

# The Tradition of Ainu Oral Literature Today

15

Related Sheets: 7, 14, 17, 18

## On Ainu Oral Literature

There are distinct categories of Ainu oral literature, such as fiction, legend, song, greetings, and prayers. These were developed and formalized over a long period of time between the continuous interaction between orator and audience.

However, among a variety of styles of stories, Ainu oral literature can be broadly categorized into three distinct types.

### ① Heroic Epic

Around the Saru River region, heroic epics are called *yukar* (Donan, or South Hokkaido dialect). The names are regionally specific, however. For example, in a different area of Donan, heroic epics can be called *yairap*. In northeast Hokkaido, they are called *sakorope*, and in the Sakhalin region, they are referred to as *hauki*.

In these heroic epics, the performer repeats short melodies while keeping a rhythm by using a *repuni* (clappers). Although there are many types of stories told in this way, the most well known surrounds a boy with super-



**Photo 1** The melodies of these stories vary according to the performer. Originally, they were sung as entertainment around the hearth of the *chise*.

natural abilities named Poiyaunpe and his adventures and romances.

Most of these tales are very long, taking anywhere from tens of minutes to a few hours.

### ② Myths of Gods

Around the Saru River region, these myths are called *kamuy yukar* (Donan dialect), *tuitak* or *menoko*

*yukar* in other parts of south Hokkaido, *oyna* in northeast Hokkaido and Sakhalin, and *matyukar* in east Hokkaido.

It is unique in having a repeated phrase called *sakehe*, and it often tells the experiences and life stories of *kamuy*, or gods.

One theory states that these repeated *sakehes* are the voices of the gods themselves, while other people think that they are merely meaningless lyrics.

### ③ Poetic Prose

In the Saru River Region, these are referred to as *uepekere* (Donan dialect), *isoitakki* in other parts of south Hokkaido, and in the northeast Hokkaido and the Sakhalin region, they are called *tuitak*.

These are characterized by its conversational, matter-of-fact tone, while also having a great deal of modulation in intonation.

The contents of these stories may vary, but most include lessons in



**Photo 2** People have been developing a modern style to continue Ainu oral literature. One of the representative efforts of this is the Shishirimuka Ainu cultural festival.

daily life teaching the audience that good behavior begets good things in life.

## Passing Down Oral Literature Today

Traditionally, Ainu oral literature was performed in ceremonial locations such as the *chise* (home), *apeoi* (hearth), or *kotan* (village), but has consistently changed shape over time.

On one hand, people continue to pass

on these stories at home. However, with the development of recording devices and written Ainu, the method by which these stories are inherited has begun to change.

Furthermore, there are non-daily site through which Ainu oral literature is performed, such as Ainu cultural festivals, speech contests, and other performances.

In 1987, Biratori-cho, the Nibutani Biratori-cho Ainu Language Classes

began, leading the way in Ainu language education in Hokkaido. Since then, Ainu oral literature has been an integral aspect in the learning of Ainu language, resulting in the Shishirimuka Ainu cultural festival, which takes place every February since 1990 in order to showcase what students have learned.

These methods of passing down Ainu culture are one of the most important initiatives in thinking about the future of the Saru River region.

## Okikurmi Tureshihi – Kotan in the Sky –

This is a *kamuy yukar* set in the Saru River region depicting the feeling of Okikurumi's sister\* towards the Ainu mosir (the human world). \*Although the protagonist is referred to as "Okikurumi's sister," the character is actually Okikurumi's wife.

Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Ki wa kus	That's why	Cihoyuppare	Crowd together
A=kor kotanpo	My homeland	Soyene=an wa	I went out	Kanna cep rup	The fish on the surface
Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	A=kor kotanpo	And our village	Sukus cire	Brown their backs in the sun
An=esikarun	I miss it so	Tu noka orke	In two shapes	Pokna cep rup	The fish on the bottom
Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Re noka orke	In three scenes	Suma siru	Scrape their bellies on the stones
Tan pe kusu	That's why	A=nuye wa	I painted for you	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
Tu ipe somo a=ki	Two whole meals	Ahun=an ki na	And returned	Cep koyki kuni p	Those who fish
Tu suy c-e-kuni-p	Three whole meals	Hetak soyenpa	Now go outside	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
Re suy c-e-kuni-p	All this food	Inkar ki yan	And take a look	Marek ukoetaypa	Fight over the harpoons
Tukarikehe	I did not want	Sekor okay pe	With these words	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
A=noteciwa	And pushed away	A=kor yupi	My man	Pet kanas ka ta	Over on the riverbanks
Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Etaye kane	Gave me strength	Rupne yuk topa	A herd of large deer and
An=an ayne	There I was, but	Ki wa kus	And so I tried	Nokan yuk topa	A herd of small deer
Tane anakne	Soon I realized	Soyunpa=an	To go outside	Citeterekre	Chase after each other
Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Iki=an ayne	Tried my utmost	Yuk koyki ku ni p	Those who hunt
Ray ku nip	Death would be	Reyereye=an	Crawling	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
A=ne ki humi	Upon me	Sinusinu=an	On my knees	Oro cipasusu	Just run around
U ne kunak	And that was where	Soyenpa=an wa	I got outside	Turep ta ku ni p	Those who dig for lily roots
A=ramu ki kor	My mind was when	Inkar=an wa	And finally	Nokan saranip	Leave behind
U anna hore hore hore	U anna hore hore hore	Ne wa ne ciki	I looked up	Ukoemakpa	The small bags
An=an ayne	Just lying there	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Rupne saranip	And fight over
A=kor yupi	I heard my man	Nis kotor ta	On the belly of the cloud	Ukoetaypa	The large bags
Soyunpa wa	Go outside	Sonno poka	At last I saw	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
Ahup kuni	Saying he'd be late	A=kor kotanu	My village	Susu nitaye	The willow forest
Kasuno isam	But he was gone so long	A=kor mosir	My land	Hosaociwpa	Blown toward the river
Kasuno isam	So long	Tu noka orke	In two pictures	Kene nitaye	The alder forest
Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	Re noka orke	In three pictures	Homakociwpa	Blown toward the mountain
Ki ruwe ne ayne	Finally he	A=nuye ki wa	Painted there	Supki sari	The field of reeds
Ahup akusu	Came home	Siran katu	How can I tell you	Hosaociwpa	Blown toward the river
Ene itak hi	And said to me	Ene oka hi	What I saw there	Siki sari	The field of plum yew
A=kor turesi	Mama	Sisirmuka	The Sisirmuka	Homakociwpa	Blown toward the mountain
A=kor kotan po	I know you miss	Arpa ru ko	Its flow	Anramasu	Seeing them
E=esikarun	Our village so	Maknatara	Its purity	A=uesuye	Exhilarated me
Tanpe kusu	So badly to have skipped	Kenas so ka ta	Over the fields	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore
Tu suy c-e-kuni-p	Two meals	Nokan yuk topa	A herd of small deer and	Ki ruwe ne ayne	But just as soon
Rep suy c-e-kuni-p	Three meals	Rupne yuk topa	A herd of large deer	A=siketoko uskosanu	The vision vanished before my eyes
Somo e=e no	And now you're starving	Citetterkere	Chase after each other	Orowano I FELT GOOD	I felt good, and knew I would feel good
E=an ayne	But if you go on like this	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore	An=an sekora	And there I was
E=ray wa ne wa	And die	Sisirmuka	Inside the flowing		
Ne wa ne yak	It won't be	Pet onnay ta	Sisirmuka		
Mosir ewen pe	For the land	Anna hore hore hore	Anna hore hore hore		
Kotan ewen pe	Or for the village	Nokan cep rup	Small fish and		
Ne ruwe ne	Doing this won't take you home	Rupne cep rup	Large fish		

This work can be heard at the Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum's permanent exhibition room, Kamuy Zone. (Kayano ed. 1998)



"Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development"  
Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

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Published: June, 2014