

Ho Disum Ho Honko (The Ho People of the Ho Country)

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Of men and women having become old

paragraph 1, p. 256

Surely, no-one will remain a young man or woman for ever. Slowly, but continuously the human body becomes old and, with age, will continue to shrink. As soon as someone's hair has turned grey people will say: "This person is becoming an old man or an old woman." But if some young men's hair is greying, they are still not considered to be old. Only those whose body has become old are recognized as old. The same holds true for ageing women when they become grey-haired and lose their physical strength. Also, looking at old people's teeth is another way to recognize their age. All those who have lost their teeth are called old men or old women. A man or woman, when young, may break a tooth in some way or other, but they will not have all teeth missing at the side as old men and women do. Increasingly lacking bodily strength old men and women will no more be able to do any physically hard work. Have they lived on to a ripe old age they may also not be able to walk. They then will make it a habit to regularly use a walking-stick.

paragraph 2, p. 256, 257

Old men also do not age at the same time, in an instant and quickly and neither do old women turn old just like that, all of a sudden and fast, but slowly, almost without realizing that their body turns into one of an old man or woman. Even if someone is strong, he will be said to be an old man, if his hair has turned grey and a girl will be said to have become an old woman. Old men even (when) working like young men are also said to be old, but they cannot do very hard work. They can, however, plough very well and will do so until they need a walking-stick. If there are no children or young men (living) in the house, old men keep on ploughing even if they are unable to walk without difficulty (well). But even if they are not able to dig or replough/loosen the soil, if they cannot level the earth with a levelling plank and are unable to get anything for their ploughing efforts, men at a very advanced age will still work in the fields. In some village there are extremely old men to collect and bring firewood and leaves from the jungle, and poor people also support themselves by carrying those things from village to village and selling them (*akarinasul, tinulasulena*). But there are also houses in which old people are living who are not doing any hard work, who keep living at a very slow pace (*esu suwaereko taina*). Those old men living in a house in which there is regularly enough to eat (*asul owa:ren ham hokodo*) abandon hard work (at a time) when they have not yet become really very old (*ham-bar*), as their children when having grown into young men will step into their fathers' shoes and do their work. Old men and women living in such houses (may) slacken their efforts (*jindal*) and do light work only. Contrastingly, in order to earn money, the old men of houses who support themselves by day labour will habitually work up

to a very old age. (Even if) they can work (only) very little, they will work to earn (some) money (*paitiko dai jokadoko nalaegeya*).

The work of old men

(paragraph 3, p.257)

Now, such old ones that we have spoken of above are said to be strong and to remain strong. They are considered to have aged fully and completely only when they are no more able to do any work whatsoever. Hence extremely old men who (still) feel strong enough (*kere:no:wakankodo*) to work will do so. They will surely not be idle, but carry on, whether it is work related to the house or wage labour to support themselves or their family. **More (??)** villagers are accustomed to working from the time when they are children until they have become old and they will continue to work even if only little (*jokareyo ?*)Old men who are still strong plough the land and, after reploughing, remove paddy seedlings from one place and put them in another where more are needed. Such work they will do very well. **Silkworm-breeding** is a sacred work which old men are very good at. Accustomed to silkworm- breeding old men do not desire to do any other work. While they may not be able to do various other work, they love silkworm-breeding, and they can do this work very well. Having bred silkworms ever since they were young men, old men if ordered **kaya:** prefer not to do other work but breeding silkworms. While silkworm-breeding is not at all tiring, young men may get bored and fed up. From the early morning on one must be sitting all day long, and as long as the silkworms are still small, one must keep looking after them now and then, here and there (*lelbakano:ge tainenana:*). Young men will certainly not like to (just) sit around and be quiet. As they want to shoot birds and so forth, they will go somewhere else even if the site where silkworm cultivation is done is left lopsided. If that is the case the small and young silkworms will very probably get eaten up completely by wasps and even by crows and kites. Contrastingly, old men will continue to remain deeply engrossed in silkworms. They will keep an eye on the silkworms so they do not get eaten. So, before the old men will go in the morning to the places where silkworm breeding is done, they will first have prepared cooked rice by setting fire to the firewood (*mandi tinkete*) and they will take a smouldering piece of straw rope as a source of fire. Next, while spending the whole day in the sites of silkworm breeding, they will smoke or chew tobacco. From this they will form very large home-made cigarettes (*pika*). One old man can look after many silkworms all by himself, but when the silkworms have completely eaten up the leaves of a tree that has been used for silkworm cultivation, they need to be removed. To remove so many can be done only after he has been helped (by others). So, when he wishes to breed perhaps really many silkworms, the 'people of the house' will surely go to the sites of silkworm breeding to help him.

Para 4, p.258

Old men who are still strong are requested/expected to herd cattle and goats (*gupiichikowa*). If there are no children in the house and if there are no domestic servants, if someone is told to herd their cattle and goats (just) a little even if he is an aged person (*haram horo*), he will herd cattle and goats. Old men are really good at herding cattle and goats and let them not only roam freely, but also make them eat their stomach full. (However), if there are herders taking care of cattle and goats, old men will not be ordered to do any work in the field, but to do

some work in the house from time to time. Close to the house they will spread paddy out on a mat to dry and they will make sure it is guarded. If there are no women in the house and if those doing the work in the field have left (gone), old men will habitually spread out the paddy grains. When the paddy is ripening in the fields close to the village, the chicken will peck (the grains). Then an old man will certainly not be sitting around uselessly, isn't it, but guard the chicken so as to allow the paddy crop to grow properly. Old women, too, will do those kinds of work. Until their eyesight has become really poor (*medko bugite kako neljomre jaked*) they will engage themselves in some work like guarding the paddy and chicken. Even if they hold on to a stick, they will be hitting the ground with it. If that is the case the chicken will not get near (because of the sounds). From the time that they (have to) remain at home (*dubakanete*) old men will make ropes and string a bed with them. Many old men will usually weave fishing nets as long as (until) their eyesight is clear. By selling them they will get some money. To weave a fishing net is in no way tiring. That is why those who are old are generally happy to have the knowledge and experience of weaving a fishing net. If there are children and grand-children these will usually be asked to amuse the old men and women (who stay) at home from time to time (*jarichibakowa*). Like this as long as they can see clearly (*medko neljom*) and as long as they can still move around, old men and women will continue to work, even if only a little, and not be idle.

para 5, 258/59

Whether old men remain at home or whether they are somewhere outside in the field, they will keep chewing or smoking tobacco. Even though they may not get any food they will feel good after having had some tobacco, and even though they keep being hungry they will take tobacco first knowing they will have only little to eat. Inside a house smouldering firewood to start a fire at any time and matches and the like are not always there. Therefore, even if old men do not hold inside the house in readiness a straw rope smouldering at one end to start a fire, they will twist a rope and take it along when they go to the field in order to herd the cattle.

para 6, 259

If women are old but still fairly strong, they will also work in the field. Those who live close to the jungle will not stop going there to get firewood and leaves despite their having reached a very old age, and they will also not refrain from going to the jungle once they have to use a walking stick regularly. Close to the house old women are expected to spread the paddy out to dry, also to clean the cowshed and to take care of the children. They are asked to guard the paddy crop against chicken so as to allow it to grow properly in the field and also to guard the cultivation and harvest from cattle and goats when the men herding them let them roam freely during the season when pulses are growing (*kansari – masuri din*). Usually old women are very happy to gather the seeds of the *neem* tree and of the *mahua* fruit picking them up from the ground. On the day when the *neem* fruit are ripe, they will take their meal along and spend the whole day under the *neem* tree. On the day when the *mahua* fruit are ripe they will go to a *mahua* tree in order to collect the fruit which have fallen down to the ground. From the early morning on they will roam from tree to tree and look under every single one. When the people of the house want to press some oil for their own use, they will (first) ask an old woman to

pick and gather the seeds from the ground, and while they seem without pity on an old woman going along all bent over they will request her to do the work and she will go. Furthermore, as long as old women can see well, they will bind brooms and plait mats in great number, and as they are doing that work while sitting they will be working and plaiting throughout the day. In this way old men as well as old women will engage themselves in different kinds of work until they reach a very old age. Surely, they do not do any hard work, but they will certainly try to do that kind of work that they are able to do.

So, the old men and women of a village will continue to work even if they can walk only permanently bent over. Holding on to their walking stick they will even herd cattle and goats.

Para 7; p. 259-260

In a village old men and old women quite generally grow old in a good manner. No matter if they are having a walking stick, their eyes and ears may remain good. Until they can get up from their bed, they have not become too old and by taking a walking stick they will go outside to defecate and urinate. Until they have reached a very advanced age a village's old men and women will be able to eat their meals and also drink rice-beer. As old men and women know how to tell the tales of the olden days well, children, young men and young women gather around them to listen to them talking. Some old men who are not yet too old will discuss village affairs and attend meetings and talk about the well-being of the village and how to further it. Like that old men are happy to join in a lively debate (*bugin-bugin jagar-apayumta:*) and the young and the old of a village will talk about matters seriously (well) with each other (*hatusai hoko, sepedko bugin jagarkoko jagarakowa*). For that kind of work and the discussions old men are looked for and really wanted. At a time when they have not yet become too old and are able to walk, they will visit their in-laws, make the preliminary arrangements for a marriage and are involved in the activities and the feast on that occasion. It is only those aged, knowledgeable and experienced men who are entitled to conduct those marriage negotiations, from whom can be learnt how to conduct them and with whom all is talked about that needs to be decided in matters related to getting married. For that kind of work, therefore, the presence of old men is very necessary. Of course, not all old men know how to conduct that kind of discussion, but generally old men have watched and listened to everything since they were children and know how to converse adequately. That is why they will certainly report to others what they have been witnessing.

Para 8; p.260

Some old men and women in a village will grow old in a way that their skin becomes flabby. When old men and women have become really very old, they will remain in and around the house. Nevertheless, even then some will still walk around and can walk around. But slowly, slowly their life will be coming to an end and also their physical strength will continue to diminish. So, the old men and women will not die from sickness, but they will rather die quietly as if lying down for a continuous sleep. When old men die Ho people are not as concerned as they are when children or young men and women have died. Still, there will be continued loud wailing if an old man has died, and his children will certainly be much concerned and they will be crying.

Unmarried old men and women

Para 9, p.260

It is quite usual in a village that there are young men and also young women who remain unmarried. Some men do not find (bring) a wife, while they are still young. Those men say they either did not desire to come home bringing a wife or they worried about setting up a household as expected of a newly married couple and locating their residence. If in some houses there are numerous brothers and sisters and if the elder or the younger brothers are already having a wife, then one younger brother may consider not to marry thinking: "we are already as many as this, there are already numerous children in the house." Some young men are shy and too ashamed to speak/propose to a young woman to make her his wife. Such young men will remain unmarried unless a marriage is arranged for them by their parents or unless any of their companions keep back a young woman to make her become their wife. Otherwise they will remain unmarried. Sometimes a man will grow old and remain single when he had a wife who died without children and when he did not remarry.

Para 10, 261

Similarly, some young women will remain without husband. Either there was no man to develop a love relation with them or as younger sisters they take care of their younger brothers at home and rather support their setting up a household. So even if someone invites them to their house in order to make them their wife they will not go and prefer to remain unmarried. Some women will not remarry and remain single when their husbands leave them and they are not invited to become someone else's wife. Have they become very old, they will live at their parents' or their brothers' house.

Para 11, 261

A man after having found himself a wife and a woman after having found herself a husband and having given birth parents will surely be taken care of and well looked after by their children when they have become old, sick and weak. Their son will certainly be there, their daughter-in-law and their grand-children. Should their eyesight become worse their grand-children will take them by the hand and lead them around. So irrespective of how old a man or a woman becomes, they will not suffer any trouble in their old age. However, when unmarried single men or women fall ill and when they are poor, they will live through a hard time. Unmarried and single, some of them will live apart, separate from others. Living separately means suffering, because when they are unable to do anything by themselves anymore there may be an older or a younger brother and their wives to take care of them now and then, but not fully and comprehensively. Even if an elder sibling's daughter (*hon-era*), nephews and nieces (*gungu*) are there to regularly look after them when they are ill and suffer, they will not do it in a way as children do who take care of their two parents. Therefore unmarried men and women will find it very difficult in times of sickness and other afflictions once they grow old and can't help themselves.

Para 12, 261

If unmarried men and women live separately, they will receive some food and prepare their meals separately. For this reason, those who are not married will live separate most of the

time. However, men will usually not live by themselves; they will stay with their elder brother or with one of their younger brothers and his people. If the land has previously been divided among the living offspring, a man will perhaps stay with anyone of his brothers. If the younger brother or elder brother have some paid employment, he will stay and surely plough the land. Some who have studied or who are employed may also remain unmarried and stay with a younger brother or sister who treat him well. If in a house there are unmarried persons they are welcome to stay, they will not be excluded from eating and drinking rice beer, they will not lack anything, their nieces and nephews will love them just as one's children do, and they love them, too.

Para 13, 262

Women when remaining unmarried after having left their husband are given a place to stay in a/the house (**whose ?**), but they will not be offered a share of the (ancestral) land. However, if unmarried women who have not been married before and who have not left their husband remain unmarried and live apart/ separate, they will be given a/their share of land.? When after leaving her husband a woman remains unmarried she will stay at her parents' house though in a separate place. She will see to herself and prepare the meals for herself. Those women will not do the work related to the house and its members, but she will support the household by working outside the house, for others and for wages. When that kind of women become very old, life may become quite difficult for them, and in times of illness they will have to expect grief and inconvenience. Therefore, old men and old women, if unmarried, will not die happily; they will die rather after having suffered tremendously. So, in a village sayings are known such as: " Get yourself a wife, otherwise you will die curled up." In this way men are being made fun of. Wives are teased like this: " If you do not live with a husband, will your younger brothers treat you well one day, and how can the harassment by your son's, your younger brother's or your elder brother's wives be any good?" It is very true indeed that an unmarried woman staying at her younger brother's house will become unhappy when he is about to take a wife. Fault is found with whatever they are working or doing, they are scolded at and constantly harassed and so do not feel well most of the time. They are even persecuted. It is said that people habitually die at the back of the house, that they die curled up and without drinking water before. As there are usually unmarried men and women living in a village, also in former times just as now there are unmarried old men and unmarried old women. According to their custom Ho people, young and old, will be buried in a grave once their life-span has been fulfilled.

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