

Book Review: The Ainu Wolf Carving

Kayano Shigeru, First published by Komine Shoten Co., Ltd.

Republished by Project Uepeker on February 6, 2015

ISBN:978-4-903924-77-9

Reviewed by Rudolph Rýser, PhD
Center for World Indigenous Studies

*Translated by Justin Bowmann
and Owaki Noriyoshi*

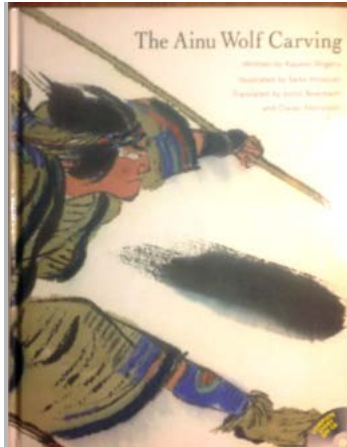
© 1975 Kayano Shigeru (Text)

© 1975 Kayano Saito Hirojuki
(Illustrations)

8-3, 6-Chome Honcho, Nanae,
Kameda-gun, Hokkaido, Japan
041-1111

Project Uepeker in Hokkaido, Japan—chaired by Peter Howlett—consists of a group of ten English language instructors, translators, the president of the Ainu Association, and illustrators dedicated to translating Ainu folktales into English. By so doing the Project members seek to introduce Ainu perspectives on life to English speakers around the world to “bring about the intent of uepeker (in Ainu *u* means “other,” *e* means “by which,” and *peker* means “purify”); that is, the hearts of both the storyteller and the listener will be cleansed and contribute to the realization of a world in which all life can live together in dignity.”

Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006) is the first Ainu in Japanese history to be elected to the state parliament (1994). He made a lifelong commitment early in his life to the preservation and revival of the Ainu language and culture resulting in the publication of many books of which five were translated into English. His books won him the coveted Kikuchi Kan Literary Award (1975), the Yoshikawa Eiji Literary Award (1989), and the Hokkaido Cultural



Award (1993). He founded the Kayano Shigeru Ainu Memorial Museum and served as its director for 34 years.

Famed illustrator Saito Hiroyuki (1919-1987) from Manchuria, moved to Tokyo in 1910 and entered The Imperial Art School—now the Musashino Art University—and studied Western painting. He collaborated with Shigeru illustrating two Ainu picture books (The Adventures of Okikumi and The Ainu Wind Goddess and

Okikurmi, published by Komine Shoten Co., Ltd.).

Shigeru and Hirojuki collaborated on the development of The Ainu Wolf Carving, resulting in its publication in 1975. Between Shigeru’s flowing and descriptive prose and Hirojuki’s dramatic illustrations the story of The Ainu Wolf Carving comes alive. The story unfolds in first person as the main character describes his early life living on the Ishikari River and the pride he held in his heart for his father’s hunting skills. Paddling up the Ishikari River our storyteller describes catching salmon and eventually rowing his canoe to a village where he meets an old woman who invites him to her house. He also meets a white-bearded man who seemed sad, as something terrible must have happened. The old woman cooked the salmon and the three of them ate without speaking. That night the storyteller describes

his restlessness as he tries to sleep, and finally deciding he could not sleep by the morning he leaves the house with his bow and arrows and a walking stick. He finds that he is walking faster and faster along the river and he starts to run. He runs “wildly” to a mountain “like a deer.” It is the mountain that draws him in at a frantic pace until he reaches “the heart of the mountain.”

The story proceeds with the storyteller’s discovery at the heart of the mountain—a small house inside of which sits a beautiful young woman holding a little baby. She has lost her way and cannot make it back to her home by the river. She describes how her father-in-law asked her to go with him to the mountain to gather firewood. She did join him, but once they were at the mountain the father-in-law “disappeared” without a trace. Her baby was born shortly after and was eventually confronted by a bear. Wearing a “tiny wolf carving” around her neck, the young woman saw that the bear tried to sneak into the house, but a “dog appeared” and fought the bear—chasing it away. She looks down and realizes her wolf carving had disappeared only to return after the bear was chased away. Then she realized that it wasn’t a dog after all that chased the bear, but rather a wolf.

The storyteller agrees to help the young woman with her baby return to the river below and they fall asleep that night. The storyteller is awakened by a rumble and swooshing sound whereupon he sees through the window that a large dog rushed to attack the bear. Gathering up his bow and arrows the storyteller moved to chase the bear away, but a battle between the dog and the bear was so furious the storyteller dared not get close. The battle went on all night and the storyteller tracked the bear finding the dog and the bear still engaged in a bloody tangle. The storyteller shoots an arrow deep into the bear and it falls dead, and

the dog disappeared. Returning to the little house the storyteller finds the small wooden wolf carving on the ground outside the house entrance. Storyteller helps the young woman return to her family on the river and the bear’s body is retrieved for food. All were happy and satisfied thanks to the return of the young woman. Even a tiny wooden wolf carving can save human lives, the storyteller concludes, and that always one must treasure and hold dear a carving made by an Ainu, “no matter how small.”

Inquiries about this book and the Project Uepeker should be directed to Peter Howlett at holettthesloth@yahoo.co.jp

Cite this article as:

FWJ Editors (2015). Book Review: The Ainu Wolf Carving. *Fourth World Journal*, 14(1) 49-50.