

# 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 preformed 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              |
| Somo e=e no           | And now you're starving    | Citetterkere        | Chase after each other    |                     | my eyes                                 |
| E=an ayne             | But if you go on like this | Anna hore hore hore | Anna hore hore hore       | Orowano I FELT GOOD | I felt good, and knew I would feel good |
| E=ray wa ne wa        | And die                    | Sisirmuka           | Inside the flowing        | An=an sekora        | And there I was                         |
| 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           | Rupne cep rup       | Large fish                |                     |   |
|                       | take you home              |                     |                           |                     |   |

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"  
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