

山あいの歌

山口 藍

以前、「山口」とはどういう意味なのだろうかと思いたち調べたところ、一般的なのは登山口であったり、牛久市の大名の姓として各地に広がり東京あたりでは入間周辺で山口と名乗り始めたのが始まり、などいずれも想像を超えたものではなく、つまらない姓だなと思いつつ調べ終えた。

ここ数年、制作において和歌に触れる機会が多くそこに使われる平仮名の起源を知りたいと広く調べていく中で白川静氏の字典に出くわし、身の回りに常々触れている漢字の成り立ちを知り、そこで改めて「山口」とは何かを探った。ただここではそれが姓としては書かれておらず、「サンコウ」と読み、その意味が書かれていたのだが、小さい文字で羅列された文章を一行読み間違えていることに気づかず、「山口（サンコウ）」とは山の湖」と記憶されて

しまった。なるほど、湖とは確かに山にばかりと空いた口のようなだ、と想像すると素晴らしい情景が浮かび、あくまでサンコウとしての意味だとしてもありふれた姓の印象が変わり嬉しくなった。

しかし昨年、今回の展覧会の題名を決めるに当たり今一度同氏の字典を調べたところ、この数年信じていた「山口（サンコウ）」の意味が記された部分は隣の「山湖（サンコ）」の意味だったと発覚。私の中の湖は決壊し枯渇。そして肝心の隣の「サンコウ」はというと、「山間（ヤマアイ）」という意味だった。「山」と「口」とを分解してそれぞれを調べると、「山」の意味は、人里に對し人の住まぬところ、つまり神の住むところを指し、万物を生じさせることから古代より自然信仰の中心とされ、「口」はサイと言う神への言葉を入れる器という意味があり、それぞれを

私なりにふわりと合体させるとそれが「湖」になるのは腑に落ちる気もしたのだが、字典に明記された通りに「山間」だとするとそれぞれの漢字の意味も当てはまらないような感覚があり納得がいかなかった。そうは言っても確かなことはサンコウは「山間」と更新されたので、さてでは「山間」とは何なのかと自分なりに考えた。

その字典によると、「山と山の間」や「馬の頭上の左右両耳の間」という意味で使われることが専らのようにだが、山と山の間とは何とも分かり易すぎるし、その情景から両耳の間という小さな見立ても然りと思っていたのだが、しばらく考えるうちに、そんな山間にある人の営みやそこに流れる川によってもたらされる豊かさを想像させ、また馬に限らず動物の両耳の間という空間が愛おしいことは特にペットを飼われている方ならば共感いただけかと思うが、山間という言葉は抒情的なものなのではないかと考えた。また、山間＝陝（ヤマアイ）とも書き、神梯の形である自（βふ）に順っており、人の往来し難いような険峻な聖所という意味もあるそう。そして、山と山の間というのは狭くて、響きわたると書かれていた。

響くと言えば歌ではないか。「歌」というのは字典によると本来は外に激しく表現されるもの、もとは呪詛的な性格を持つもの、などと意味があるようだ。より深く分解して調べると、歌という字に含まれる可には祝詞を入れる口（サイ）を柯（木の枝）で呵して神に向かつてその実現を呵責する、という意味で、その祈りが歌である、と書かれている。

連想していくうちになんとなく全てが繋がりはだし、長らく頭の中にあつた湖に湛えられた水が山を降り山間を潤していくようだった。

今の世の中は大変な事態に陥っており、それはまさに立ちほだかる山と山の間にいるかのようだ。私もその一人ではあるが足掻きながらも有難いことにこうして日々制作できている。禍によりたくさんの人が夢や希望が断ち切られそうなこの世の中で今をどう過ごせばいいのか悩み、物理的に孤立したことによりそれぞれ募らせる思いが大きくなり、孤立させられたその居場所で叫んでいるように感じている。

つまり、今居る場所がそれぞれの山間とするならば、私はここで山あいの歌を響かせようと思う。

yamaai no uta ai yamaguchi

Previously, I had wondered about the meaning of the name “Yamaguchi”, so one day I decided to do some research on it. It is commonly known that the name takes its roots from the surge of mountain trail entrances across the country, as well as the widespread use of the surname “Yamaguchi” of Ushiku-shi’s daimyo and led many people to adopt the name especially in the vicinity of Iruma-shi, Tokyo, and so forth. It was nothing out of my imagination, and thinking of how dull my name is, decided to end the research there.

In the past few years, I have had an increasing opportunity to spend time with Japanese *waka* poems through my work, and I began to do extensive research on the origins of hiragana which is used on the poems. As I did my research, I came across a dictionary written by Shirakawa Shizuka, which led me to a profound realization to the origins of many kanjis that appear all around us in our daily lives. That was when I decided once more to do more thorough investigation on the meaning of the name “Yamaguchi”. On this dictionary, it was not described as a surname, but was pronounced as *Sankou* and it had a definition of the word. However as it was written in a small font size that unaware of my own mistake, I had read the text from a different row, the one next to it, and from there on had remembered the definition of the word *Sankou* as “a lake on a mountain”. I was pleased with the definition as I thought that a lake does indeed look like a gaping mouth on a mountain. Thinking about it made for a picturesque scenery in my head, as well as a renewed excitement from a surprising change of outlook to “Yamaguchi” which I had always thought to be a disappointingly mundane name, although in actuality, it was the wrong definition. However, just last year, as I was preparing for the title of my upcoming exhibition, I had decided once more to look up the word on the dictionary. It was at this point that I had finally uncovered my own doing and found that the definition which I had believed for the past several years to be the meaning of *Sankou* (Yamaguchi) was actually a definition for the word next to it, *Sanko*. And just like that, the lake in my head had burst and had run dry. And most importantly, the correct definition for the word *Sankou* is described as “Amongst the mountains (Yama-ai)”. When I searched for the definition of the word *Yama* and *Kuchi* (Guchi) separately, I found that *Yama* refers to a place where there are no human inhabitants, in other words, a place where gods live and believed to be the root of life, therefore these sacred places have been a central hub for religion on nature since the ancient times. The word for *Kuchi* refers to a bowl called *Sai* used to contain words addressed to a god. When combing these two words together, I could almost fool myself into convincing that the definition for “Yamaguchi” means a lake, but

when seeing the actual definition of *Sankou*, I could not shake off the feeling that the meaning of the individual kanji seem irrelevant to the definition, which I felt cheated. However, as much as I was discontent, the fact of the matter is that the definition has been revised. Therefore, I decided to really think about the meaning of *Yama-ai*.

On the dictionary, the word *Yama-ai* is defined exclusively as “in-between two mountains” or “in-between the right and left ears of a horse”, which I found too obvious, and to share the meaning with something as insignificant in scale as a place right between the ears of a horse to be so shallow. But after thinking about the word for a while, I began to envision all of the livelihood activities in the mountains and the richness brought by the flowing rivers from the mountains, and even imagining the space between the two ears of not just horses but of all animals, is endearing and relatable especially to those who have pets. Anyways, I began to think of the definition of *Yama-ai* as being something very lyrical.

Yama-ai (山間) is also written in Japanese as (峽), and it uses the kanji stroke (𠄎), the shape of a sacred ladder, and is said to hold a meaning of sanctums located on steep ground where it is difficult for people to come and go. It is also described that the space between the mountains is narrow and echoes. Echoing relates to singing, and according to the dictionary, the word “Song (歌)” originally meant something that was strongly expressed towards the outside, or something that was related to curse words. When doing further examination, it is written that the kanji stroke (𠄎) used in the kanji “Song” means to chant ritual prayers contained in a bowl *Sai* (匚) with wave of a stick while being in trance-like state to address the god’s prayer with a song.

As I thought deeply into the meaning, everything began to connect and even the water in the lake which had been on my mind for some time seemed to flow down and replenish the mountains.

The world today is in a struggle with many dire issues, as if confined and closed-in all sides by mountains. I am amongst those people in struggle but despite the hardship, thankfully I am still able to create artwork every day. I feel that many people today are worried about how to live in this world where their dreams and hopes could be cut off at any moment from the many issues we face, and because of the physical isolation, our fervent beliefs are intensified, and I feel we are crying out for help in the very place we are isolated in. In other words, if we are all confined to live among the mountains, it is my hope to bring the echoes of the song of *Yama-ai* to as many people as I can.