"The Goddess of the Wind and Okikurmi"
Kayano Shigeru, transl. with introduction by Kyoko Selden
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Blaxell and Fedman make reference to the displacement and deculturation of Ainu in the process of Hokkaidō's incorporation into modern Japan. Indeed, the assimilation of Ainu resulted in what some have characterized as near "cultural extinction" and provoked enduring worries about the loss of Ainu identity as mixed marriages between Ainu and Japanese increased; practices in clothing, housing, and food became more Japanese; and the Ainu language fell out of daily use. In response, there have been attempts, especially since the 1970s to protect, revive, and promote Ainu culture. Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006) was a prominent conservationist of Ainu culture who, in 1999, offered in a children's book an adaptation of an Ainu *kamuy yakur*, a song of gods and demigods. Or more precisely, a *yakur* is an epic poem that draws on Ainu oral traditions, and *kamuy* are spirit forces that are believed to control the visible universe. This particular *kamuy yakur*, translated into English by Kyoko Selden, is about an encounter between Pikatakamuy, the goddess of the wind, and Okikurmi, the guardian god of the Ainu. Consider this song as a primary source that speaks to Ainu views of gods, nature, and the relationship between humans and nature. And compare this to the understandings of the natural environment that were discussed in the Blaxell and Fedman essays, with sensitivity to both resonances and tensions. Kayano Shigeru wore many hats as a promoter of Ainu culture. In one significant legal case he became an environmental activist against the construction of the Nibutani Dam on the Saru River in Hokkaidō during the 1990s. Like many environmental activists in Japan over the last century, one inspiration was Tanaka Shōzō, profiled in the next essay.

The Goddess of the Wind and Okikurmi[1]

By Kayano Shigeru

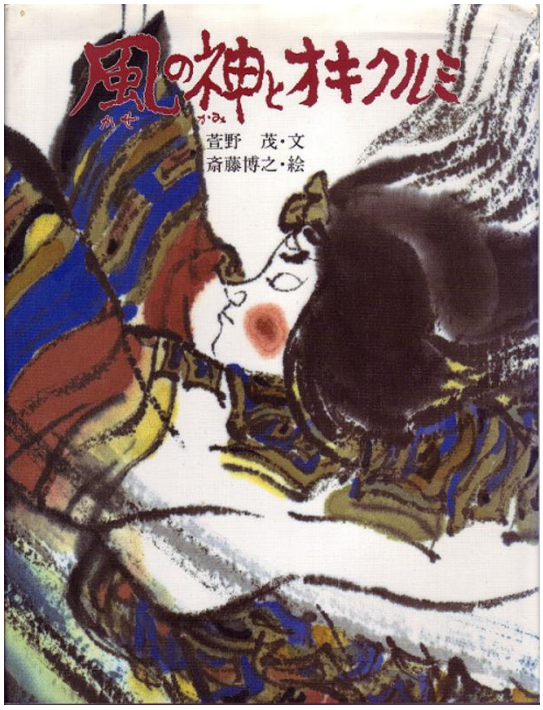
Translated and Introduced by Kyoko Selden

Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006) was an inheritor and preserver of Ainu culture. As collector of Ainu folk utensils, teacher of the prominent Japanese linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke, and recorder and transcriber of epics, songs, and tales from the last of the bards. He was also a fierce fighter against the construction of a dam in his village that meant destruction of a sacred ritual site as well as of nature. In addition, Kayano was the compiler of an authoritative Ainu-Japanese dictionary, a chanter of old epics, the founder of a museum of Ainu material culture as well as of an Ainu language school and a radio station. He was the first (and so far the only) National Diet member to address the assembly in Ainu. Kayano was also an inspiration behind today's appreciation of Ainu culture in which young people, Ainu and non-Ainu of various nationalities, join to celebrate aboriginal cultures and their contemporary development. That includes recent youthful attempts to create new forms that combine traditional Ainu oral performances with contemporary music and dance. "Ainu Rebels" which formed in 2006, for example, is constituted mostly of Ainu youth but also includes Japanese and foreigners. They are a creative song and dance troupe that draws on Ainu oral tradition adapted to hip hop and other forms, as well as engaging in artistic activities that combine traditional Ainu art with contemporary artistic elements.

The three major genres of Ainu oral tradition were *kamuy yukar*, songs of gods and demigods, *yukar*, songs of heroes, and *wepeker*, prose, or poetic prose, tales. The Ainu linguist Chiri Mashiho (1909-1961) saw the origin of Ainu oral arts in the earliest *kamuy yukar* songs of gods, in which a shamanic performer imitated the voices and gestures of gods. In Ainu culture, everything had a divine spirit: owl, bear, fox, salmon, rabbit, insect, tree, rock, fire, water, wind, and so forth, some not so esteemed or even regarded downright wicked, and others revered as particularly divine. This gestured mimicry apparently developed into *kamuy yukar* songs of gods, or enacting of songs sung by gods, in which a human chanter impersonates a deity. *Kamuy yukar* later included songs of Okikurmi-kamuy (also called Kotan-kar-kamuy), a half god, half human hero who descended from the land of gods to the land of the Ainu (humans), to teach how to make fire, hunt, and cultivate to humans living in *kotan* (hamlets).

The following piece by Kayano Shigeru, published in 1999 as a children's book with Saitō Hiroyuki's illustrations, is an adaptation-translation from an old *kamuy yukar* dramatizing a contest of strength between the goddess of the wind and the demi-god Okikurumi.

I am Pikatakamuy,
Goddess of the Wind from the land of the gods.
I have the power to fly through the sky
and raise winds at will,
whether
a gentle waft
a strong gust
or a stormy blast.



In the land of the gods,
or in the land of the humans,
women need be good at embroidery.
I lived at my house in the land of the gods,
and passed my days
always embroidering.

One day,
I stopped my hand that held a needle
and chanced to look
across the land of the humans.
A village caught my eyes.
It was a big village of the Ainu.

How cheerful the village looked!
All the people of the village
were busy working.
Children and little dogs ran about joyfully.
My old habit began again:
All right, I'll dance the dance of the winds
and scare the humans—
so I thought.
Once I felt like playing tricks
there was no restraining myself.

Right away, I donned
layers of particularly beautiful
wind-stirring robes
storm-hurling gowns
that I had embroidered,
then, with a swoop
I flew up to the sky.
I flew and flew across the sky-

and on landing on a lofty mountain,
I chanted,
"Blow wind, blow wind—"

and began to dance my dance,
my wind-stirring dance,
my storm-hurling dance.
Then, as usual,
from the tips of my hands,
from inside my sleeves,
fierce winds began to blow,
they blew from the mountains out to sea,
raising fearful large waves.
The large waves,
like waterfalls
began pounding
upon the village of the Ainu.

The raging winds
made me so happy
day and night with no rest
for six days running
I danced on.
When I finished dancing
and looked at the village of the Ainu,
it was clean and bare,
not one thing was left.
Yet I found—

one house was still there all alone.
It was the house where a young man lived.
Upset and upset,
at once, I danced more fiercely than before.
When I finished dancing,
I looked carefully and there it was,
the house, not yet blown away.
Upset and upset, I thought of trying one more time,
but too tired to dance again, with nothing to do
I went home to the land of the gods.

When I came home,
again I passed my days
embroidering.
After days had passed, one day
I recalled the events in that village
and looked that way. To my surprise
the village, which I thought I had blown away,
was just as before.
Having rebuilt the houses,
all villagers lived cheerfully.

Vexed and vexed to see this,
donning at once my wind-stirring robes
and storm-hurling gowns
I flew to the top of the mountain
and danced powerfully
the wind-stirring dance, the storm-hurling dance.

From the tips of my hand
from the sleeves of my robes
piercing winds began blowing
sand storms swirled around the Ainu village
creating such turmoil
it was as if the sea was turning upside down.
Day and night for six days,
as I sent the winds,
the gods of the trees began wailing
so as not to be blown down,
big trees broke with snaps
while those that did not break
flew away, pulled up by the roots.

While dancing the wind-stirring dance
the storm-hurling dance,
I glanced at the village of the Ainu.
The village had blown off, leaving
a bleak, empty wasteland.
Yet, believe it or not,
all by itself, the young man's house
still stood there
as before the storm.
Appalled by this
I gave up trying to blow the house away,
went home to the land of the gods
and passed my days embroidering.

Soon afterwards,
suddenly at my door
a young Ainu appeared.
How daring of him to come to my door
before I, a goddess, realized it—
I was vexed by the horrid Ainu.
But he smiled sweetly and said,
"Pikatakamuy, goddess of the wind,
thank you for showing us your delightful dance.
As a token of gratitude, let me show you
the dance of the Ainu."

The moment he said this—

the young man came into my house,
and started to dance his dance.
Then from the tips of his hands
from the sleeves of his robe, began blowing
strong, strong, piercing winds,
things fell from the shelf,
ashes and fire rose from the fireplace,
the house shook, the ceiling tore apart,
and in moments a mere framework
was all that was left of the house.

"Pikatakamuy, goddess of the wind,
The dance of the Ainu is not done yet,
I will show you another."

Taking from his pocket
a fan, he danced.
On the fan was a drawing
of cold winter clouds
and as he fanned,
cold, cold winds blew at me;
when he fanned harder,
snow and hail danced around,
grains of ice pelting against me.
In the blink of an eye, my robes were torn,
my entire body was
covered with bruises.

My body was cold as ice,
I thought I was freezing to death.
Then the young man said,
"Pikatakamuy, goddess of the wind,
the dance of the Ainu
is not done yet."
With this he flipped his fan.
Now there was a drawing
of a burning red sun.
This time, each time he fanned
there was dazzling light
and a hot, hot wind.

It was hot, so hot, my eyes went blind,
my skin scorched and charred,
it was so painful

I could think of nothing.
Falling like a rag,
I lost my senses.
After a while when I came to,
the young man approached me and said,
“Pikatakamuy, why did you
so devastate the village of the Ainu?
Because of you so many humans
lost their lives.”

“I thought, Pikatakamuy,
of killing you as I should have.
But you are the goddess of the wind in the land of the gods.
So I only punished you while keeping you alive.
If you make such strong winds one more time
know that I won’t forgive you then.”
This said, the young man fanned me
with his fan.
Strangely, each time he fanned,
bruise after bruise on my skin
was gone.

As the young man fanned me with his fan,
my robes that were like tattered cloth flipped and flapped
into the beautiful robes they were before.
No, not only that, as he fanned around him,
my shattered house pulled and heaved
into the fine house that it was before.
“Who really are you?
Please let me know your name.”

When I asked,
“I am Okikurmi,”
the young man answered briskly.
“What? So you are Okikurmi!”
I was stunned to learn his name.
No wonder he was so strong.
Okikurmi is none other
than the strong, strong, wise youth, who went
from the land of the gods to the land of the Ainu.

Ever since,
I send no strong winds
toward the Saru River
by which Okikurmi lives;
I only send

gentle winds
refreshing winds
healing winds.

In these words,
Pikatakamuy, the goddess of the wind
told us the story
of Okikurmi and the village of the Ainu.

On This Picture Book

Kayano Shigeru

This is a retelling in modern Japanese from a *kamuy yukar* (a story told by a god) in literary Ainu, further adapted into a style fit for an illustrated storybook.

Pikatakamuy,[2] the spirit of the wind, is a wind that blows down from the mountains, or *yamase* (cold mountain wind) in Japanese, and it is a *wenkamui* (evil spirit). The general word for "wind" in Ainu is *rera*, but this includes both good and bad winds. This explains why the wind in this story is called Pikatakamuy.

Okikurmi, who punishes this evil god, is the guardian god of the Ainu, also called Ainurakkur ("humanlike god," "Ainu" meaning "human"), who teaches skills of livelihood to humans. He lives in the village of the Ainu, teaches how to live, encourages the gods to protect the Ainu, and occasionally, as in this story, punishes gods who play wicked tricks. Through Okikurumi, Ainu have expressed their ideal human image.

The Ainu have a unique view of the gods (*kamui*). The gods are not the absolute; they are divine only to the extent that they are beneficial to humans. For example, if a child drowns in the river, the Ainu would sharply reprimand the god of the river, saying, "This came about because you were not watchful. From now on, be sure to protect Ainu." Of course, the Ainu not only expected protection, but rewarded the gods with prayers and constant offerings of *inau* (a sacred twig, equivalent to the Japanese *gohei*, a sacred staff with strips of cut paper).[3]

Kyoko Selden is the translator of Kayano Shigeru's Our Land Was a Forest, *and Honda Katsuichi's* Harukor: An Ainu Woman's Tale. *With Noriko Mizuta she edited and translated* Japanese Women Writers *and* More Stories by Japanese Women Writers. *She is the coeditor and translator of* The Atomic Bomb: Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki *and an Asia-Pacific Journal associate.*

Notes

[1] Ainu no min'wa: *Kaze no kami to Okikurumi*, narrated by Kayano Shigeru and illustrated by Saitō Hiroyuki (Komine Shoten, 1975/1990).

[2] The word *pikata* in Pikatakamui means south, south wind, or southwest wind.

[3] *Inau* is a ceremonial whittled twig or pole, usually of willow, with shavings still attached and decoratively curled.