

## **Chiri Yukie**

Chiri Yukie (1903–1922) was an author and translator who significantly contributed to the preservation of Ainu culture by transcribing and translating oral epics called *kamuyyukar*. Her compilation of 13 such epics, translated into Japanese, was the first book published by a person of Ainu heritage in the Ainu language.

Chiri was born in Noboribetsu, southwestern Hokkaido, in an era when discriminatory policies compelled Ainu to assimilate into Japanese culture. At the age of six, she moved to Asahikawa to live with her aunt Imekanu (1875–1961) and grandmother Monashinouku (dates unknown), both of whom were well-versed in reciting *kamuyyukar*. In this environment, she grew up bilingual in Japanese and Ainu.

In 1918, Chiri met Kindaichi Kyosuke (1882–1971), a Japanese linguist who encouraged her to write about her language and culture. Chiri

recorded the various *kamuyyukar* chanted by her grandmother and aunt.

These epics were told in the first person, from the point of view of various *kamuy* (spirit-deities) appearing in the forms of animals, from wolves and owls to frogs and even shellfish. Chiri transcribed the stories phonetically using Latin script and then translated them into Japanese.

After completing the first anthology of *kamuyyukar*, Chiri died of heart failure at age nineteen. Her manuscript was published the following year under the title *Ainu shin'yoshu* (Collection of Ainu Chants of Spiritual Beings). Chiri's work inspired a newfound respect for the Ainu language and culture among Japanese readers. *Ainu shin'yoshu* remains an invaluable resource for scholars of Ainu culture.