have, visual associations of poverty and wealth still hold merit. As observed by their "gentlemanly and ladylike quality," they are not "poor" by way of their morals but only by their lack of resources alone, which makes them all the more worthy of good fortune from the perspective of the Owl God. While he the couple houses him overnight, he is suddenly willed to decorate their worn-out home with fine objects, changing their lowly status entirely;

I sat there between the ears of my earthly body

But before long when midnight came,

I arose.

"Silver drops fall all around,

Golden drops fall all around,"

I sang quietly,

As from the left side of the house to the right,

With beautiful sounds, I flew.

As I beat my wings... (Peterson, lines 96-104)

The use of “earthly body” is worth noting as it calls attention to the physical form of the Owl that this *kamui*, as well as the very physical, visual nature of the song and its trajectory. Philippi translates this line more simply as “between the ears / of my body,” (143) so it is possible that Peterson includes the word “earthly” as a means of emphasizing the fact that the Owl God presides over the human world and inhabits a physical body. This sense of corporality is also made apparent by The Owl God declaring that “with beautiful sounds, I flew / As I beat my wings.” While the actions, behaviors, and spiritual impacts of the *kamui* are considered much more important than the physical body of the animal they inhabit, the particular majesty of the Owl God in this song is represented through his physicality. In the context of reading the song it appears that the body acts as somewhat of a vessel for the kinds of immaterial and subtle changes the Owl God is able to enact within the human world.

The emphasis that is placed on the physical nature of the scene is furthered by the Owl God’s focus on decorative, aesthetic transformation of the home and its impacts on the more invisible aspects of human life. He recites that “exquisite jewels fell, the divine jewels / Making lovely sounds as they scattered around,” (Peterson, lines 105-106) which alludes to the fact that decoration in and of itself holds a certain sense of spiritual significance for both *kamui* and Ainu. The use of “divine” implies that these jewels have a direct connection to the *kamui* who bestow them, and thus when they surround a home it is a sign of the gods’ influence being physical and tangible in space and time. The use of “scattered around” also calls back to The Owl God’s repeated refrain “silver drops fall all around,” which furthers the sense that the influence of this particular *kamui* can be observed everywhere within the physical environment. What is also worth noting is the degree to which this scattering of adorned materials radically and instantaneously transforms the home, suggesting the overall impact on human conditions that

these physical objects have. The Owl God declares that "...in one moment, I made that little house / Into a house of gold," (Peterson, lines 111-112) and later refers to the house as "this mansion," (line 116) which calls to the sheer magnitude of this transformation on a visual scale.

Whereas the Owl God encompasses spiritual and immaterial space in the previous song, in this song he seems much more concerned with the physical aspects of both body and environment. Upon noticing the decorative transformations of their home, the couple he visits remarks that "We thought that we merely dreamed, that we merely slept, / But in fact, you were doing all this for us," (Peterson, lines 139-140) which is a major point of departure from the Owl God appearing in the dreams of the Ainu to teach them about sustenance practices. Instead of appearing in the spiritual realm to teach humans a lesson, and transforming their moral and intellectual capacities, he alters their physical space and material possessions. This is not to say that The Owl God's transformation of the home is merely superficial, as it has direct impacts on the social and emotional conditions of the couple. It does, however, allude to his ability to transform circumstances for the Ainu on both physical and metaphorical levels according to different situations. The two songs in which the Owl God appears are ultimately a means of understanding the *kamui*'s role as both an inhabitant of the physical world and something which has much more invisible and intangible influence in how humans behave and interact with one another.

While the two Songs of the Owl God within Chiri's volume may represent a harmonious relationship between *kamui* and Ainu, there are also several instances in which this relationship becomes disrupted and cannot be as seamlessly repaired. The patience and consideration of the Owl God is not necessarily reflected in other *kamui* who are either more militant in their punishment for behavior which disrespects the human-*kamui* relationship outright. One such case

of this is “A Song Pon Okikirmui Sang,” in which the Pon Okikirmui protects the human-*kamui* relationship with strict force, even to the point of violence. Okikirmui, who is the only *kamui* in the volume that is not represented by a physical animal form, is seen as a “culture hero” who sternly presides over the human world and strictly enforces the proper relationship between *kamui* and gods. Pon Okikirmui, his younger version (as indicated by “Pon” meaning “child” or “little”) (Peterson), is described by Strong as “a strong character with superhuman strength who works to protect and instruct human beings” (133). While he does not inhabit a physical body, his punishment against humans and gods for disruption of social order is something very much tied to physical and corporal punishment, which is to say that he is another representation of the fusing between the physical and spiritual worlds that the *kamui* often represent.

The song of Pon Okikirmui and the Song of The Owl God are somewhat similar in that both are primarily concerned with the mistreatment of animals and its impacts on the human-*kamui* relationship, although the tales differ greatly in how each *kamui* reacts to the situation at hand. Like the Owl God, Pon Okikirmui sees fish being mistreated, but rather than being patient in teaching the Ainu how to properly behave, he swiftly takes action. When he sees a young boy “hammering in stakes for a walnut-wood fish trap” (Peterson, line 4) and realizes the boy has been mistreating salmon, he abruptly kills him without hesitation;

I saw that because the stakes were walnut-wood  
 Walnut-colored water, muddy water  
 Came flowing out, and the salmon  
 Came out of the water and because they hated the muddy water  
 Were returning, weeping, to their homes. I was angry

And therefore, I grabbed the hammer that the boy was holding

And the sound of the blows I gave him echoed around.

I struck him so hard his hips broke, I killed him,

I sent him to Hell. (Peterson, lines 7-15)

As Pon Okikirmui is so intensely angered by the boy's complete disregard for the physical conditions of the fish, he is left with no choice but to act swiftly and forcefully to punish him, almost out of his own volition. It is worth noting that the salmon "came out of the water" and "were returning, weeping to their homes," as it calls attention to the fact that their forms as animals are only vessels for the *kamui* that represents them. When their physical conditions are undesirable in the human world, they escape to the world of the gods to seek refuge. As Pon Okikirmui is so militantly concerned with protecting the relationship between the two worlds, he is angered by the boy's actions because it directly violates the nature in which these connections are supposed to operate. The fact that "the sound of the blows I gave him echoed around" suggests the sheer magnitude of this *kamui*'s physical power, and this echoing may serve as a message of threat to others nearby.

While it may seem as though Pon Okikirmui's response to the boy's actions is too drastic, the fact that the *kamui* has "sent him to Hell" reveals his evil nature and his lack of humanity altogether. As Strong explains, "his status as an evil spiritual being, rather than as an actual human, is established when he is trampled down to the underworld, the *pokna moshir*" as this is "a place of permanent banishment for evil spirits" (133). Thus, this "boy" is merely an evil spirit deceptively manifested in physical form, and it is through Pon Okikirmui's careful surveillance of the human and *kamui* worlds that he is able to recognize this and quickly banish him. Not only



does he punish the spirit but also “snapped those stakes / At the very base, and sent them too, to Hell” (Peterson, lines 21-22), which suggests that this evil spirit is present not only in the form of a physical body but even in the tools which he has used. While *kamui* manifest everywhere within the physical environment for positive influence and protection of the Ainu world, evil spirits have the potential to do the same for their own destructive aims. It is the responsibility of Okikurumi to ward off this evil and protect the integrity of the human-*kamui* relationship, thus he must be much more militant and aggressive in his response to wrongdoing than other gods. The presence of evil spirits amidst the human and *kamui* worlds evokes the sense that the human-*kamui* relationship will always be threatened by malicious and destructive outside forces, which displays just how crucial it is that this relationship is maintained both by humans and by gods.

While something that centers several of the songs are the ways in which humans disrespect the human-*kamui* relationship, it is also important to consider how animals can commit such wrongdoing and are punished for it as well. This suggests that it is the responsibility of everyone to uphold these important connections, and that anyone can face repercussions from *kamui* if they disregard this role. The song follows two rabbit siblings who break manmade traps for their own amusement, which can be seen as a direct violation of the human-*kamui* relationship because of the ways in which it restricts food supply and thus the proper mode of transaction between humans and *kamui* (Peterson). As the rabbits are completely unaware of the fact that what they are doing disrupts the food supply, they are surprised when their actions suddenly result in violent punishment. The older rabbit describes the regularity of this form of amusement as well as his shock in his game suddenly backfiring, reciting that

Everyday I'd go up into the mountains  
Breaking the humans' crossbow traps;  
That was just the normal way to amuse myself.  
One day I found a crossbow trap set in my path  
But just next to it there had also been set  
A little crossbow made of wormwood.  
I said to myself,  
"Whatever does this do?" (Peterson, lines 30-38)

The fact that the amusing act of breaking traps is an everyday occurrence implies that the rabbit is entirely and constantly acting out of self interest and with little consideration of the natural environment. Not only is he disrespecting the Ainu, but he is endangering their ability to send offerings to *kamui*, which results in a complete disregard for the transactional relationship between the two worlds. "Normal" builds upon this disregard by implying that these connections are not something that are usually considered, and that the act of breaking traps does not deserve a second thought. The rabbit's emphasis on his own curiosity when finding the wormwood crossbow deliberately separates this object from its intended purpose, continuing to center his focus on himself and not on the environment around him. This curiosity in touching and observing the crossbow ultimately results in him being "utterly caught in the trap / Beyond any hope of escape," (Peterson, lines 42-43) and thus he is forced to relinquish to the consequence of his actions regardless of if he is aware of how they may be immoral.

As the violent punishment inflicted against the rabbit reveals, his breaking of traps is something which is incredibly destructive to societal function and thus must be retaliated against

accordingly. His continued language of helplessness and confusion at his situation suggests his lack of awareness of the fact that his daily activity directly correlates to his unfortunate fate. When his younger brother is unable to help him and someone arrives to take him out of the trap, he is under the impression that he, as an innocent victim, is being rescued and bestowed with good fortune;

I wept again and someone came to me -  
A human appeared. He was a youth  
As beautiful as a god, smiling broadly.  
He picked me up and took me away  
To a big house, filled with sacred treasures. (Peterson, 46-50).

The fact that this young man is “as beautiful as a god” perhaps alludes to his moral proximity to the world of the *kamui*, which in the eyes of the rabbit would serve as a reminder that he is being protected by those who overlook him. In tandem with his appearance, the rabbit’s mentioning of the man’s “big house, filled with sacred treasures” places emphasis on the physical and tangible aspects of being human. Similar to the Song of the Owl God, these lines reveal that one’s morality is often associated with one’s material possessions and decorations, and that the two may inform one another.

These visual associations, however, are merely forms of deception and distraction from the circumstances at hand, as the rabbit comes to understand that he has been brought to the home in order to be tortured. Even once these circumstances take shape, however, he is still left unaware of the fact that this enactment of violence against him is because of his arbitrary

breaking of traps. The young man puts the rabbit in a pot after “he cut my body apart as if he were slicing leather,” (line 53) which reduces this animal to mere object and personal resource. The rabbit’s view of the traps as disposable is reflected back onto him, as he is made into something to be discarded and torn apart. As this scene pans out, however, the rabbit is still “desperate to escape” (line 56) and mournfully remarks that he will “die a pointless death,” (line 61) evoking the sense that he feels he is unworthy of this cruelty and that his actions are not worth punishing.

Miraculously, however, the rabbit escapes his fate, which gradually shifts the tone of the song away from ignorance towards a subtle self-awareness. He realizes that the person who punishes him is not a human at all and is in fact Okikirmui, who he describes as “godlike in strength” (line 72). Once the rabbit is aware of the fact that the traps he destroyed were not set by an “ordinary human,” (line 75) he suddenly becomes weary of his actions and understands why they might elicit such a violent and aggressive response. It is worth considering why he appears to be more patiently accepting of the response of kamui than of humans, as he understands that he has “angered Okikirmui” through the breaking of traps, (line 76) but does not consider the earlier needs of the humans he affects. Perhaps the authority and overall importance of kamui is something he is unable to disobey, or he considers them to be more worthy of respect than humans. Several lines later, the rabbit explains that Okikirmui had not come after him after he fled his punishment, which he believes is because he is “no mere insignificant god” (line 78) and was thus worth sparing. This is the first time in the song that the rabbit refers to himself as a kamui, which only appears as a means of self-flattery and not as a recognition of responsibility. While the rabbit becomes aware of the consequences of his actions and respects the authority of

Okikirmui, he also removes himself from his own fault and does not experience a complete transformation of thought and behavior.

The rabbit concludes his song by highlighting the extent to which his actions have influenced future generations to come, serving as a cautionary tale to ensure proper behavior. These closing lines are didactic in nature, offering a certain explanation of how nature has evolved because of his choices;

Because I couldn't resist meddling,

Whereas rabbits were as big as deer before,

We've become as small as a single piece of meat.

All of my kind from now on

Are going to have to be as small as this.

Therefore, rabbits of the future, take heed not to make mischief! (Peterson, lines 84-89)

The fact that the rabbits have been forever reduced to the size of “a single piece of meat” because of the narrator’s “meddling” suggests the sheer magnitude that one individual’s wrongdoing can have on the collective environment. His explanation that they “were as big as deer before” connects the past history to the future after his death, and acknowledges the present reader who may be searching for an explanation of environmental circumstances. As he is addressing the other rabbits directly, this begs the question as to what it might mean to read and understand the song within a ‘human’ context and as human readers divorced from more specific forms of communication and understanding among a species. Although the message of the song to avoid

improper behavior is something which may be applicable to Ainu and *kamui* alike, the rabbit's address to "rabbits of the future" to "take heed not to make mischief" intentionally narrows the scope of its audience. As the rabbit only reflects upon how his actions affect other *kamui*, perhaps his transgression that remains unresolved is his inability to account for the human. Like the songs which precede it, the rabbit's story indicates to the reader that Ainu and *kamui* must always be equally respected to maintain the proper balance between them, and when they are not one's way of life may be radically and unrecognizably altered. The moral quality of the *kamuy yukar* display to its reader how one must always behave in accordance with the desires of humans and gods, and can thus be read both as stories in their own right and forms of instruction.

#### **Chapter 4: Colonial Legacies of Translation**

Chiri's translation of *kamuy yukar*, and the subsequent scholarship in anthropology and Ainu studies that arises from it, is further complicated by the backdrop of the Ainu language vanishing from existence. Access to the Ainu language rapidly diminishes in the decades following Chiri's untimely passing in 1922, as the effects of the banning of language embedded in the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act continue to reverberate. By the 1950s, the Ainu language becomes virtually extinct, and there remains only few elderly Ainu in Southern Hokkaido who have any semblance of language retention (Bugaeva 2007). Thus, her work of transcribing and translating tales is particularly significant in that its backdrop and the history which follows it is one of active and ongoing efforts to reduce accessibility to cultural and linguistic materials. The "vanishing" she describes in the preface to her text is extended upon in later generations, as the distance from devoted religious practices is exacerbated by ongoing efforts to culturally assimilate the Ainu.

Chiri's process of translation, however, is situated within a series of direct relations between colonizer and colonial subject in Japan, and it is crucial to speculate on how readings of her translated works may center non-Ainu systems of historical documentation. As noted by Strong, the *kamui yukar* she transcribes are originally only a form of oral performance, and "historically Ainu was not a written language. Traditional Ainu culture can be described using Walter Ong's term as one of "primary orality"" (6). This is to say that virtually all aspects of Ainu cultural customs and traditions are structured around oral communication, and that printed word is seldom featured as a means of representation. For a culture of "primary orality" to enter the literary territory of print, it seems, would be a sign of its readjustment to 'modernized' cultural norms. By 'converting' Ainu oral tradition into written form to be disseminated to the non-Ainu, and Romanizing the oral language and translating into Japanese, it is important to underscore the degree to which Chiri's text may be somewhat removed from the traditions and practices it represents. It begs the question of whether these stories retain their impact when perceived out of the context of oral tradition, or if they are 'sanitized' and streamlined through their publication. While her tales provide a documented account of Ainu religious beliefs and allow her reader into the vast world of Ainu cultural systems and worldviews, it is important to underscore the degree to which such a practice may center non-Ainu systems of knowledge production and narrative construction.

The process of translating Ainu into Japanese, when understood in relation to Japanese national interests, places major limitations on the possibilities for indigenous autonomy and accurate representation. Part of the reason why Chiri is given the opportunity to collaborate so closely with Japanese translators and archivists is their interests in uncovering the colonial Other. As Katsuya Hirano underscores in his essay "The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the

Narrative of the Ainu as a ‘Vanishing Ethnicity,’ the primary motive for translation of Ainu and other native languages into Japanese involves an anthropological approach to finding the origins of Japanese language and culture, as well as solidifying the boundaries between Japanese and non-Japanese identities. Kindaichi Kyosuke, Chiri’s close collaborator in translation, describes that the Japanese took interest in translation because “we had to clarify the relation between Japanese and the other national languages” (5). Ainu, Ryukyu, Korean, and Chinese were thus studied in order to more clearly define difference and to mark the Japanese language as a definite origin point, and to better lineate boundaries of inside and outside social categories.

This “clarifying,” as Hirano underscores, involves the theoretical centering of Japanese and places Ainu and other languages on the periphery of epistemological importance. He writes that “what this means therefore, is that they objectivized, mobilized, and utilized the neighboring languages in order to affect the beginnings of Japanese as an institution.” (5). Translation being used to define the constitutive outside lays the groundwork for other Japanese interests in the social sciences, in which ethnic differences are deployed in similar ways. In light of this theoretical framework presented through translation, it remains curious to think about whether Chiri Yukie and her collection of cultural materials may be seen as a tool for the bolstering of settler colonial systems and the development of racial and cultural difference. While she herself did not intend of doing so, it remains significant to be conceive of the processes of her work as a product of settler colonial circumstances. Her personal intentions of revitalizing Ainu culture and having the Ainu return to their spiritual and cultural roots are vastly different than the intentions of outside scholars, and her untimely death further exacerbates the differences between these motivations.



It is primarily because of the construction of the Ainu as a “vanishing ethnicity” that the Japanese take interest in studying their culture, as it serves to further emphasize the supremacy of Japanese ‘civilization’ and progress. Hirano notes that

the “civilized” Japanese intellectuals unquestionably believed that their destiny was to make these childlike, immature people of the periphery, who were incapable of self-sufficiency, into an object of research, and at the same time, to extend a helping hand to them so that they might “become fine Japanese people who no one can criticize.” (6)

If the Japanese study of the Ainu is tied to motivations toward assimilation and the marking of non-Japanese identities as “ancient” and “savage,” it is inextricably bound up in the impacts of settler colonialist and nationalist policy initiatives. This perhaps underscores the degree to which through translating and ‘concretizing’ her text (that is, publishing what only exists in oral form), Yukie is associated with such sets of colonial relations and the motivations of the Japanese ethos. The push toward documenting Ainu tales in Japanese is linked to the conception of the Ainu as a “vanishing ethnicity,” as to concretize and document their history is to not only mark them as a disposable culture but as a material for the study of Japanese ethnic origins that is constructed as in the past. While *Ainu Shinyoshu* still remains pivotal for the study and analysis of Ainu belief systems in the face of colonial devastation, the ways in which it is objectified and politically utilized drastically may confer readings of the text which centers non-indigenous perspectives and worldviews.

If Chiri's selections of *kamuy yukar* are distanced from their original cultural associations when they are romanized and translated into Japanese, they are even further divorced from their origin point when such Japanese translations are converted into English. Western scholars of Ainu studies such as Philippi and Peterson build upon Chiri's work of cultural revitalization, and their new translations of her work in English certainly allows for a wider audience to reach Ainu cultural materials and study the Ainu more closely. However, with the extension of this external audience perhaps comes the prioritization of Western, colonial ways of understanding sustenance, social relations, and religion. As the inner worlds of the tales will exemplify, Ainu culture exists outside of ideas of 'modern civilization' which prioritizes industrial expansion and monetary survival over more abstract ideas of spiritual and environmental connection. While non-Ainu scholars do make remarkable progress in displaying and articulating the major facets of Ainu spirituality and the importance of Ainu-god relationships, they often operate from a point of comparison to Western ideological systems.

Within the English translations of Chiri Yukie's work, there arises the problem of altering and contextualizing certain linguistic Ainu concepts for the purposes of readability, which emphasizes the prioritization of Western modes of thinking in the study of Ainu culture. These gestures toward making the text more 'readable,' while perhaps not intentionally prioritizing a certain point of view, perhaps make the authority of the non-Ainu translator more palpable. Peterson wrestles with the difficulties in working around the differences between the simple Ainu text and its more descriptive Japanese adaptation and what this implies for his work;

One of the most remarkable things about Chiri's original translation is the relationship between the clear, sophisticated, beautiful Japanese text and the

superficially simpler original. For example, human beings in the original are referred to as almost invariably simply as *ainu*; this may mean ‘human’, ‘Ainu’, ‘person’, ‘inhabitant’ and so on...Both the Japanese text and this translation, therefore, use many different words where the Ainu original uses only one; this is one of the ways in which a translator’s culture inevitably imposes itself on a text (“About This Translation” in *The Song the Owl God Sang*).

The “simpler” language of the original Ainu is perhaps suggestive of the fact that it does not take into account the idea of external audience, prioritizing its role within Ainu culture and among Ainu speakers. The word “Ainu” to mean “human being” evokes the sense that these tales are internal to the community they represent, and that the Ainu people are the only ones by which the concept of the human would apply. The adaptation of these “simple” phrasings into more varied meanings, then, interrupts the internal nature of the original version, creating a heightened awareness of readers that do not belong to the original community. Through these more ‘descriptive’ iterations of the text that take into account the specific meanings of particular word choices, the outside reader is perhaps better able to comprehend the text in relation to their own internalized beliefs and cultural worldviews. On the one hand, this allows for a deeper understanding of Ainu culture as something entirely distinct from one’s own idea of oneself in relation to ideas of the natural environment, sustenance, and spirituality, yet it simultaneously ‘Otherizes’ the Ainu through this lens of comparison. It is crucial to both delve into the most significant theoretical and literary developments in Ainu studies that arise from Peterson’s and other scholars’ works while also acknowledging and critiquing the ways in which they uphold epistemological hierarchies rooted in colonial structures.

When translation of Ainu tales becomes intertwined with historical, archival, and anthropological work, it strengthens the intellectual authority of the non-Ainu scholar in being able to interpret and mediate what may be considered the major facets of Ainu culture. Philippi's *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans: The Epic Tradition of the Ainu*, while effectively revitalizing a large collection of Ainu songs and aiding in modern understandings of Ainu culture, also brings into question the role of the translator in imposing a certain ideological framework based on its reliance on English translation. Philippi describes the Ainu epic tradition as being inherently tied to the concept of self-revelation in that it displays to its reader certain facets of the identity and personal experiences of humans and gods. He writes that the songs "are, so to speak, monologues or self-revelatory utterances in which a personage describes his or her experiences and adventures from the subjective point of view," explaining that "the archaic epic is a form of interspecies communication in which gods or humans speak of their experiences to members of their own species." Yet how might this insular form of communication and personal display be radically altered when it is brought into public view, especially by an audience that will never be able to experience the oral traditions of the Ainu in a way that is entirely authentic? Simultaneously, might an outside audience disrupt this precious and intimate connection between gods and humans? Philippi's use of "archaic" calls attention to the idea of the Ainu being a people of the past that are part of a larger field of study in modernity, perhaps emphasizing the role of modern practices of translation and archiving in distilling the meaning behind these pieces of cultural material. It is crucial that a close study of Ainu tales strides away from viewing 'archaism' and 'modernity' as two sides of a constitutive binary, especially because of the ways in which Chiri can be seen as adapting past traditions in to the modern context of literary

publication. And yet this framework is, in some ways, unavoidable and inevitable due to the very nature of translation and its aims.

The process of translation, particularly as it relates to the Ainu, is one by which cultural material and its most intimate meanings are recontextualized, transforming one thing into something entirely other. This movement of meaning, however, while altering prevailing ideas of literature and history, is arguably not something which is as clear cut as it may seem. Azzedine Haddour writes in *Frantz Fanon, Postcolonialism and the Ethics of Difference* of translation as “a means of *transport*; a mobile vehicle carrying meaning from place to place” (202) The ways in which English translations of Ainu tales must grapple with adapting the ‘simple’ phrasings of the original texts to the wider array of social and cultural concepts automatically moves them away from their original cultural context. There are certainly means by which Peterson and Phillippi can - and often do - retain the cultural breadth and authenticity of the stories they present, including the retention of certain italicized Ainu words or phrases in place of English replacements. These moments, which are scattered throughout their translations of *kamuy yukar*, may be seen as recognitions of the fact that there are certain facets of Ainu identity and social relations which cannot be fully understood from an English-speaking, Western point of view.

Yet these subtle gestures are not enough to take away from the fact that translation on the whole is something which, by “transporting” meaning into new territory, shifts the authority away from the original source material and into the hands of the external scholar. As the Ainu are seen by many as a primitive people whose language has died out with them, these non-Ainu scholars and translators are often constructed as cultural and intellectual saviors. Donald Phillippi concludes the introduction to his translation by speaking of the Ainu in constricting and

antiquated terms as a past people, crediting the work of external scholarship for the persistence of language;

Even though the Ainu language has almost entirely disappeared from daily use and the epic tradition has died out with the deaths of the last reciters, we are extremely fortunate in having a substantial body of texts collected, chiefly during the early decades of the twentieth century, by Western and Japanese students. This body of texts reveals that the Ainu epic tradition is one of the richest and most interesting bodies of archaic oral folklore in existence. (21)

It is troubling that Philippi's first instinct is to show appreciation and gratitude for "Western and Japanese students" and not the immense efforts of Ainu scholars and activists, whose lasting knowledge of Ainu language and its surrounding oral traditions are the reasons we have access to this material in the first place. Without the help of those like Chiri Yukie, who saw the preservation of language as a final hope for reversing the abandonment of cultural traditions, Ainu epic tradition would not persevere as a field of study in the ways that it has. While Philippi is correct in saying that the language is no longer in current use, it is a grave oversimplification of both the past and present to attribute the continued visibility of the Ainu's legacy to those who have no direct personal ties to it. It is especially disheartening considering the fact that a majority of the Ainu who have contributed to this work have died, as it means that their work can be more easily and covertly co-opted by outside forces. Attributing the successes of Ainu studies to Japanese and Western scholars alone presents the earlier work of the Ainu as insignificant and

unworthy of consideration, and non-Ainu methods and theoretical frameworks as inherently superior.

Ultimately, it is crucial to understand that the scope of knowledge and access we have to Ainu oral tradition today is an amalgamation of both the efforts of the Ainu themselves and the non-Ainu scholars that take interest in continuing on with developing analytical, historical, and literary research. With this in mind, though it is important to consider that those who study the Ainu by means of their own intellectual interest may be detached from the impacts of settler colonialism on an individual level. There may be less immediate consideration of the oppressive political histories that this material is situated within, as well as what the many collections of Ainu stories may imply for the future of activism and broader recognition efforts. When the study of Ainu epic tradition is neither depoliticized nor is it transformed to serve settler-colonial or Western aims it has the potential to aid in narratives of resistance. Chiri's pivotal work in the revitalization of Ainu oral traditions refuses the notion that Ainu culture should be discarded for being incompatible with ideas of modern development, as she is able to adapt such traditions into the present context without removing their original meanings.

### **Conclusion**

When Kayano and Chiri's self-representations are read through the lens of persistence, it becomes clear that these texts transmit lasting cultural knowledge that counteract the invisibility of settler colonialism in Japan. The readers of these texts, regardless of their closeness to the subject matter at hand, are likely to understand that Ainu social formations and belief systems are entirely distinct from that of the Japanese, and that the Ainu are victims of settler colonial violence and erasure. When Kayano's memoir and Chiri's translated collection of songs,

however, are read merely as literary products and are detached from their more pressing political contexts, it is possible that their stories become commodified and removed from decolonial activism. *Our Land Was A Forest* and *Ainu Shinyoshu* are certainly incredible literary accomplishments in their own right, but it is important to always consider them within the political and social contexts that they are situated in; to do otherwise would minimize the full scope of these authors' achievements as Ainu writers.

As my analysis has shown, the processes of settler colonialism are ongoing and are palpable even within the fields of literary publication, anthropology, and translation. With this in mind, it is important to consider how certain literary, artistic, and scholarly representations of the Ainu from the outside represent cultural beliefs and lived experiences in radically different ways than self-expressions are capable of. These representations have the potential to Otherize or diminish the authority of the Ainu, and also potentially lack the cultural authenticity and specificity that is so apparent in these source texts. One such example of this is Miyazaki Hayao's 1997 film *Princess Mononoke*, in which there are villagers who interact gods that are manifested through the bodies of animals. While the Ainu are never mentioned by name in the context of the film, it is immediately apparent that the Ainu-*kamui* relationship is something which thematically influences Miyazaki in the plot structure and characterizations in his film. On the one hand, this can be seen as a positive and crucial development in Ainu representation in media, although it runs the risk of taking measures of representation out of the hands of the Ainu themselves. By the Ainu becoming a trope within Japanese media, it may further the assumption of them being a past people that no longer holds cultural and self-expressive merit, and thus reinforces the settler colonial norm of Japanese-imposed narratives.



Another crucial representation of the Ainu within Japanese media appears through Noda Satoru's manga series *Golden Kamuy*, which depicts the Ainu much more directly than *Princess Mononoke* and even includes phrases from the Ainu language. The story follows the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war, and is explicit in its depictions of Ainu social structures, the relationship to *kamuy*, and the preservation of Ainu language. Because this representation of the Ainu is grounded in actual historical material, the Ainu are connected to the wider context of the Japanese settler colonial project and are not mythologized or made to be fictional characters. This form of representation has the potential to provoke thought about the lived experiences of the Ainu within Japan, especially within economic and military institutions, but it of course somewhat more distanced from the intricacies of these experiences. It is truly only the Ainu which can express themselves to the fullest extent, and it is important to prioritize these self-representations over ones that are constructed by those on the outside.

In tandem with these forms of literary representation, it is important to consider the role of political visibility and activism as forms of settler colonial resistance. As he was the first Ainu to take office in the Diet of Japan, Kayano Shigeru was pivotal in demanding that Japan recognize and compensate for the circumstances that have been inflicted upon the Ainu. His activist work has ensured that this would be reflected in the legislature and not in literary or cinematic representation alone, which has created immense pressure on the Japanese government to recognize the realities of the settler-colonial structure of Hokkaido. As recently as 2019, the Diet passed the Ainu Promotion Act, which "obligates the government to adopt policies to facilitate people's understanding of the traditions of the Ainu and the importance of the diversity that ethnic groups contribute to society" (Umeda). This encouragement of education and discussion of the Ainu can be seen as a remarkable step in the push for settler colonial visibility

within Japan, although it arguably may not do enough to address the problems at hand. The rhetoric of contribution implies that the Ainu have made necessary cultural and economic sacrifices for the Japanese state, which in and of itself reinforces the settler colonial structure. These efforts toward cultural promotion must be met with direct political and economic justice, which not only acknowledges the conditions of the Ainu as a result of Japanese policy, but makes active efforts toward reparations. Only time will tell whether Japan will live up to its newfound promises of cultural promotion and recognition, but it is crucial to acknowledge that it is because of the important activist work of Ainu like Chiri Yukie and Kayano Shigeru that these questions remain to be considered.

Regardless of what the future holds, Ainu self-representation can be seen as a defiant political act that collapses the narrow, constricting boundaries of time and history. Both Chiri and Kayano adapt rich and long-standing cultural traditions and expressions for the modern, public view, speaking to the fact that the Ainu can never be seen as a static, archaic people but are instead one which has radically maintained its cultural origins. The permanence of the self-expressions published within their texts make erasure something which is impossible to ever achieve to its fullest extent. Through language, they immortalize the experiences of the Ainu, preserving their own histories and what will follow them. It is because of these forms of literary expression that the Japanese settler colonial structure can and never will be extinguished.

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