

# The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the Narrative of the Ainu as a 'Vanishing Ethnicity'

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Translation by Gavin Walker

*The History of Hokkaido*, compiled and published by the Hokkaido regional authority in 1918, explains why the Hokkaido frontier was “opened” (*kaitaku*) by the Japanese (*wajin*) rather than by the Ainu: [1]

With respect to their old customs, the great majority of the Ainu have not yet managed to escape a savage and uncivilized stage...From the very outset, the task of opening the frontier can only be accomplished by an ethnos that has reached a certain cultural level. It is of course impossible to hope that this opening of the frontier could be performed by the people of Ezo themselves, a people that has not yet left behind a period of primitive savagery - the only ethnos among those close to Hokkaido and near to the Ezo people which possesses a culture capable of enduring this duty is unquestionably the Japanese. [2]

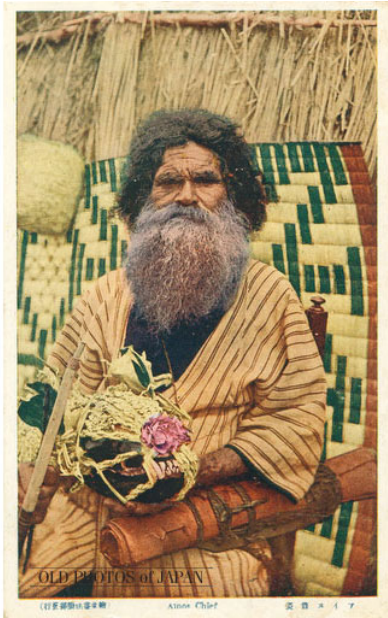
The formulation of a cultural hierarchy seen in this passage provided the logic that enabled the Japanese state to justify the necessity for its people to appropriate and rule the territory of Hokkaido in place of the Ainu by making the former the assumed subjective motor-force of this “opening,” while rendering the latter into an ethnicity (*minzoku*) that had “not yet managed to escape a savage and uncivilized stage.” Further, the new anthology of Hokkaido history compiled in 1937 insisted on the point that the “opening” made it possible for the Japanese to “enlighten the Ainu,” who had “for a long time continued their primitive lifestyle,” through the imperial assimilationist educational policy (*kominka kyoiku*) and it brought about a real possibility for the Ainu to “be granted universal brotherhood, and treated as national citizens.” [3]



Ainu group in a Japanese representation in Edo

Thus the territorial expropriation of, and assimilationist policy towards, the Ainu was rationalized through this term “opening,” which in turn rested on two of the major ideological standpoints of the modern world, that is, historicism and ethnocentrism. The former was an ideology linked to an understanding of time in which all human societies, despite their historical differences and diversities, follow the

exact same linear path of progress; the latter was an ideology linked to a spatial understanding in which people who share the same cultural origins - language, history, religion, customs - form the nucleus of the community as a specifically national community.



**Ainu chief, 1920s.**

What allowed historicism and ethnocentrism to become such hegemonic ideologies—and not only in Japan—was precisely that they were so successful at rewriting and representing in the former case, the history of capitalism, and in the latter case, the history of the nation-state as universal narratives. In other words, history came to signify the process by which the universal manifested itself in particular forms (cultural or territorial difference). The ethnos was thereby posited as a supra-historical subject whose existence predated history, and history itself was determined as the process (whatever its variations) by which ethnicities proceeded from the backward circumstances of the primitive era to a higher form of civilization (capitalist civilization). As a result, the historical process through which capitalist society and the ethnic community were produced - a contingent and hazardous process - was concealed and forgotten. This conception of history is precisely what Foucault referred to as “metaphysics,” that is, it is an ideology which is formed through the presumption of “the existence of immobile forms [i.e., ethnicity, the universal law of progress] that precede the eternal world of accident and succession.”[4]

Seen in this way, we can understand that the discourse of “opening” operates as a universalistic expression of the ethnic enterprise and its progressiveness. A society like that of the Ainu, possessing neither the form of the nation-state nor the structure of capitalism, is thus posited as an ethnicity which utterly lacks the ability to manage itself, to say nothing of the ability to “open” frontiers. It is the “undeveloped” or “childlike” remnant left behind by the historical law of “progress,” one whose only option is to survive through the leadership and patronage of a more “progressive” ethnicity. Consequently, historicism and ethnocentrism resolve themselves in reducing the rich historical experience of mankind to the binary structure of “progress or stagnation,” and each ethnicity is thereby rewritten into a narrative of its oscillating rise and fall.



**Ainu family, 1906**

Rewriting social difference or heterogeneity as “savage” or “backwards” and the task of substantiating and institutionalizing it is a strategy of control that every colonial system engages in - I refer to this here as “colonial translation.” “Translation” in this sense does not merely indicate the process of the linguistic or semiotic symbolic operations related to the strategies of colonial rule, but rather points to the application of material power to fundamentally dismantle and then reorganize the social, economic and political relations that obtained prior to colonization (the inscription of heterogeneity on the land) in order to insert them into the capitalist production process. In other words, this translation should be

understood not as a form of free and equal “exchange” or “communication,” as theorized within nineteenth century liberalism, but as an instance of the destruction, expropriation, and absorption of the heterogeneous and multiple forms of life under conditions of the inequality of power, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization.” [5] The quotation at the beginning of this article splendidly illustrates the narrativization of this process by which, once the difference and heterogeneity of the Ainu had been reread into the form of savagery, their land and water, that is, the provisions for their livelihood were “legally” expropriated. While the Japanese state, not to speak of the Ainu themselves, had recognized nighttime trout and salmon fishing in the Ainu rivers and their tributaries as legitimate Ainu activities during the Tokugawa period, by the beginning of the Meiji era this was considered a “failure to address a long-standing abuse” and was summarily prohibited in 1879. For the Meiji government, whose avowed aim was modernization of Ainu life, this was justified as a means to transfer the right to fish from Ainu to Japanese while promoting the fisheries industries on a massive scale under the rubric of policies intended for the “increase of production in industrial enterprise” (*shokusan kyogyo*). The Ainu, who had thus been robbed of their livelihood, appealed to governmental agencies for a delay of the ban on nighttime fishing, which covered not only the major rivers but the smaller tributaries as well. This was denied on the basis of the “former natives’ illiteracy and ignorance of law.” Thereafter, it was the Japanese “openers” of the frontier who, with the backing of the Meiji government, “legally” expropriated and monopolized the fisheries industries in Hokkaido. [6]



**Ainu fishermen c. 1900**

It is crucial to heed the fact that the expropriation of territory and their rights to life proceeded simultaneously and parallel to the process by which the Ainu, a term connoting a proud person or people, was transformed into the humiliating term “native” (*dojin*), a word indicating a savage or uncivilized people. Because, when we turn our attention to this historical fact, we can immediately understand that the operation of the representation of the subject (from human to “native”) and the material destruction and expropriation of non-capitalist society are two deeply imbricated strategies. Racism (one form of the representation of the subject) justifies the operation of reification in capitalism (in a Lukascian sense) as natural - social relations amongst human beings are formed through the mediation of things (the commodity), and thus humans themselves come to exist as things or commodities. The slave trade, in other words, the exemplary commodification of human beings, cannot be explained without an understanding of the justifications of racism or its operations of representation, nor can we understand the history of the expropriation of the Ainu without considering the relationship between racism and reification.

Yet the position of the Ainu as enclosed within Japanese capitalism also differed from that of the poor peasantry, who were torn from the earth in the process of the accumulation of capital and made into “free” labor - in other words, labor as a commodity (the proletariat). Through their enclosure into the name “native” and the system of racism, it was not merely that

their means of livelihood were expropriated, but that their very right to life was lost. That is, the lesser or the powerless (*muno na mono tachi*) who were left out of this struggle for survival were reduced to an existence incapable of even becoming wage labor (incapable of even being commodified). The only path of existence left for them was to irrevocably discard their “Ainu” ways of life and become as close to human (Japanese) as possible; in short, the only path left for them was assimilation. In fact, those who “succeeded” at assimilation were consolidated into the system as the lowest strata of labor or came to be fetishized as a “rare material” of disappearing species. It seems necessary for us to once again examine Marx’s crucial insight – that the primitive accumulation of capital and the advent of the new mode of production that accompanies it is formed and unified through the violent disintegration of the foundations of traditional society – from the viewpoint of translation (the total reorganization of non-capitalist society, including the strategies of the rewriting of history and culture). In any case, the Japanese state created its “ideal” national subjects (those with absolute loyalty to the divine authority of the Emperor) in the form of the “imperial subject” (*komin*, or “loyal subject,” *shinmin*) in order to spur on modernization and the transition to capitalism. The fact that the Ainu were situated and subjugated as the polar opposite of this imperial subject suggests that the formation of the modern Japanese state and people was from the very outset developed around the axis of racism, that this process also connoted the formation of the imperial world and the annexation of its various neighboring societies. [7]

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In this short essay, I want to consider the politics that emerge from within the process of colonial translation by focusing on the role played by Japanese linguistics, in particular through the prism of the relation between Kindaichi Kyosuke (1882-1971), known as the father of linguistic research on the Ainu language, and Chiri Yukie (1903-1922), an Ainu woman who worked as his assistant and passed away at the age of 19 in his residence in Tokyo.



Kindaichi Kyosuke

There are three characteristics of the politics that become visible in colonial translation: 1) Colonial enterprise is intrinsic to the institution of the nation-state and in the creation and reinforcement of its ideology. 2) The relation between discrimination and assimilation (difference and identity) which forms the basis of colonial rule, is not an opposition as is generally thought, but rather must be understood as a mutually complementary, complicit relation. 3) Colonial rule does not succeed in perfectly subjugating and subordinating the colonized through assimilation and discrimination, but rather is always and constantly exposed to contradictions, cracks, frictions, and tensions through the enunciations and actions of the colonized.

In order to grasp the first point, we must consider for what purpose the National Language Research Center at Tokyo Imperial University was established. Tsuboi Hideto points out that it was “precisely based on the premise that by investigating and researching peripheral languages, and seeking out their relation to Japanese, their work would connect to the search for an ancient Japanese language, that is, proto-Japanese.”[8] Subsequently, research on ancient Japanese, Korean, Ryukyuan, Chinese,

and Ainu began in the middle of the Meiji Period under the direction of Ueda Kazutoshi (1867-1937). Kindaichi Kyosuke's words, in reflecting on his motives for making Ainu the object of his research, confirm this:

Everyone was doing linguistics in relation to Japanese – questions like, what are the origins of Japanese, where in the world were languages spoken which had the same origins as Japanese, where was Japanese spoken before it came to these islands? These questions were shared by all of us. Each one of us took up this question in our own ways, and we had to clarify the relation between Japanese and the other surrounding national languages. So it was clear that someone had to deal with the relationship between Japanese and Ainu... [9]

Thus Japanese linguistics began as a discipline from the overarching goal of starting a study of “national language” through the classification and analysis of the languages of neighboring societies. This research methodology, whereby Japanese is placed at the center, and Ainu, Ryukyu, Korean, and Chinese are located on its periphery, could only exist on the basis of the premise that these languages reflect the origins of this central language, in other words, the assumption that the traces of proto-Japanese remain in these latter four languages. 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. Kindaichi recalls his excitement upon encountering the oral epic stories of the Ainu, the *Yukar*:

They had no writing, so it wasn't in the form of a book, but it was something guarded by the elders, passed down from mouth to mouth up until the present day. It was a thoroughly rare set of materials for someone investigating ancient times...I felt that I was touching on the life of the ancients within the present age, that I was seeing a primeval form of literature before my very eyes.[10]

The notion that the Ainu language retained

within it a form of the “ancient past” through its oral tradition would never have emerged without the presumption that (in comparison with Japanese culture), Ainu culture still continued to be “primitive.” In order for Ainu language to become an important research object for linguistics (the study of the “national language (*kokugo*)”), this presumption of “primitiveness” was essential. The heterogeneously inscribed, fertile history of the Ainu was renarrated as “primitive” and frozen in time. Where Japan's history was viewed in terms of progress, the Ainu culture of oral tradition was positioned as merely a set of “rare materials” dealing with the ancient past, reduced to the status of a “specimen.” And a specimen, moreover, which could reveal clues to the *Japanese* past.

This notion of a search for the “origins of the Japanese language” was born from the desire to explain and clarify the cultural origins of the Japanese ethnos, a desire shared on a general level by the statesmen and intellectuals of the Meiji era. This desire itself was generated by the will to ground the Japanese ethnos as a self-identity, a drive which was popularly encouraged by the Meiji state. It was not only a case of linguistics – rather, from the late Meiji era onwards, history, folklore studies, anthropology, archeology, aesthetics, literature and so on all tried to explain the “particular” cultural-historical character of the Japanese people through a search for its “ethnic origins.” It goes without saying that in examining the various nearby societies from this particular perspective, these disciplines were organized through a Japanese ethnocentrism. This problematic is clearly and thoroughly conveyed in the memoirs left behind by Kindaichi on the subject of his encounter with Chiri Yukie and their exchanges. Just when Chiri Yukie was undertaking the task of translating the *Yukar* into Japanese, Kindaichi's words are recorded in one of their exchanges as follows:

Because the Ainu live on a far-away island where the light of civilization was delayed in reaching, you are like children born late – there's nothing embarrassing in the fact that your older brother has run ahead while you are still only crawling. [...] I believe that, in addition to the Greek, Roman, Indian, and Finnish epics, the *Yukar* is one of the world's five great epic poems. In the distant past there were also narrative storytellers in Japan, and in the same

way they too continually recited their tales, but as it was an era when there were not yet phonetic letters, and in which writing instruments and materials were hard to come by, none of these tales were written down in their full forms – O no Yasumaro instead left us mere summaries, and these are the oldest extant classics at present. Anyway, you are all still living through the conditions of this pre-literary era – personally, I don't find it regrettable to devote my lifetime to this task, but for you young people it's different. Despite all this ancient stuff, please go on steadily learning new knowledge and become fine Japanese people who no one can criticize. [11]

Precisely because the Ainu were considered a remnant left behind in a barren wasteland untouched by the light of civilization, they were thought to have retained an archetype of an ancient culture predating written language, as in the form of oral storytellers, who had disappeared from Japan long ago. Thus this logic according to which research into the Ainu constituted a mirror image illuminating the origins of ancient culture (Japanese ethnic-national culture) is stated here as something self-evident. Consequently, the “civilized” Japanese intellectuals unquestioningly 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”: this is precisely the space where we can locate Kindaichi.

Kindaichi's “sympathy” for the Ainu is well known, but it is inextricably linked to this sense of destiny; in fact, he could possess this sentiment only because he grasped the Ainu from the outset as a “vanishing ethnicity.” Nothing expresses this more clearly than Kindaichi's comment that the *Ainu shinyoshu* (*Anthology of Ainu Mythology*), the slender volume of Yukar that Chiri translated and compiled, was the work of “a young woman who was determined to attempt to transmit and record for eternity a commemoration of the existence of her race.”[12] For him, the *Shinyoshu* signified the tombstone of an ethnicity on the verge of extinction, a last will

and testament.

His contemporary, the ethnographer Torii Ryuzo (1870-1953) approached his interest in the study of the Ainu, Ryukyuan, Korean, and Indochinese from the same vantage point. It is well known that when Torii investigated Northern Sakhalin and the Amur River Basin, he constantly compared the customs of the Stone Age within the Japanese islands to those of the Ainu, and emphasized their similarity. According to Tessa Morris-Suzuki, while Torii paid great respect to various aspects of the cultures of these indigenous peoples, in particular to the beauty of their traditional woodcraft and embroidery, he simultaneously considered them to be “peoples that are naturally destined to vanish.”[13] Precisely because Torii believed that the Ainu retained the traces of the primitive past of Japan's Stone Age, he paid respect to their vanishing culture, becoming interested in them as an object of investigation.

What I want to emphasize and ask here is: what were the ideological conditions that gave rise to this view of the Ainu held by Kindaichi, Torii and their colleagues? As briefly explained above, we can consider two conditions here. First and foremost, during the 1880s-90s at the dawn of modern Japanese anthropology and linguistics, the discourse of the Japanese as an independent “ethnic group” or “race” was continually propagated. Similar to the notion of a unique language and culture. This ideology saw the unbroken line of the Imperial family in the same light as that which ensured the historical continuity of homogeneous language and culture (this was referred to as the theory of the national polity [*kokutai*], and Japanese ethnocentrism was formed on this theoretical basis). Secondly, driven by Social Darwinism (“the survival of the fittest”), there was an increasingly widespread belief around the same time that history was the unilinear and incessant movement of progress. Kindaichi and Torii were well aware of the actually occurring plunder of the Ainu at the time (the expropriation of the right to livelihood, as exemplified by fishing and hunting rights, affected through the policies associated with the opening of the frontier that I mentioned earlier). They chose to frame this as the inevitable outcome of “nature” or “destiny”, holding that the only path available for the Ainu was assimilation (“becoming a fine Japanese”). In other words, Kindaichi and the leading historians, anthropologists and linguists of the time continued to repeat this patently contradictory mantra according to which the Ainu could only continue to live precisely by their own total negation – becoming one part of the Japanese ethnos or national body – without

feeling the slightest ethical misgiving. In fact, the “sympathy” shown by Kindaichi towards Chiri Yukie should be understood as the product of a colonial relation of power utterly lacking any consideration of alterity.

If these intellectuals believed that Ainu’s “survival” depended on the complete eradication of their culture, it comes as no surprise that they saw the need to record Ainu culture at the moment of its rapid extinction not because they were concerned with the actual causes of Ainu’s tribulations but because they wished to uncover a “primordial” cultural form that might offer clues to the cultural origins of the Japanese ethnos. It is precisely here that we can see how colonial enterprise is intrinsic to both the self-formation of the nation-state and its reinforcement. The study of the other was purported to serve the purpose of discovering oneself. Or the interest in Ainu culture was based on the lack of interest in their actual/historical conditions. This very paradox – a deep structure of colonial epistemology shared by many colonial powers, as Michel de Certeau points out in *The Writing of History*, explains why people such as Kindaichi and Torii unconditionally accepted the discourse of the “peripheral ethnicities destined to vanish” despite their close relations with the Ainu.

On the second point: how did this mode of recognition of “difference and identity” function within Japanese colonial policy on the level of the creation and implementation of colonial relations of power? Here the fact that Kindaichi constantly emphasized that Chiri Yukie had a working knowledge of two languages, in other words, that she was bilingual, has a crucial significance. Kindaichi praised her command of the “national language” (Japanese) as so perfect that “even a local aristocratic lady could not measure up,” and noted that her Ainu language, learned by conversing with and listening to her grandmother recite the *Yukar*, was exceptional, superior even to Ainu adults.[14]

This bilingualism, the object of endless praise from Kindaichi, was of course a by-product of the colonial policy of assimilationist education pursued by the Japanese government.[15] In 1899, the year of the enactment of the “Laws for the Protection of Former Natives,” the percentage of Ainu children attending school was 22.5%, while in 1909, the year Chiri Yukie entered elementary school it had risen to 89.8% and in 1915 to 95.9%.[16] From these statistics, we can see that the saturation of Japanese-language education took place with frightening speed: without this type of colonial policy, Kindaichi’s research into the Ainu language

could not have existed. To put it another way, the system of knowledge in linguistics produced by Kindaichi was deeply connected to the process through which the Japanese state assimilated the Ainu.



**Chiri Yukie**

The collaboration which Kindaichi so eagerly sought in his relations with Chiri Yukie has to be understood within this context. The organizing principle of their relationship for Kindaichi was the division of labor between object and subject, between the native informant as object of research and the researcher who analyzes her. Since it was “destined to vanish,” the role expected of the Ainu object was to record and preserve her culture “just as it was,” and therefore to “faithfully” visualize (alphabetize) her own statements, enunciations, and oral traditions. It was Kindaichi’s role to provide these with an ethnographic interpretation. This relation of knowledge production in which the Ainu is the supplier of “raw data” while Kindaichi gives “meaning” to this data thus exactly reflects the power relations between the

colonizer and the colonized. The Ainu can never become the subject of the interpretive act; rather it is the self-appointed Japanese guardian or leader who provides the interpretation in their place. Thus the world of meaning is appropriated from the Ainu, and they are dispossessed of their enunciative subjectivity. Perhaps we can define assimilation as the attempt to control the other's world of meaning. Linguists and ethnographers attached a crucial significance to the fact that Chiri was conversant in her native language and possessed sufficient ability in the "national language" to faithfully translate into it insofar as she performed her bilingualism within the limits of the colonial relations of power. (Kindaichi did not encourage Chiri to compile the Ainu shinyoshu with a hope that the work would raise a fundamental question about Japanese colonial policies or urge the government or scholars towards a deeper sense of reflection. Rather, the Ainu shinyoshu was nothing more than a "commemorative" monument for the preservation of the "vanishing" Ainu culture, a set of "materials" through which the cultural origins of the Japanese ethnos might be understood)

At this point we need to further consider the question of what exactly assimilation is. As Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi have pointed out, assimilation does not at all signify the attribution to the colonized of the same civil rights that the colonizer possesses, nor does it mean to be respected as an equal human being. However much the colonized attempts to assimilate (the attempt to acquire the language, culture, and knowledge of the colonizer), in the end he/she is merely seen as a skilled "mimic," but is never treated as an equal human being. At the same time as the colonized is transformed into a member of society, he/she remains an "other" eternally inscribed with this heterogeneity.

Through assimilation, the Ainu were given the position of loyal subjects (*shinmin*) of the Japanese empire, but were never permitted to become truly "authentic Japanese." The Ainu of Hokkaido were included into the family register system as "former natives," and although they held Japanese citizenship, attended Japanese schools and were subject to taxation and the draft, but prior to Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, they were not guaranteed equal civil rights, such as the right to vote or the right to participate in government. The Ainu of the Sakhalin islands were referred to as "Sakhalin natives" (the fact that the term "former" is not used here reflects the judgment that they were considered even more "backward" and "uncivilized" than the Ainu of Hokkaido): just

like those in Hokkaido, these Ainu were given Japanese names, and spoke Japanese, but were not included in the family register; rather they were entered into a "Native Name Register" (*dojin meibo*). Further, since Sakhalin Ainu were not under the protection of Japanese criminal or civil law, not only were their rights to acquire property or administer a business not recognized, they possessed no representation in the Diet. [17] In other words, assimilation indicates the operation by which the "heterogeneous other" is subordinated and is at the same time integrated under the sovereignty of the empire. It was precisely this seemingly contradictory mechanism of discrimination and integration that formed the nucleus of the colonial policy of the Japanese empire. Etienne Balibar argues that the modern state requires the nation-form in order to successfully facilitate the capitalist system. The form is made up on the one hand of patriotism, the principle of equality which inspires the spontaneous participation of the people, and on the other hand it rests on the principle of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, and class, which legitimizes and justifies difference as something natural. This double principle of the nation form is the essential condition for the state's management of capitalism because a creation of patriotic sentiments of common destiny and spontaneous participation inspired by the sentiments help neutralize or dissipate potential antagonisms emanating from fundamental inequalities such as division of labor and the wage differential necessary for profit-making. In the same way, we can say that the imperial state, which requires the loyal subject in order to profit from exploitation and expropriation, depends on this double principle for its survival: on the one hand, the loyalty of the subject to the empire (being Japanese) engendered through assimilation, and on the other, political and economic discrimination based on ethnocentrism (not being fully Japanese). [18]

It is by no means an accident that this double principle exists in a disquieting imbrication with the structure of the linguistic doubling, or bilingualism of Ainu people such as Chiri Yukie (difference and identity, in other words, the heterogeneity or primitiveness of the Ainu and their assimilation or belonging to the Japanese empire). Why is there such a crucial significance to this operation by which the Ainu replaced their "primitiveness" with the language of the Japanese, this "national language," by *their own actions*? It is precisely because it was this process of translation which verified and substantiated the fact that the Ainu were a "different" ethnos and at the same time belonged to the Japanese empire. In fact, without this effect of making difference and



identity something substantialized, the *Ainu shinyoshu* would not have been conceived of by Kindaichi. In other words, without the premise of the Ainu language's primitiveness, its subordination to and eventual destiny to be replaced by Japanese, the "national language," it would not have been compiled in the first place.

Ainu language was therefore enclosed within the Japanese empire, and yet continued to be its outside. Ainu thus bore the sign of an exteriority within the interior. The empire configures its own continuity through the production, maintenance, and mobilization of precisely this type of exteriority. While the Ainu people were seen as the origin of the Japanese ethnos as a result of their "primitiveness," and thus as the interior of the empire, they were constantly made the object of discrimination as something eternally different (an inferior race). The Japanese empire cleverly utilized these policies of assimilation and discrimination, ensuring the flourishing of its capitalist development by dispossessing the Ainu of the land and water that had been the basis of their livelihood, and silencing their voices of resistance by denying them civil rights.

On the third point: during the preparation of the *Ainu shinyoshu*, it seems that Chiri Yukie made the point to Kindaichi that there was something like an Ainu "voice" that could not be expressed in any written forms in any language. Tsuboi Hideto refers to this as Chiri's "modest resistance." [19] Leaving aside the question of whether Chiri consciously attempted to resist, this example exactly demonstrates that the lived history of the Ainu and the narratives that transmitted it always held something unrepresentable, something that could not be assimilated to the institution of language, through the hegemonic linguistic system, the "national language" (Japanese). We might say that it shows us that assimilation policy and the politics of colonial translation sustaining it does not simply end with the relation of unilateral domination.

It is true, as Fanon brilliantly outlines in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that the inferiority complex implanted within the interior of the colonized through a socially, institutionally, and educationally formulated system of discrimination plays an essential supporting role for colonial rule. The Ainu people were also made to internalize the racial discrimination forced on them by the Japanese, gradually accepting this negative self-image as an irrefutable truth. In 1913, one of the Ainu from Sakhalin, Yamabe Yasunosuke stated, "Somehow, somehow, I really want to quickly

make those poor Ainu children into good imperial subjects, just like the average Japanese." In 1917, Takekuma Tokusaburo, also from Sakhalin, recorded that it "is my long-cherished desire for the Ainu to assimilate to the Japanese (*wajin*) and become fine citizens of the Japanese nation (*nihonjin*)."[20] Here again we can see that assimilation and discrimination are not an oppositional relation, but rather function in a mutually complementary fashion. The desire for assimilation was here spurred on precisely by the sense of anxiety or despair at the fact that they could never attain the ideal of becoming *Wajin* (the perfect, true Japanese).

Yet, Chiri Yukie held her own position in her refusal to submit to this ideal of becoming *Wajin* despite being tormented and perturbed by her racial inferiority complex and its horrific psychological violence. When Kindaichi's friend Okamoto Chiaki, who wanted to include an advertisement for the *Shinyōshū* in the magazine *Jogaku sekai* solicited a contribution and photograph from Chiri, Chiri hesitated to have her picture taken (in fact, it was Kindaichi who wrote this "contribution"). Noticing Okamoto's puzzled responses to her reluctance, Chiri speculated that Okamoto saw it as stemming from "an anxiety along the lines of "If I remain silent about my Ainu origin, nobody would notice who I am, but, contributing to magazines like *Jogaku sekai* (Women's World) I would expose and thus denigrate myself, and I wouldn't like that." [21] Chiri went on to write as follows:

To think that way seemed a bit strange to me. I'm Ainu. Completely Ainu. What part of me is supposed to be *shisamu* (*wajin*; Japanese)?! Wouldn't I still be Ainu whether or not I called myself *shisamu*? The idea of becoming *shisamu* just through that kind of lip-service is ridiculous. Who cares about becoming *shisamu*? I'm Ainu, so doesn't that make me another human being? I'm still a human being just like them. I'm happy being Ainu. [...] Because I'm Ainu, I'm looked down upon, but it's still fine. If my *utari* (compatriots) were looked down upon but I wasn't, what kind of a situation would that be? I'd rather that I was looked down upon together with my *utari*. [22]

Chiri's sensitivities about Okamoto's gaze and

her adamant assertions and defense of her Ainu identity indicate the degree to which the abject subject of the “inferior Ainu” deeply impinged on Chiri’s consciousness. Nonetheless, Chiri refused to embrace this “destiny” to vanish assumed by Yamabe and Takekuma, and hoped for the possibility to save the Ainu from this “destiny.” When she states, “I’m still a human being just like them. I’m happy being Ainu,” we can clearly see the affirmative meaning she gave to Ainu identity in her determined declaration to share the fate of her compatriots.

Chiri Yukie’s avowal that “there is something like an Ainu ‘voice’ that can not be expressed in any written forms in any language” needs to be understood in relation to this positionality. And the fact that she produced such a high level Japanese translation of the *Yukar*, one that effortlessly crosses the linguistic boundaries of Ainu, Japanese, and the Roman script, demonstrates not only her mastery of the dominant language, but also perhaps shows her determination to safeguard the inassimilable otherness of the voices of the Ainu themselves. This extraordinary achievement by Chiri would not have been possible without her acting out what Fanon called “mimicry,” the attempt of the colonized to behave in perfect synchrony with assimilation. It is a tragic irony of colonialism that the voices of the colonized were “savable” only through the mediation of the colonizers’ language, an impeccable mimicry. [23]

In the *Ainu shinyoshu*, Chiri Yukie never clearly explained what she intended by expressing the Ainu language in the Roman script, then placing her Japanese translation of the text in parallel, that is, in opposition to it, but Sato-Rossberg Nana argues that Chiri Yukie produced a superlative and unprecedented Japanese translation, one that uses a variety of devices to effectively convey the rhythmic movement and vitality of its retelling and performance of the *Yukar*. [24] This translation, which places its emphasis on the performative aspect, allows us to recall the fact that the *Yukar* is an orally narrated story configured around the narrator’s improvisation and creativity. In this sense, it is not a “tradition of thousands of years” safeguarded through recitation, but a form of art continually emerging anew in the here and now. Further, Chiri successfully re-introduces the voices of the Ainu by utilizing the Roman script in place of the Japanese *katakana*, which had previously been used to express Ainu phonetics. In particular, Chiri’s annotations in the Roman alphabet differed from the previously standard system of John Bachelor, the English missionary and researcher of Ainu culture, in that they came to be regarded by linguists as closer to the phonetics of the Ainu

language itself. A good example is the term *Yukara* – in Bachelor’s system this ends in a vowel, while Chiri renders it “*yukar*,” ending in a consonant. Today this has become common knowledge, but at the time it seems to have been a groundbreaking innovation. [25] In any case, this new method of translation and transcription expressed a certain rhythmic movement of the Ainu voice, a voice that cannot be entirely captured in writing, and thus this method itself can be viewed as a trace of Chiri’s desperate struggle to seek out the possibilities of Ainu survival, a task she regarded increasingly as unattainable.

I think the fact that Chiri re-introduced the voices of the Ainu by choosing to notate the Ainu language in the Roman script bears some important implications. In particular, if we consider the variant meanings ascribed to the Roman alphabet in modern Japan, we can see the topology of Chiri’s annotations. For example, Kindaichi’s friend, the poet Ishikawa Takuboku (1886-1912), considered the Roman alphabet to be a method of representation for the direct exposure of human interiority and desire, while Kindaichi’s teacher, who guided him into the study of the Ainu language, Ueda Kazutoshi, argued that, in aiming to build a new civilized nation, Japan ought to use the Roman alphabet, since learning Chinese characters was a massive waste of time and energy. Whatever the case may be, we cannot merely grasp the attention paid at the beginning of the Meiji period to the Roman script as a new method of transcription as a form of Eurocentrism or its adoption. By using the Roman script, an “ambiguous” system of annotation, Chiri attempted as best she could to restore the rhythmic movement of the voices of the Ainu, to communicate something that could never be represented within the existing linguistic systems (the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries, as well as Chinese characters). In other words, the Roman script was used here to liberate the voices of the Ainu from the yoke of the institutionalized and dominant language. Chiri’s creativity, which amazed Kindaichi and his friends, precisely indicates that, far from being a mere informant, she was an enunciative, interpretative subject in her own right. Chiri’s mimicry and act of translation suggested a possibility of dislocating, upsetting, even threatening the colonizer’s putative superiority and racism that supported it by appropriating the colonizer’s language and creating new semantic horizons. [26] Thus the division of labor that I previously mentioned, the relation of subject and object (analyzer and analyzed) between Kindaichi and Chiri, was something far more unstable and volatile than is generally thought.



Representation of Chiri Yukie's "Fox's Song"

The complex relations of power that emerge from this process of translational mimicry warn us against any simplistic schematics of Kindaichi as oppressor and Chiri as victim or resister. In fact, Chiri harbored great affection, gratitude, and respect for Kindaichi, while he never ceased praising her character, ability, and creativity (of course, as I have already argued, we can never consider this affective level of relationality as separate from colonial relations of power). Further, their collaborative work continued without a clear self-awareness of the latent discordance and incongruity between the differing goals each may have had in their transcribing, translating and editing of the *Shinyoshu* (later the linguist Chiri Mashiho, Chiri Yukie's brother and Kindaichi's disciple, would confront this problem)[27]. For instance, it seems that Chiri fully accepted Kindaichi's understanding of the meaning of the *Yukar*. In 1922, as soon as she arrived in Tokyo to live with the Kindaichis, she asked herself why she would sit down at a desk everyday and pursue this translation work, writing in her diary as follows:

Jotting down letters in blue ink on the white page that look like the tracks of earthworms as they crawl...that's it. What will just doing this lead to? For me, for my ancestors, and....In order to share reference materials with my teacher who continues to research our language (*akoroitaku*) and the precious work he's doing in line with it, for the sake of learning, for the nation of Japan,

for all the nations of the world....what an immense task. I have to wrench these things from out of this little head and into my brush...just doing this much - I have to write, as much as I know, as much as my life can bear, I have to write - this glittering morning - this green morning.[28]

Here in discussing her goals, she states that the translation is for herself, the Ainu, Japan, the world, and Kindaichi, and seems to see no contradiction or difficulty in reconciling these with each other. We can certainly glimpse the optimism and strength of her spirit in this declaration of intent to expend all the energy in her "little" self on this immense task. But in a poem written just before her death, this somewhat naïve optimism has completely vanished to be replaced by tragedy and despair:

In the evening moon

When the leaves show their pale undersides in the autumn wind

The leaves at night

And the flickering lamps

The lizards awed by its beauty

At last forget the ugliness of their bodies

And crawl into the light

Burning to death in the flame

I saw them leave behind

These ugly carcasses.

We Ainu women

Are exactly like

The lizards of Tokyo.

Those who can do nothing

Will remain

Stuck in a dark place  
 In the corner of the world.  
 Like the lizards  
 Bewitched by the beauty and splendor  
 Of the light of the world,  
 Whose white underbellies are showing  
     And who leave behind their ugly  
 carcasses  
 The Ainu  
 Are vanishing.[29]

Chiri's conception here of the Ainu, whose spirits were bewitched by the dazzling light of civilization, only to be destined to be burned to death by this light, leaving behind their unsightly and hideous corpses, is diametrically opposed to the optimistic sentiments expressed in the previous quotation. Although in the previously quoted passage she saw no contradiction in translating for the survival of the Ainu and participating in the light of Japanese, and indeed world civilization, here she comes to understand that it is precisely this lure and power of civilization that is destroying the Ainu. For the Ainu, civilization does not mean salvation or a promised future, but rather it leads to death and extinction, in other words, a place where a tombstone awaits them. It seems that Chiri, in approaching death at the age of 19 in the land of modern civilization, this foreign land of Tokyo, opened her eyes to the violence and destructive force of civilization experienced by the Ainu, and for the first time, came to accept an understanding of the Ainu as an "ethnicity destined to vanish." Further there is significance in the fact that she came to understand herself as an Ainu *woman*. Although she does not elaborate, she must have come to consciousness of herself as an Ainu woman while feeling the (discriminatory) gaze of the Japanese (*wajin*) in this metropolis of Tokyo where she spent the last four months of her life (she records in her diary that after coming to Tokyo, she is tormented by her "ugly" body). Whatever the case may be, the "ugliness of the body" that Chiri spoke of is perhaps a figure of speech directed also at herself, not merely as "Ainu" but also as "woman," an expression of the alienation, loneliness, and despair she felt at the rejection and negation of her body and spirit

by the force of "civilization." She passed away a mere four months after arriving in Tokyo. Approximately one year later, the *Ainu shinyoshu* was published, in which she was introduced not as the "translator," but as the "editor," once again erasing Chiri as interpretive, enunciative subject from the face of the world and consigning her to oblivion.

As we have seen above, when we turn our eyes to Chiri's translation of the Ainu "voice," a transversal crossing of the boundaries of several linguistic systems, with all the allegories and indeterminacies of meaning produced by it, we come to understand the politics of translation not simply as the one-sided exercise of power on the part of the dominant order, but as a subtly unfolding process of negotiation within the relationality between the dominant and the dominated. In other words, although Chiri was frightened and alarmed in the face of the subordination and the threat of extinction visited upon the Ainu by Japanese assimilation policies, she simultaneously opened up a path through which the Ainu could go on living, by translating their voices into both the dominant language (Japanese) and the Roman script. She did this not to preserve Ainu epic stories as a set of "materials" for academic research, a "commemorative" tombstone of a vanishing ethnicity, or a body of "primitive literature" of a people left behind by civilization, but as an attempt to continue the narration of a *living language and society*. In the violently contradictory and ruptured feelings she expresses in the preface to the *Ainu shinyoshu* - self-respect and inferiority, hope and despair, resistance and submission - we can hear Chiri's cries, her plaintive wish for the survival of the Ainu:

The forms of nature of the ancient times faded into the shadows before we knew it, and the whereabouts of the many peoples who used to live joyously on the plains are also unknown. The small number of us in our tribe who remain can only watch the world as it moves onwards with an astonished and overwhelmed gaze. But we have lost the beautiful and radiant spirit of the ancient people whose eyes were governed by their religious sentiments as they took in every action, every movement, and now full of anxiety, we burn with distress, growing ever more dull and unable to see with discernment - now we can only

depend on the compassion of the outside, oh, the wretched forms of those who are vanishing....This is what we are known as now - vanishing - what a sorrowful name we have come to possess.

Our blessed ancestors of long ago could scarcely have imagined that their native land would end up in such a miserable state. Time constantly flows and the world ceaselessly moves forward. Perhaps the day will come when, even among us, who now face the shame of defeat in this fierce realm of competition, two or three strong ones among our number might emerge, capable of walking in step with the world as it progresses forward. This is our ardent wish, what we pray for continually, day in and day out.

And yet, perhaps the many languages, the old sayings and tales that our dearly loved ancestors used with each other to ascribe meaning to the rhythms of their daily life may disappear along with the timid, vanishing, and weak among us. Oh, this is the most heartbreaking anguish we face. [30]

The politics of colonial translation was incapable of completely taming the voices of the colonized Ainu. The proof of this lies in Chiri's voice, full of irreconcilable thoughts and feelings, her prayers and outcries, an essential site of materiality where no power can claim a total interpellation. [31]

To reclaim and listen carefully to these voices, long ago consigned to oblivion by modern historiography and literature, is to come face-to-face with the fact that the systems of knowledge gathered and centered on the nation-state were deeply complicit with the legitimation and institutionalization of the violence of the imperial state and its capitalist enterprise. This requires us to reconsider the process through which the oppressed are forced to live the "state of exception" (the violence of discrimination, assimilation, expropriation, and subjugation) as "normality." [32] But above all else, these voices alert us to the fact that the

situation in which the "state of exception" operates as "normality" is by no means merely something in the past, but rather is an ongoing and continual reality of our "here and now," a reality that will exist as long as the institution of the nation-state itself, and the relentless capitalist expansion that accompanies it, continues to shape and dictate the possibilities of our imagination and praxis. Whether Chiri Yukie's voice will be a mere tombstone which continues its eternal silence or a *living* voice is a question that will be determined by how we choose to face the past and the future.

*Katsuya Hirano is assistant professor of history at Cornell University. He is the editor and translator of Doing Shisoshi (Doing Intellectual History) by Tetsuo Najita, Tokyo: Misuzu shobo, 2008.*

*Gavin Walker is a Ph.D. candidate in East Asian Literature at Cornell University. His article, "The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio: Limits and Anxieties in the Autofictional Machine" is forthcoming in positions: east asia cultures critique . He is currently translating a volume of the selected writings of Uno Kozo.*

*He wrote this article for The Asia-Pacific Journal. It was posted on January 12, 2009.*

*Recommended Citation: Katsuya Hirano, "The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the Narrative of the Ainu as a 'Vanishing Ethnicity'" The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 4-3-09, January 12, 2009.*

See the following related articles on the Ainu and Japan.

Chiri Yukie and Kyoko Selden, [The Song the Owl God Himself Sang. An Ainu Tale](#)

anne-elise lewallen, [Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous Peoples Summit in Ainu Mosir](#)

Chisato ("Kitty") O. Dubreuil, [The Ainu and Their Culture: A Critical Twenty-First Century Assessment](#)

## Notes:

This article is based on comments in Japanese prepared in response to Tsuboi Hideto's presentation "Mizukara no koe o honyaku suru" for the workshop *Gurobarizeshon to imin (Globalization and Migration)*, held at Cornell University in 2007. Gavin Walker translated the original version of this text which has been expanded and substantially revised for *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. I wish to thank Tom Lamarre, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, and Mark Selden for their valuable comments on the earlier versions of the article. My thanks also go to Gavin Walker who translated the original version of the article which has been expanded and substantially revised for *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. Walker is a Ph.D. candidate in East Asian Literature at Cornell University. His article, "The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio: Limits and Anxieties in the Autofictional Machine," is forthcoming in *positions: east asia cultures critique*.

[1] The difference in use of the terms "*wajin*" and "*Nihonjin*" from the Meiji to the Taisho periods is a crucial point. While "*wajin*" was meant to connote the pure ethnicity of the people living in this archipelago from the Yamato period (300-550 CE) onwards, the term "*Nihonjin*" ("Japanese" in contemporary language), was used for any single citizen of the Japanese empire, and therefore indicated *membership*. At the base of this differentiation is the assumption that while the Ainu or the Ryukyu people could become "Japanese" through the process of assimilation, they could never become "*wajin*." Clearly, Ainu themselves came to use *wajin* as a way to distinguish themselves from people on the archipelago in the process of assimilationist policies. Chiri, Yamabe and Takekuma all used this term to mean "authentic Japanese ethnos" as opposed to "Japanized" Ainu.

[2] *Hokkaidoshi*, vol. 1 (Hokkaido-cho, 1918), 3-5.

[3] *Shinsen Hokkaidoshi* (Hokkaido-cho, 1937), 47.

[4] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142. My addition in brackets. Foucault goes on to argue that "if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is something altogether different behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms." My critique of history based on the conceptions of ethnicity and progress is aimed precisely at this kind of metaphysical assumption of essence and timelessness. And I believe that the perspective of colonial translation is an important corrective to historicism and ethnocentrism because of its ability to unpack historical processes in their singularity, heterogeneity, and contingency.

[5] Deleuze and Guattari use the term "deterritorialization" to explain the process by which the right to utilize a certain piece of land is revoked, and the land itself expropriated from those who previously used it for their own livelihood. They use "reterritorialization" to indicate the reordering of the multiplicity of place and territoriality into a unitary space, the process by which the heterogeneous inscription in the land is translated into a homogenized, geometric space. In the context of colonialism, "deterritorialization" is the process of the violent seizure from its indigenous people of the means of production (land and the forms of life based on it) necessary for their existence, while "reterritorialization" is the reintegration of these means, now transformed into the means of capitalist production, into a homogeneous, geometric territoriality. What I refer to in this article as "colonial translation"

indicates this total process. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980); *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[6] Iwasaki Naoko, *Rekisho to Ainu: Nihon wa doko e iku no ka* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2003), 209-211.

[7] The history of Japan's early colonies such as Okinawa also attests to the point here.

[8] Tsuboi Hideto, "Mizukara no koe o honyaku suru" in *Ikyo no shi*, eds. Nishi Masahiko and Sakiyama Masaki (Tokyo: Jinbun shoin, 2007), 87.

[9] Otomo Yukio, *Kindaichi Kyosuke to Ainugo* (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobo, 2001), 29-30.

[10] Kindaichi Kyosuke, "Ainu no dan: Kokoro no komichi yowa" in *Gengogaku gojunen* (Tokyo: Takara Bunkan, 1955), 201-203.

[11] Otomo, *Kindaichi Kyosuke to Ainugo*, 83-84.

[12] Kindaichi, "Chiri Yukie san no koto" in the Kyodo kenkyusha reprint of *Ainu shinyoshu*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chiri Mashiho o kataru kai, 2002), 1.

[13] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Henkyo kara nagameru* (Misuzu Shobo, 2000), 110.

[14] Kindaichi, "Chiri Yukie san no koto," 2.

[15] This bilingualism should be distinguished from that which Ainu had gained long before the Meiji period in order to trade with the "Wajin." The former was a by-product of colonial policy of monolingualism that forced Ainu to renounce their language and adopt Japanese as their own.

[16] Ogawa Masato, *Kindai Ainu seidoshi kenkyu* (Hokkaido tosho kankokai, 1997), 10.

[17] Morris-Suzuki, *Henkyo kara nagameru*,

136-138.

[18] Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology" in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 86-106.

[19] Tsuboi, "Mizukara no koe o honyaku suru," 107.

[20] Yamabe Yasunosuke, *Ainu monogatari*, ed. Kindaichi Kyosuke (Hakubunkan, 1913), 189. Takekuma Tokusaburo, *Ainu monogatari* (Fukido Shobo, 1918), 14-15.

[21] Maruyama Takashi, "Chiri Yukie no shi/shi" in *Ikyo no shi*, 15.

[22] Maruyama, "Chiri Yukie no shi/shi," 16.

[23] Of course, this is not necessarily the case for other colonial societies. Neither did the people of the Dutch East Indies lose their languages to the Dutch, nor did the Koreans or the Taiwanese lose theirs under Japanese colonialism. It would be important to point out that one important dimension for the elimination of language is that it often took place in societies whose linguistic system was grounded in oral transmission. The question of the size of the colonized and colonizer populations is also a factor.

[24] Sato-Rossberg Nana, "Chiri Yukie to Chiri Mashiho no Ainu shinyo yaku" in *Ikyo no shi*, 133-137.

[25] Otomo, *Kindaichi Kyosuke to Ainugo*, 89.

[26] Yukie's reminder that *Yukar* was an improvisational art form suggests that storytelling was understood by Ainu people not primarily as an act of reciting/recording but of creating/writing. In this regard, the conventional wisdom that Yukie's contribution in *Ainu shinyoshu* was to record the vanishing Ainu language needs to be reconsidered: she was an author of the stories in the volume.

[27] Chiri Mashiho (1909-1961), a younger brother of Yukie, was a linguist trained at the Imperial University of Tokyo. He taught at the University of Hokkaido while conducting extensive research on Ainu language and culture. He remained critical of his mentor Kindaichi's scholarship about Yukar and Ainu language throughout his life.

[28] Maruyama, "Chiri Yukie no shi/shi," 30.

[29] Nakai Miyoshi, *Chiri Yukie: jukyusai no igon* (SairyÅ«sha, 1991), 240-241.

[30] Chiri Yukie (ed.), *Ainu shinyoshu* [Kyodo kenkyusha reprint, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.] (Chiri Mashiho o kataru kai, 2002), 1-3.

[31] After having been neglected for years, Chiri's *Ainu shinyoshu* was republished by a major publisher, Iwanami, in 2001. There is clearly a marked resurgence in serious scholarly interest in Ainu history in Japan and elsewhere in recent years. This seems to correspond to the rising tide of postcolonial studies in the global scene in the last few decades or so. It is yet to be seen whether this renewed interest in Ainu history could be an important momentum for rethinking the very conditions of modernity.

[32] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 257.