

Let's Learn About Ainu Culture

-Through the Film SONGS OF KAMUI-



School of SONGS of KAMUI

Project for Coexistence with the Ainu

Moving Towards a Multicultural Society Free of Discrimination

Today, Japan is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, where anyone can connect to the world through the Internet. As members of this global community, it is essential for us to build a better world by understanding and respecting the history and culture of each and every ethnic group.

The Ainu are the indigenous people of the northern regions of the Japanese archipelago, primarily Hokkaido. Although they have long developed a distinct language and have a rich cultural heritage, public awareness and understanding of their history and culture remain limited.

This publication is a digital learning material designed to both spark interest and introduce deeper insights in the Ainu people and their culture through the film SONGS OF KAMUI, while also introducing deeper insights. As part of the Project for Coexistence with the Ainu, which is a collaborative effort between the Town of Higashikawa and the Hokkaido Shimbun Press, this material has been made freely available for anyone to view or download.

We believe that fostering a greater understanding of the Ainu people and their culture and working towards a society that respects their pride as an ethnic group will also lead to the development of a more diverse Japanese culture. We hope this publication will contribute to the creation of a multicultural society free of discrimination.

About the Film SONGS OF KAMUI

The film SONGS OF KAMUI is inspired by the story of Yukie Chiri, an inheritor of Ainu folklore. She was born in 1903, and passed away at the young age of 19. This film was produced in order to showcase the beauty and significance of Ainu culture, as well as to contribute towards creating a world free of discrimination.

The Plot of SONGS OF KAMUI

-The *Kamui* (Gods) dwell in the heart of the Ainu-

Teru was a model student who had aspired to attend a girls' school, but despite her excellent grades, she was rejected simply because she was an Ainu. Later, in 1917, she became the first Ainu to enter a girls' vocational school, yet she was labeled a "savage" and subjected to severe discrimination and bullying. One day, Professor Kaneda, a leading researcher on the Ainu language, traveled from Tokyo by train to visit Teru's aunt Inuiematsu to listen to the Ainu epic poetry known as *Yukar*. As the professor listens intently to Inuiematsu's *Yukar*, he tells her "You should be proud of your Ainu heritage. You are a one-of-a-kind people, unique to the world." Deeply moved by these words, Teru dedicated herself to recording the *Yukar* into text, much to the professor's encouragement. Her proficiency in translating the Ainu language into Japanese eventually leads to her pursuing her work more seriously in Tokyo directly under the professor's guidance. She is sent off by her aunt and a young Ainu man named Hisashi, unaware that she would never set foot in Hokkaido again...



We can provide video rentals!

We can lend out the film SONGS OF KAMUI as a Blu-ray disc or other format, free of charge. This service is only available to individuals or organizations who plan to screen the film at a venue, such as at a school or community center.

Through the universally accessible medium of film, please experience the life of Yukie Chiri, an Ainu woman who made significant contributions to preserving the rich oral literature of the Ainu for future generations. For any inquiries or requests, please contact us through the 'School of SONGS of KAMUI' website or by phone.

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[1] Trade and the Formation of Ainu Culture

In Hokkaido, the Jomon period spanned approximately from 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, followed by the Epi-Jomon period, which lasted from around 12,000 to 1,500 years ago. Next, the Satsumon period extended from about 1,500 to 800 years ago, and the period from approximately 800 years ago up until a few centuries ago is referred to as the Ainu cultural period.

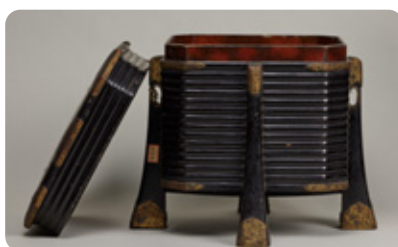
From the 13th century onward, the lifestyle of the people living in Hokkaido changed dramatically. Their houses transitioned from dugout shelters to flatland dwellings, they built *casi* (fences and forts), and they began using a variety of tools made from iron. These changes led to the rise of a distinct culture, academically known as the Ainu culture. The Ainu culture, as we know it today, gradually evolved through trade with the Japanese people (*Wajin*, as they were known to the Ainu) and the Sakhalin (*Karafuto*) people from the 13th century to the first half of the 19th century.

With the transition from the Satsumon to Ainu cultural period, tools such as knives, arrowheads, and cooking pots went from being made of stone or clay to iron, which was sourced from the *Wajin* people in southern Hokkaido and Honshu (mainland Japan). Varieties of lacquerware such as *shintoko*, *tuki*, and *itanki* were also traded from Honshu, which the Ainu would use in their daily lives and in rituals such as the *Kamui-nomi* (prayers to the gods). Other imported goods included cotton cloth, rice, alcohol, tobacco, and needles.

When obtaining goods from Honshu and continental Asia, the Ainu would trade using items from Hokkaido. Eagle and hawk feathers and seal fur were particularly considered luxury items in Honshu. Other items traded with the *Wajin* included bear and deer pelts, dried salmon, kelp, and *attus* (fabrics made from tree bark fibers).



Goods traded between the Ainu and the Matsumae Domain
Source: Hokkaido Museum



Lacquerware obtained through trade or as compensation for labor
Source: ColBase, <https://colbase.nich.go.jp>



The *Wajin* also received items such as clothes made from tree bark fibers.
Source: ColBase, <https://colbase.nich.go.jp>

[2] Food

In the past, the diets of the Ainu would vary slightly depending on where they lived. For example, those who lived near the sea would rely on food from the ocean, while those who lived in mountainous regions or near rivers would gather nuts, wild vegetables, and fish from the rivers, depending on the season.

In the mountains, they would hunt large animals such as deer and brown bears, as well as smaller animals such as raccoons, squirrels, and rabbits. Those who lived by rivers and lakes would fish for salmon, trout, and shishamo smelt, which they boiled together with wild vegetables and ate as a soup or grilled on skewers. In the mountains, they would gather wild vegetables and use the buds, stems, leaves, rhizomes, and fruits of other wild plants.

In addition to hunting and fishing, the Ainu also engaged in agriculture. Both archaeological evidence and the Ainu names for Japanese millet and foxtail millet suggest these crops were cultivated as far back as the Jomon period. These grains were mainly used to make porridge, but they were also used to cook rice for festivals and ceremonies, and as ingredients for dumplings and alcohol. Food obtained from hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming was not only eaten immediately, but was also preserved for the winter or in case of famine. They often preserved wild vegetables in spring and summer, and would store crops and fish in the fall.

Thus, the Ainu prospered, living resourcefully while cherishing the blessings of nature.

They adapted to their surroundings and lived in harmony with nature!

Let's take a look at... /

Ainu Meals



Rataskep

In the Ainu language, *Rataskep* means "to combine." It is the name of a dish made by boiling vegetables and beans, seasoned with salted fish fat or tallow. It was not only a part of their daily diet, but was also vital in their ceremonies and festivals.

Source: Shinhidaka Town Museum



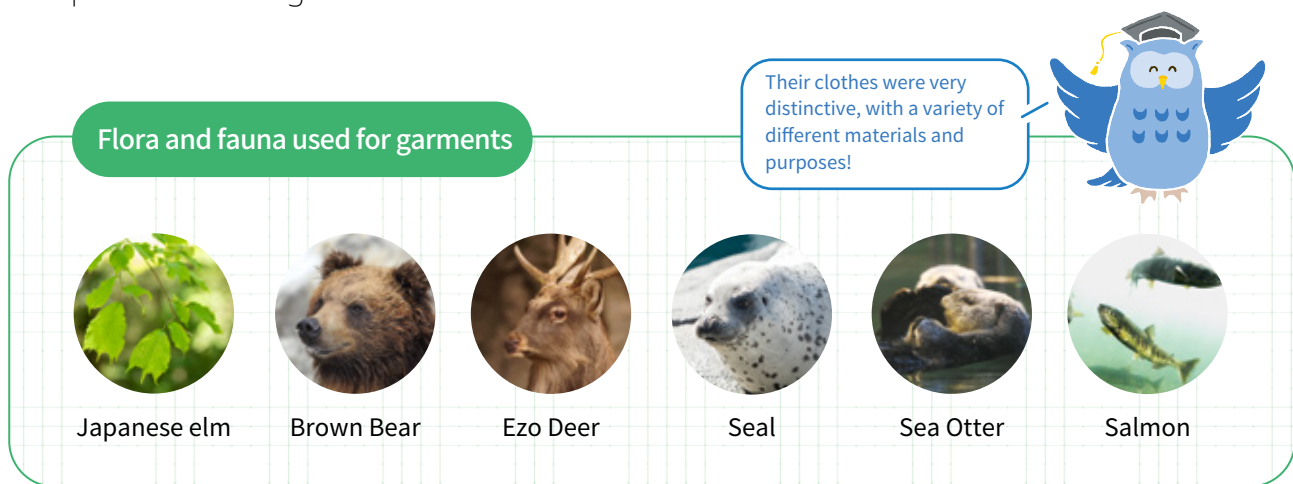
An Example of Daily Meals



Source: Shinhidaka Town Museum

[3] Clothing

The Ainu made their clothes using readily available materials. As a result, the Ainu of each region had their own unique materials and methods for making clothing. Ainu garments include cotton garments (*momen-i*), bark garments (*juhi-i*) made from the bark fibers of elm and linden trees, and grass garments (*souhi-i*) woven from the fibers of grasses. Animal skin garments (*juuhi-i*) were crafted from the hides of bears, deer, and martens, as well as from marine mammals such as seals and sea otters. They also made fish skin garments (*gyohi-i*), by sewing together the skins of salmon and the Japanese huchen. *Gyohi-i* is characterized by a one-piece shape, with narrower sleeves and a wider hem compared to other garments.



The Ainu wore two types of clothing: their everyday clothes (*nichijo-gi*) and formal clothes (*hare-gi*) reserved for special ceremonies and celebrations. Everyday clothes were plain and had minimal patterns, while formal clothes were more ornate and adorned with gorgeous embroidery. Most of the traditional garments preserved in museums today are of the *hare-gi* type.

Featured Scene

Everyday clothes

The costumes seen in the film were inspired by the everyday clothes of the Ainu.



Ayumu Mochizuki as Hisashi

Some of their clothes also came from other regions, such as through Honshu or foreign countries, such as silk garments called *Ezo-nishiki*. Clothing worn by Qing officials in China reached Hokkaido via trade with Sakhalin. Clothes such as the *uchikake*, *kosode*, and *uchiikake*, Noh costumes and *jimbaori*, were introduced through trade with the Japanese from Honshu. These foreign garments were highly valued by the Ainu. On special occasions, they were worn as formal attire over *attus* (bark garments) and other traditional garments.

\ Let's take a look at... /

Ainu Clothing

cotton garments (*momen-i*)



Source: ColBase
<https://colbase.nich.go.jp>

Animal skin garments (*juhi-i*)



Source: Nibutani Ainu Culture
Museum in the Town of Biratori

fish skin garments (*gyohi-i*)



Source: Kayano Shigeru
Nibutani Ainu Museum

formal clothes (*hare-gi*)



Source: ColBase
<https://colbase.nich.go.jp>

Clothes from Honshu (*jimbaori*)



Source: ColBase
<https://colbase.nich.go.jp>

I wonder what sort of
occasions each one was
worn for?



[4] Residences

The Ainu built their homes near rivers or by the sea, where food and drinking water were readily available. They chose locations where floods would be less likely to occur, and where transportation would be convenient. They formed villages called *kotan*, which consisted up to around a dozen dwellings called *cise*.

A *cise* would range in size from 20 to 100 square meters, and was built using local materials through the cooperation of the residents of the *kotan*. Hard woods such as chestnut and oak were used for pillars, and the thatched roofs were made from grasses abundant in the area, such as *kaya*. The frames, roofs, and walls were all built without the use of nails, and the materials were tied together with wild crimson glory vines or with the bark fibers from linden trees.



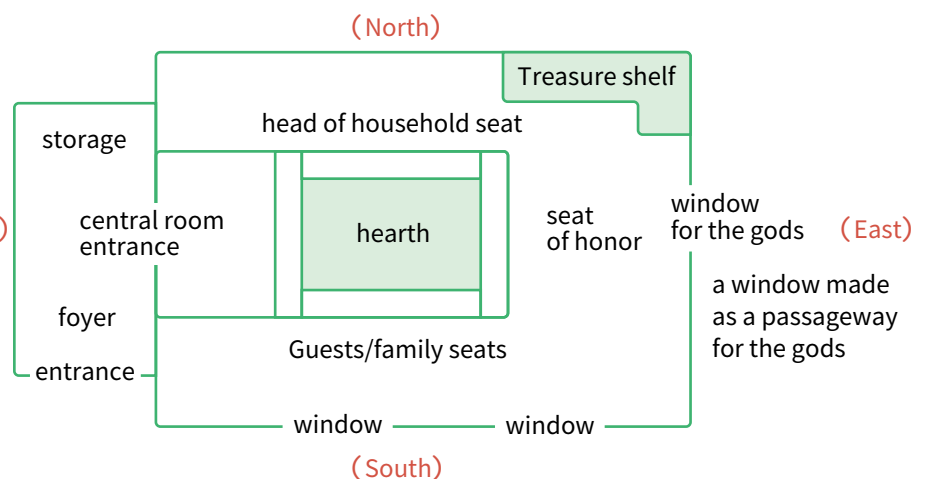
Current *cises* built as they were in the past

A floor plan for a *cise* in Shinhidaka, Hokkaido

This is what the insides of their homes were like!



(West)



A fireplace would be near the entrance of each home. It was used not only to heat the room and to cook meals, but also for important ceremonies. The area around the fireplace served as an important gathering place for family members and guests.

The Ainu built special windows which served as passageways for the gods into their rooms. It is known that these windows would be positioned in order to face a certain sacred direction. This window was so revered by the Ainu that it was forbidden to look in through it from the outside. The space between the window and the fireplace at the center of the room was considered a place of honor, and guests would sometimes be invited to sit there.

Various structures essential for daily life were built near the *cises*, such as an altar, a shed for drying food, a food storehouse, a cage for keeping bear cubs, separate toilets for men and women, and poles used for drying laundry.



Featured Scene

***Cise*: Residences of the Ainu**

In this scene, Teru and Hisashi carry firewood to an elderly woman, who lives alone in a *cise* deep in the snow. The scene depicts exactly what a *cise* would have looked like at the time.



[5] Beliefs

The Ainu believed that everything in the world possesses a soul. They especially revered certain important things as being *kamui* (gods), such as animals, plants, natural elements like fire and water, and even the essential tools used for their daily life, such as boats and mortars. They believed that gods would manifest in the human world through nature and objects, bestowing blessings on people and fulfilling various roles in their lives.

Kamui-nomi

Kamui-nomi is an Ainu word combining “*kamui*” (god) and “*nomi*” (to pray), referring to a ceremony in which people pray to a god (*kamui*) for the necessities of daily life.

In Ainu belief, everything in the world is thought to possess a soul, and things and concepts especially revered by the Ainu were regarded as *kamui*. These included natural blessings such as animals and vegetation, fire and water, and tools essential for survival. *Kamui* also encompassed phenomena beyond human control, such as the weather and epidemics.



Ainu offering ritual tools called Inaw to the river

Featured Scene



About the Ainu's beliefs

In one scene, after someone spills their drink on the floor, and Inuiematsu affably responds by saying “The god of the floorboards must have been thirsty.” This moment illustrates how the Ainu revered various objects as being *kamui* (gods).



The Ainu also believed natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis, as well as deadly diseases to be the work of malevolent *kamui*. While the concept of nature preservation did not exist in Ainu culture, they did believe that *kamui* and humans had a symbiotic relationship with each other. The Ainu saw humans as being just one part of nature, being permitted to live within it.

Once a *kamui*'s role in the human world was complete, it was believed to return to the world of the gods where its family and companions awaited it. The Ainu would then pray for the eventual return of the *kamui*, as their presence was crucial to their lifestyles. In these rituals, they would offer items such as *inaw* (a wooden offering), alcohol, dumplings, and dried salmon. It is said that a *kamui* who is sent off properly through these rituals would earn the respect of its peers and become an even more splendid *kamui* than before. The greatest example of these ceremonies is the *iyomante* - the bear's spirit sending ceremony -.

The act of capturing an animal for its meat or fur also means to take that animal's life. However, to the Ainu, this also meant freeing the *kamui*'s spirit from the animal's body. The human would receive the flesh and send the *kamui*'s spirit back to the world of the gods. The *kamui* would later come back to the human world, taking the form of an animal once more. Such rituals were not only performed for living creatures, but also for tools which had become too old or broken to be of any further use. Instead of simply discarding these tools, they were adorned with offerings of food and carefully sent back to the world of the gods.



Inaw

Source: ColBase
(<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)



A bear decorated for the *Iyomante* ceremony

[6] Literature and Arts

One tradition that the Ainu people have nurtured over generations is their oral literature. This is a form of storytelling which is passed down not through written texts, but rather by listening to the stories told by storytellers.

These stories can differ in the way they are spoken, and their various narrative styles. Some stories are sung to a melody, while others are recited in monotone, not unlike everyday conversation. The three main types of stories are called “heroic epics,” “myths” and “prose tales,” each creating an atmosphere suited to its respective narrative.

Heroic Epics (*Yukar*)

The tales of heroes known as *yukars* are narrated with a repeated short melody that is unique to each storyteller. Even if a story is learned from someone else, it is said to always have been retold with a distinct melody. The storyteller or listener would often hold a wooden stick or similar object, tapping the ground or the floor in order to maintain the rhythm. As the story unfolds, the listener – or sometimes even the narrator – might also interject with short shouts. *Yukars* are typically very long, lasting tens of minutes to several hours, or potentially even longer.

A single *yukar* can last for hours!?



Featured Scene



Yukar

Inuiematsu is singing a *yukar* around the hearth. Both the narrator and the listeners tap the ground or floor near their seats with wooden sticks or similar objects to maintain the rhythm.



Myths (*Kamui-yukar*)

The tales of the gods, known as *Kamui-yukar*, are narrated by putting words over short, repeated melodies. Each story has a unique melody and is told in verses called *sakehe*, which consist of repeated phrases. Many *Kamui-yukar* describe the experiences of various *kamui* – such as animal, plant, lightning, and illness spirits – both in the *kamui* and human worlds.

Among all *Kamui-yukar*, a collection of myths titled the “*Ainu Shin'yoshu*,” written by an Ainu woman named Yukie Chiri, is particularly famous.

Prose Tales (*Uepeker*)

The folktales and legends of the prose tales are narrated in a tone resembling everyday conversation – sometimes slightly monotonous, other times more expressive and intonated. The characters vary widely, featuring humans, *kamui*, animals, and even tools. Some of these tales resemble the *Kamui-yukar* myths, with some that focus on a human protagonist recounting their experiences and interactions with a *kamui*, and others narrated by a *kamui* sharing their own adventures. Others tales are more like the *yukar* heroic epics. For example, a story might feature a boy endowed with superhuman powers.



Kamui-yukar

There is a scene where Inuiematsu and Teru sing a *Kamui-yukar* to Professor Kaneda. This scene vividly depicts exactly what a *Kamui-yukar* is like.

[7] *Kamui-mintar*

Daisetsu Mountain Range



Source: Higashikawa Tourism Association

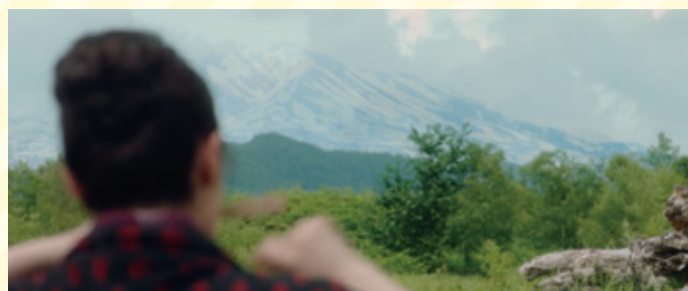
The Daisetsuzan mountain range was deeply revered by the Kamikawa Ainu people, who referred to it as *nutap-kamui-sir* (the mountain of the gods at the upper bend of the river) and *Nutap-ka-ush-pe* (the one on top of a broad marsh). Its mysterious mountain shapes and vast fields of alpine flora have also earned it the name *Kamui-mintar* (the playground of the Gods). At the foot of Asahidake – Hokkaido's highest peak, standing at 2,291 meters above sea level – lies the Asahidake hot springs, which has hosted the Ainu festival *Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi* for over 60 years.

Featured Scene



Asahidake

The highest peak of Hokkaido makes a symbolic appearance in several scenes, such as in the opening and in a scene where Teru plays her *mukkuri*.



Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi



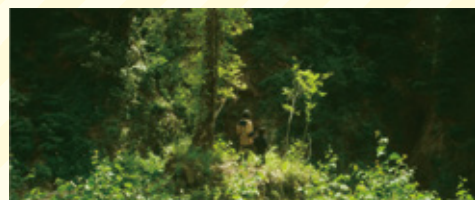
Source: Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi Photo Book

Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi, meaning “pray to the god of mountains” or simply “mountain festival” in the Ainu language, is a festival held to pray for the safety of mountain climbers at the opening of Asahidake. The festival includes traditional Ainu ceremonies, dances, a large bonfire, as well as a procession of torch carriers in which the spectators are welcomed to join.

The *Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi* is held at the Asahidake Youth Campground and begins with a solemn Ainu ceremony, followed by a display of traditional dances and songs. All participants then join a procession, carrying torches to light the bonfire. The festival comes to a whimsical end as everyone dances around the bonfire in a large circle.

Kamui-mintar

Many scenes in the film depict Asahidake and its surroundings as the majestic *kamui-mintar* (the playground of the Gods).



Japan Heritage

Kamikawa Ainu in Coexistence with *Kamui*

—————▶ Cultural Properties Designated as Japan Heritage ◀—————

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for more!



Coexistence with *Kamui*



1 Traditional Ainu Dance

Kamui-kotan (The Village of the Gods)



2 *Kamui-kotan*
-The Battle Between the Demon and God -



3 *Kamui-nomi*

Kamui-kotan (The Village of the Gods)



4 The Ishikari River

Mt. Arashiyama (*Ci-nomi-sir*), Sacred Place for the Kamikawa Ainu



5 Arashiyama, *Ci-nomi-sir*



6 *Cikap-un-i*

Mt. Arashiyama (*Ci-nomi-sir*), Sacred Place for the Kamikawa Ainu



7 *Ci-nomi-sir*



8 Traditional Ainu dwellings (*Cise*)

The Daisetsuzan Mountain Range, the Playground of the Gods (*Kamui-mintar*)

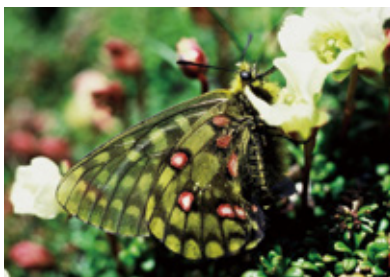


9 The Daisetsuzan Mountain Range: *Kamui-mintar*

The Daisetsuzan Mountain Range, the Playground of the Gods (*Kamui-mintar*)



10 Alpine plants
(e.g. bleeding heart flowers)



11 Alpine butterflies



12 *Nupuri-kor-kamui-nomi*

The Daisetsuzan Mountain Range, the Playground of the Gods (*Kamui-mintar*)



13 Sacred ceremony for
the spirits of owls



14 Ritual to recognize the
achievements of great
ancestors



15 Woodcarving skills
(the carving of wooden bears)

The Lives of People Living in Harmony with *Kamui*



16 Kawamura Kaneto Aynu
Memorial Museum



17 Asahikawa City Museum

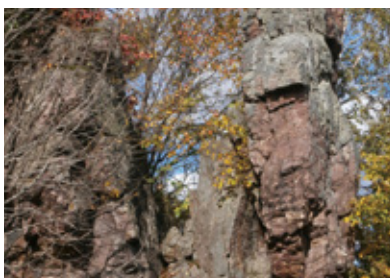


18 Tosshozan Capi

The Lives of People Living in Harmony with *Kamui*



19 Mt. Ishigaki (God of Mt. San,
the ancient Ainu battlefield)



20 Tateiwa Rock,
the Man-Eating Sword Rock



21 The Ryuo Shinto Shrine
to the Water God

[8] About Yukie Chiri

Yukie Chiri, born in 1903, spent her childhood in present-day Honmachi-2, Noboribetsu, Hokkaido, along the *Nupur-pet* River (present-day Noboribetsu River). Her father, Takakichi, and her mother, Nami, were Ainu from the Chiri and Kannari families. At the age of 6 Yukie moved to Asahikawa where she lived until she was 19 with her aunt, Matsu Kannari, and her grandmother, Monasnouk. Yukie is known as the author of *Ainu Shin' yoshu*, or "Ainu Songs of Gods," the first-ever transcription of Ainu folktales. This book containing 13 *Kamui-yukar* (myths) has been highly praised for its expressiveness and translation from the Ainu language, as well as for its heartfelt preface.

In May 1922, Yukie moved to Tokyo to complete her book, but tragically passed away from a heart disease on September 18 at the young age of 19. Yukie remained steadfast in her ethnic pride as an Ainu, and ultimately fulfilled her mission of propagating Ainu language and culture. Even after her death, her book and her spirit contained within continues to inspire people from all over the world.



Yukie Chiri

Featured Scene



About Teru Kitazato

Teru Kitazato, the main character of the film *SONG OF KAMUI*, is an Ainu woman based on Yukie Chiri. Through watching the film, you can learn more about Yukie Chiri as a person, and what her life was like at the time.



Mizuki Yoshida as Teru

History of Yukie Chiri

- 1903 ● Born in Noboribetsu, Hokkaido on June 8th.
- 1907 ● Her younger brother Takanaka is born.
Begins living with her grandmother Monasnouk at the age of 4.
- 1909 ● Her younger brother Mashiho is born.
She is placed in the care of Matsu Kannari, at the age of 6.
- 1910 ● Enters Kamikawa No.3 Elementary School at the age of 7.
- 1916 ● Graduates from Kamikawa No.5 Elementary School at the age of 13.
- 1917 ● Enters Asahikawa Girls' Vocational School at the age of 14.
- 1918 ● Meets Professor Kyosuke Kindaichi at the age of 15.
- 1920 ● Graduates from Asahikawa Girls' Vocational School at the age of 17.
- 1921 ● She sends notebooks containing her manuscripts of Ainu legends to Professor Kindaichi, at the age of 18.
- 1922 ● Takes up temporary residence with Professor Kindaichi in May
On September 18, the night after finishing the final proofreading of *Ainu Shin'yoshu*, she suddenly passes away from a heart attack at the age of 19.
- 1923 ● *Ainu Shin'yoshu* is published in August.
- 1961 ● Matsu Kannari, her younger brother Mashiho, and her father Takakichi pass away.
- 1971 ● Professor Kindaichi passes away.
- 1973 ● Yukie's biography written by Hideo Fujimoto "Silver Droplets Fall Fall All Around" is published.
- 1978 ● Esperanto translation of *Ainu Shin'yoshu* is published. *Ainu Shin'yoshu* is published in the Iwanami Paperback Library.
- 2003 ● In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of her birth, the national exhibition "Yukie Chiri... Seeking the Land of Freedom" is held in Tokushima City, Kanazawa City, and Tokyo; and the forum "100 Years of Yukie Chiri: To Where the Silver Droplets Fall" is held in Noboribetsu City.
- 2008 ● Yukie Chiri is featured in NHK's program "History in Motion."
- 2010 ● Yukie Chiri's Notebook is designated as a Hokkaido Tangible Cultural Property.
The Chiri Yukie Memorial Museum is opened.
- 2022 ● Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of her death.



▲ Yukie Chiri as a child



▲ Yukie Chiri (left) and Matsu Kannari (right)



◀ Yukie Chiri's work from her fourth year in elementary school.



▲ A class of the vocational school



▲ Diploma from her vocational school



▲ A reproduction of Yukie Chiri's Notebooks

[9] About Matsu Kannari

Matsu Kannari, born in 1875, was an Ainu woman from Horobetsu *Kotan* (present-day Noboribetsu). Her Ainu name was Imekanu, and her baptismal name was Maria. She was the daughter of Monasnouk, and Yukie's aunt. Kyosuke Kindaichi praised Monasnouk as a great *yukar-kur* (narrator of epics). She would permanently have difficulty walking after injuring her foot as a child.

In 1892, with the assistance of missionary John Batchelor, she entered Airin School in Motomachi, Hakodate. During her seven years there, she learned how to read and write Japanese; studied arithmetic and gymnastics; did Bible studies; and learned how to transcribe Ainu into the Roman alphabet. She later became a Christian evangelist and served as a missionary for 12 years at Biratori *Kotan* in the Hidaka Province, and for about 20 years at Chikabumi *Kotan* in Asahikawa. In addition to running the Chikabumi Anglican Sunday School and evangelizing her students, she also taught women how to sew and knit. Due to Matsu's disability, her mother Monasnouk moved in with her at Chikabumi to take care of her. Matsu took the 6-year-old Yukie Chiri into her care, and raised her until Yukie was 19.

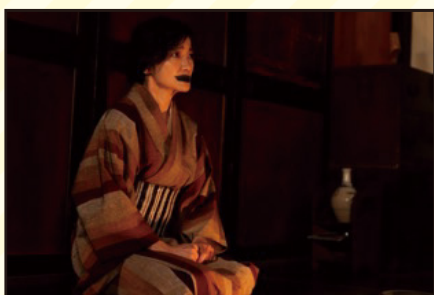
After retiring from missionary work, she returned to her hometown of Noboribetsu and transcribed *yukars* and other oral traditions that were passed down from her mother, using the Roman script she had learned at Airin School. She left behind a total of 160 notebooks for Kyosuke Kindaichi and her nephew, Mashiho Chiri. Some of these notebooks were published in 1958 as "The Collection of Ainu Epics," written by Matsu Kannari and translated by Kyosuke Kindaichi.

The achievements of Matsu Kannari have since reverberated throughout generations. Currently, with the cooperation of researchers and the Hokkaido Ainu Association, her records are being translated and published by the Hokkaido Board of Education as the *Yukar* Series. Matsu was awarded the Medal with Purple Ribbon in 1956, and passed away in 1961, at the age of 85.



Matsu Kannari

Featured Scene



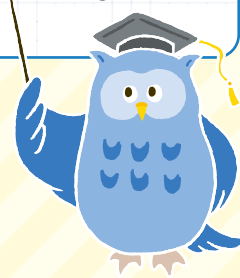
Kaho Shimada as Inuiematsu

Key Point

In the film, the area around Inuiematsu's mouth appears black. This is actually a tattoo! It was customary for Ainu women to get a tattoo around their mouths after they had truly come of age.

About Inuiematsu

In the film, you can hear the beautiful *yukars* of Inuiematsu, a character modeled on Matsu Kannari.



[10] About Kyosuke Kindaichi

Kyosuke Kindaichi (born in 1882, Iwate Prefecture) was a Japanese linguist and ethnologist, widely regarded as the founder of Ainu language studies in Japan. When he was a student at Tokyo Imperial University, his mentor Kazutoshi Ueda emphasized the importance of Ainu language research, telling him: “Since the Ainu live only in Japan, the responsibility of the study of the Ainu language falls on the shoulders of Japanese scholars,” thus sparking Kindaichi’s interest in the language. Kindaichi would later travel to Hokkaido to collect data on Ainu vocabulary. During his research, the *yukar* epics passed down by the Ainu would especially pique his interest. On one of his research trips to Hokkaido in the summer of 1918, he paid a visit to Matsu Kannari and Monasnouk, and here he would meet Yukie Chiri for the first time. Recognizing her exceptional talent, he encouraged her to record her *Kamui-yukar* into a book and publish it.

One of Kindaichi’s significant achievements was conducting systematic grammatical research on the Ainu language and its transcription, as a written form of the language had yet to exist. Through his interactions with Matsu Kannari and Yukie Chiri, he would successfully document the Ainu *yukar* epics, which had been only orally transmitted up until then. After Yukie Chiri’s untimely passing, he inherited her will in preserving Ainu Culture by organizing and translating *yukars* and other Ainu language materials. To this day, “*The Collection of Ainu Epics*” remains an invaluable record of Ainu culture. Kindaichi’s detailed records of Ainu speech and grammar laid the foundation for academic study of the Ainu language in Japan, and would greatly influence later generations of researchers. Kindaichi passed away in 1971, at the age of 89.



Kyosuke Kindaichi

Source: Natinal Diet Library



Masaya Kato as Professor Kaneda

About Professor Kaneda

Upon meeting Teru in Hokkaido, Professor Kaneda immediately recognized her talent and encouraged her to record her *Kamui-yukar* into a book and publish it. The film highlights the importance of passing on the Ainu language and culture to future generations.

[1] The Development of Hokkaido and the Ainu People

Hokkaido was originally a region where the Ainu people had lived in harmony with nature. In 1869, the Japanese government renamed the island “Hokkaido” without respecting the will of the Ainu and subsequently declared them as Japanese citizens. The government would then enact new laws annexing Hokkaido into Japan. As a result, old-growth forests were cleared out; towns, roads, and ports were built; and railways were established throughout the land.

This development process would lead to the Ainu being labeled as “native savages” and subjected to harsh discrimination.

[2] The Assimilation Policies and Their Impact

The Ainu people were not only deprived of their homeland, but also subjected to numerous restrictions on their culture and customs. They were prohibited from using the Ainu language, forced to change their names into Japanese, prohibited from getting tattoos and wearing earrings, and restrictions were placed on their fishing of salmon. These laws were dubbed the “assimilation policies,” and were aimed at forcibly assimilating the Ainu people into Japanese society.

[3] The Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act

In 1899, the government enacted the “Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act” in order to encourage the Ainu people to adopt agriculture. Land was allocated to the Ainu under this law, but much of it was unsuitable for farming. Also, since sufficient support was left unprovided by the government, many issues would yet remain. Although this policy was presented as a protection measure for the Ainu, in practice it was a part of the assimilation policies that would have a profound impact on Ainu culture and their way of life.



Featured Scene

Yukie Chiri' s *Ainu shin'yoshu* was published during this period of assimilation, and this setting is vividly depicted in SONGS OF KAMUI.



[4] The Establishment of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido

After the end of World War II in 1946, the Ainu inhabiting Hokkaido would take initiative in establishing the Ainu Association of Hokkaido. The Association would continuously work to improve the social status of Ainu people and to preserve Ainu culture. It would rename itself the Hokkaido Utari Association in 1961, before reverting back to the name of Ainu Association of Hokkaido in 2009, marking a new chapter in its history.

The Association is dedicated to preserving Ainu language, folklore, and traditional performing arts; providing livelihood support; and engaging in educational activities aimed at eliminating discrimination. It also plays a crucial role by participating in discussions concerning the rights of indigenous peoples, both domestically and worldwide.

5 The Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture, and The Act on Promoting Measures to Achieve a Society in which the Pride of Ainu People is Respected

In the 1980s, indigenous peoples from around the world would gather at the United Nations and assert the following rights:

1

To reclaim
indigenous lands
and resources

2

To protect and develop
their ancient cultural
heritage

3

To obtain the right to
voice their opinions in
politics

The Ainu, as one of such indigenous peoples, share this claim. They have continued to protest against Japan's mono-ethnic theory, which asserts that Japan has always been comprised solely of ethnically Japanese people. As a result, the Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture was enacted in 1997 in support of the 2nd of these rights: the preservation of their ancient culture.

The Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture

This law, passed in 1997, legally recognized the Ainu as a minority in Japan. Its official title is "Act on the Promotion of Ainu Culture, and Dissemination and Enlightenment of Knowledge about Ainu Tradition, etc." The law was expected to play a meaningful role in preserving and revitalizing the language and culture of the Ainu, who were once feared to be on the brink of extinction.

However, it was overly focused on concepts of cultural promotion and ultimately failed to address the rights and livelihood security of the Ainu as an indigenous people.

The Act on Promoting Measures to Achieve a Society in which the Pride of Ainu People is Respected

This law was enacted in May 2019, marking the first time the Ainu were explicitly designated as an "indigenous people" in Japanese law. This law includes measures to support the self-reliance of the Ainu, promote regional development, and eliminate discrimination. It contains the following objectives:

The realization of a society where the Ainu can live with ethnic pride, and where that pride is respected by all

The realization of a society in which all citizens can coexist with mutual respect for each other's individuality and dignity

MEMO

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[6] A Society for People of All Sorts

People of many different languages, cultures, and customs live in Japan. The Ainu, as one of such people, have established a rich culture through their regional and household traditions, which they had inherited from their ancestors for generations. However, as a result of the government's colonization of Hokkaido and assimilation policies, inheritance of the Ainu language and culture would be disrupted, and many Ainu ceremonies and traditions would fall out of practice. Subsequently, the Ainu language has declined in use and is now classified as an endangered language.

The extinction of a language means the loss of its unique worldview and the culture that it brings forth. Today, very few people can speak the Ainu language, and even fewer use it in their daily lives. However, around the 1980s, the Ainu began a movement to revive their culture and rituals. Together with the cooperation of non-Ainu individuals, these efforts have since expanded significantly.

An Increase in Cultural Promotion



Today, many people participate in Ainu language classes and other hands-on cultural workshops, such as those focused on traditional clothing, musical instruments, cooking, and woodworking. In addition, events are held to reproduce traditional Ainu houses, boats, and clothing, as well as to reenact their traditions such as salmon fishing and deer hunting. These activities offer a rare opportunity to experience the day-to-day wisdoms of the Ainu.

Ainu culture is now developing in new ways while still preserving its traditions. Traditional dances, music, and works of art are being showcased both in Japan and abroad, sparking a growing interest in Ainu culture. Ainu cuisine and designs incorporating traditional Ainu patterns have also found popularity, and are used in daily life.

With the recent enactment of laws in protection of the rights of the Ainu, their culture has become more widely recognized in schools and communities. These laws have provided a foundation for efforts to support the preservation and development of Ainu culture, and more and more people are working even harder in efforts to preserve the Ainu language, traditional dances and songs.



Ainu Language Class

Photo provided by:
Nibutani Ainu Language Class for Children in the town of Biratori



Ainu Cultural Workshops

Source: Kawamura Kaneto Ainu Memorial Museum

For the Sake of a Diverse Society



Throughout its long and storied history, Ainu culture has been passed down through many generations, overcoming many challenges along the way. This preservation has been made possible by the efforts of our Ainu predecessors, who dedicated themselves to maintaining and protecting that culture. Today, it is widely understood that diverse peoples naturally coexist in all countries and regions of the world. Respecting and understanding each other's histories and culture is essential for us all to get along and live together in harmony.



An Example of traditional Ainu woodwork

Source: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp>)



Works made in an Ainu cultural workshop

Source: Kawamura Kaneto Ainu Memorial Museum

The Essence of Ainu Culture

And How It's Needed in the World Today

To Cherish All Things and Live in Harmony with Nature

The Ainu revered all things as *kamui* (gods) and valued living in harmony with nature. When gathering wild vegetables, they would take only what was necessary, leaving enough for the plants to regenerate. Additionally, the tools and objects essential for their daily lives were carefully crafted from natural materials, prioritizing their longevity above all else. These objects were then treated with great care, as they were also believed to be the incarnations of *kamui*. The Ainu's deep respect for nature and their possessions offers valuable insight when reflecting on our own consumeristic modern society. This essence of Ainu culture allows us to reconsider just how a more sustainable society should be envisioned.

A Society where Everyone is Respected

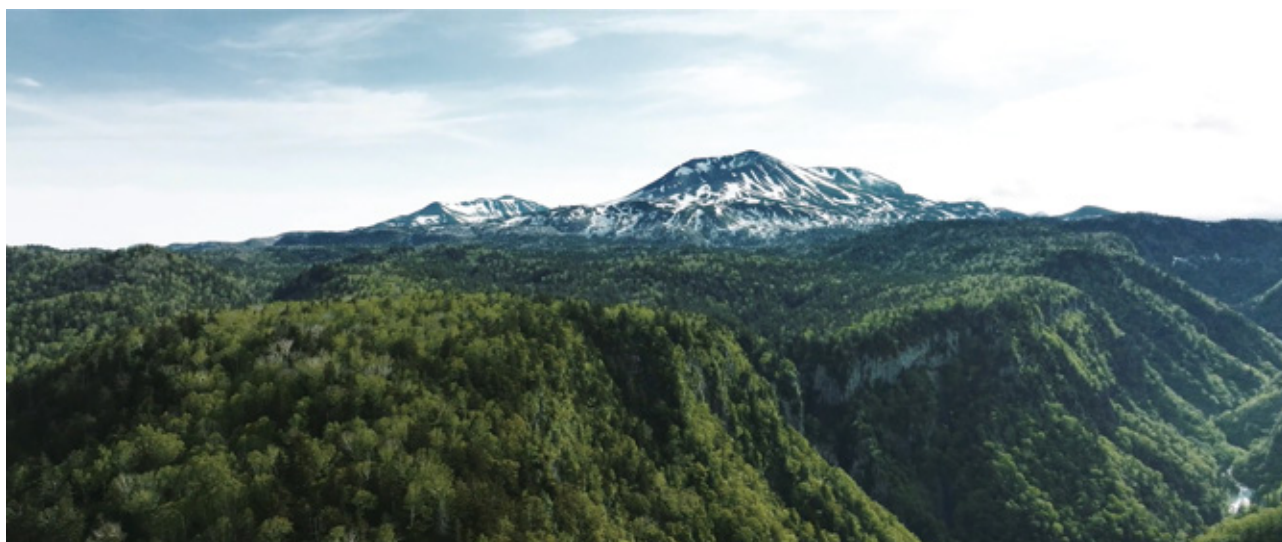
For the Ainu, helping one another was an essential part of life. Responsibilities such as hunting, fishing, and building houses were carried out with the cooperation of the entire village. This spirit of mutual assistance is reflected in the Ainu word "*urespa*" (to help one another). Children were lovingly raised as the treasures of the entire village, and the elderly were universally respected as possessors of great wisdom. The village leader would serve as the focal point of the entire community, and would be chosen for qualities such as their eloquence (*pawetok*), courage (*rametok*), attractiveness (*siretok*), and dexterity (*teketok*). This essence of mutual respect and cooperation remains a vital aspect of today's society.

A Tolerant Society Achieved through Dialogue

The Ainu freely traveled between regions, establishing a vibrant society through trade and socialization. This lifestyle was only made possible thanks to the Ainu principle of constantly striving for a peaceful and stable community. Even when disputes would arise, resolving them with thorough discussion was given priority above all else, with the use of force or war only considered as a last resort. This emphasis on dialogue offers us a valuable lesson on how we can approach conflict resolution in today's diverse world.

[7] Making Use of the Ainu Spirit in Today's Society

While modern society may enjoy an overall high level of material wealth, it also faces problems such as the weakening of our interpersonal connections, environmental degradation, wars, and poverty. In these challenging times, we may do well to partake in the wisdoms of the Ainu, as suggested by their values and lifestyles. By embracing the spirit of the Ainu – respecting nature, each other, and dialogue – and incorporating that spirit into our own daily lives, we can move closer to realizing a more sustainable and overall balanced society.

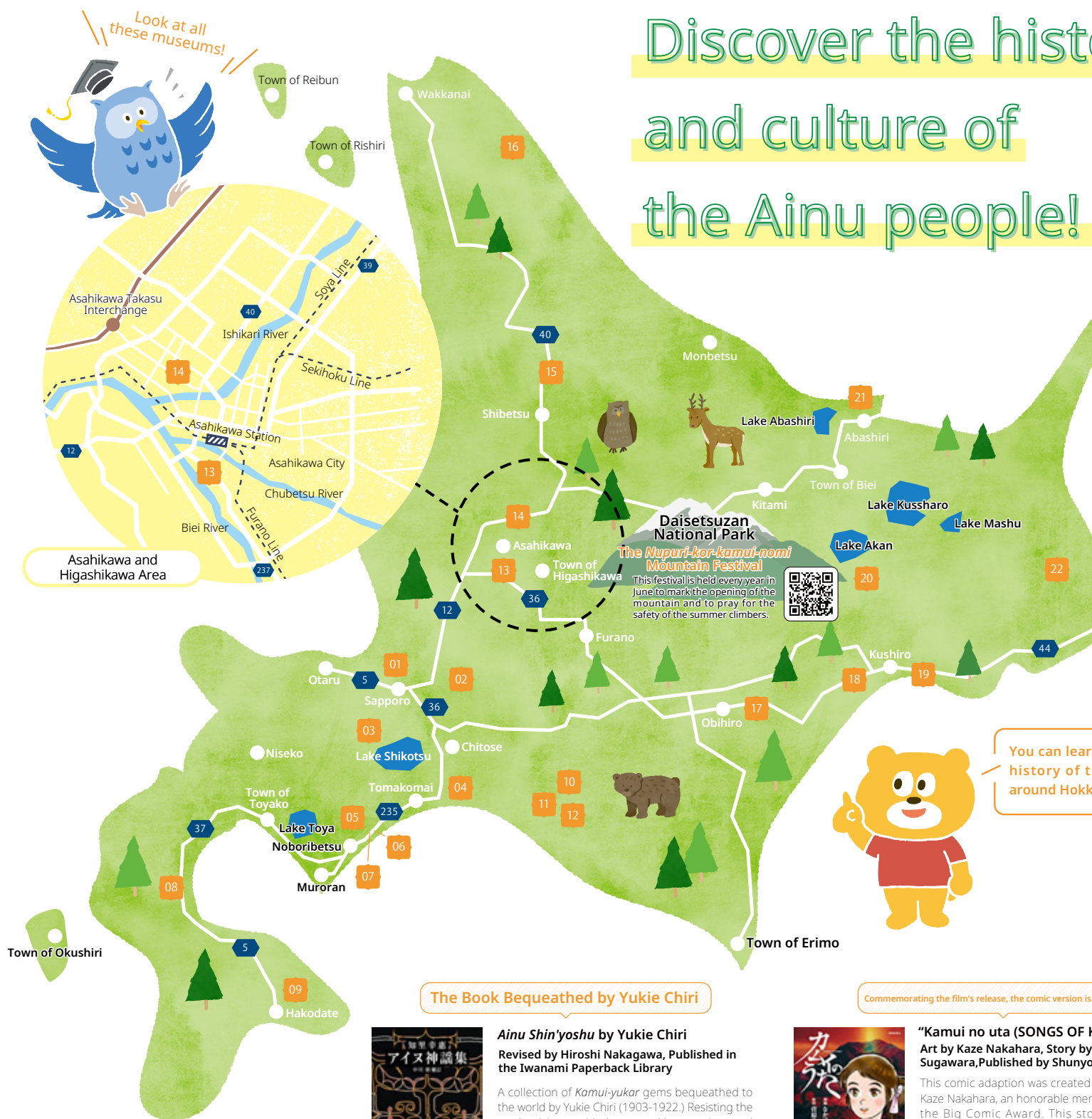


What lessons can we learn from the Ainu, and how can we apply it to our own lives?



Museums Exhibiting Ainu Culture

Discover the history
and culture of
the Ainu people!



The Book Bequeathed by Yukie Chiri

Ainu Shin'yoshu by Yukie Chiri

Revised by Hiroshi Nakagawa, Published in the Iwanami Paperback Library























A collection of *Kamui-yukar* gems bequeathed to the world by Yukie Chiri (1903-1922.) Resisting the modernizing world, she poured her passions and hopes into their composition. She hoped that the many who knew of the Ainu would read these, in hopes of preserving her ancestors' traditions for future generations.

Commemorating the film's release, the comic version is

"Kamui no uta (SONGS OF KAMUI)"
Art by Kaze Nakahara, Story by Sugawara, Published by Shunyo

This comic adaption was created by Kaze Nakahara, an honorable member of the Big Comic Award. This story is a remarkable life of Yukie Chiri, who preserved the traditional Ainu epics of the *Yukar* and preserved them as the *Ainu Shin'yoshu*. Unique to the manga are the adventures of an Ainu dog and an original character in the film.



<p>01 Hokkaido Ainu Center 7th Floor, Kaderu 2-7 Building, Kita 2 Nishi 7, Chuo-ku, Sapporo, Hokkaido 060-0002.</p> 	<p>02 Hokkaido Museum 53-2 Konopporo, Atsubetsu-cho, Atsubetsu-ku, Sapporo, Hokkaido 004-0006</p> 
<p>03 Sapporo Ainu Culture Promotion Center (Sapporo Pirka Kotan) 27 Koganeyu, Minami-ku, Sapporo, Hokkaido, 061-2274</p> 	<p>04 Tomakomai City Museum 3-9-7 Suehiro-cho, Tomakomai, Hokkaido 053-0011</p> 
<p>05 Yukar Village Ainu Lifestyle Material Building (in Noboritetsu Bear Park) 224 Noboribetsu Onsen-cho, Noboribetsu, Hokkaido, 059-0551</p> 	<p>06 Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park 2-3 Wakakusa-cho, Shiraoi Town, Shiraoi District, Hokkaido 059-09</p> 
<p>07 Chiri Yukie Memorial Museum 2-34-7 Noboribetsu Honcho, Noboribetsu, Hokkaido 059-0465</p> 	<p>08 Yakumo Town Museum 154 Suehirocho, Yakumo-cho, Futami-gun, Hokkaido, 049-3112</p> 
<p>09 Hakodate City Museum of Northern Peoples 21-7 Suehirocho, Hakodate, Hokkaido 040-0053</p> 	<p>10 Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum 55 Nibutani, Biratori-cho, Saru-gun, Hokkaido 055-0101</p> 
<p>11 Nibutani Crafts Gallery 61-6 Nibutani, Biratori-cho Saru-gun, Hokkaido 055- 0101</p> 	<p>12 Historical Museum of Saru River 227-2 Nibutani, Biratori-cho Saru-gun, Hokkaido, 055- 0101</p> 
<p>13 Asahikawa City Museum Asahikawa City Taisetsu Crystal Hall, Kagura 3-jo 7-chome, Asahikawa City, Hokkaido 070-8003</p> 	<p>14 Kawamura Kaneto Ainu Museum 11-chome, Hokumoncho, Asahikawa, Hokkaido 070-0825</p> 
<p>15 Nayoro City Museum 222 Midorioka, Nayoro, Hokkaido 096-0063</p> 	<p>16 Okhotsk Museum Esashi 1614-1 Mikasacho, Esashicho, Esashigun, Hokkaido 098-5823</p> 
<p>17 Obihiro Centennial City Museum Midorigaoka, Obihiro, Hokkaido 080-0846</p> 	<p>18 Ainu Cultural Activity Facility Ureshipa Chise Higashi 3-jo Kita 1-chome 2-27, Shiranuka-cho, Shiranuka-gun, Hokkaido 088- 0333</p> 
<p>19 Kushiro City Museum 1-7 Shunkodai, Kushiro, Hokkaido 085- 0822</p> 	<p>20 Lake Akan Ainu Theater Ikor 4-7-84 Akanko Onsen, Akan-cho, Kushiro, Hokkaido 085-0467</p> 
<p>21 Abashiri City Historical Museum 1-1-3 Katsuramachi, Abashiri, Hokkaido 093-0041</p> 	<p>22 Kaga Family Archives 29 Miyamaicho, Betsukaicho, Notsukegun, Hokkaido, 086- 0201</p> 

Our Hopes for the SONGS OF KAMUI Film and the School of SONGS OF KAMUI Project

Hokkaido is the home of the Ainu, an indigenous people with a unique language, religion, and culture. The Ainu language has no written form, and its traditions and literature have long been passed down orally. Thus, Yukie Chiri dedicated her life to transcribing the Ainu language into written form, and successfully preserved it for future generations.

SONGS OF KAMUI is inspired by the life of Yukie Chiri, set against the magnificent scenery of the Daisetsuzan Mountains. It was created to highlight the importance of preserving Ainu heritage and to deliver a message advocating for a world free of discrimination. By showcasing both the rich natural environments that the Ainu inhabited and the harsh social challenges they faced, SONGS OF KAMUI emphasizes values of cultural and ideological diversity.

We hope this film and this accompanying project will raise awareness of not only of the history of discrimination and persecution that the Ainu faced, but also of the contemporary issues of bullying, discrimination, and conflict present in modern society. Furthermore, we hope it inspires the next generation to address both domestic and global social issues, and to help in fostering a society built on coexistence and mutual prosperity.



SONGS OF KAMUI

[CAST]

Mizuki Yoshida (as Teru Kitazato), Ayumu Mochizuki (as Hisashi), Kaho Shimada (as Inuiematsu), Misa Shimizu (as Shizu Kaneda), and Masaya Kato (as Professor Kaneda)

[CREDIT]

Directed/Screenplay by: Hiroshi Sugawara

Produced by: Kiyoko Sakuma

Production company: cinevoice

Production cooperation: Higashikawa, Hokkaido,
the Cultural Capital of Photography and
"The Town of Photography"



Joint project by the Town of Higashikawa and the Hokkaido Shimbun Press

Project for Coexistence with the Ainu- School of SONGS OF KAMUI -

[Photos provided by:]

Hokkaido Museum, The Foundation for Ainu Culture, Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum, Shinhidaka Town Ainu Folk Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Higashikawa Tourism Association, Japan Heritage Council for the Promotion of Kamikawa Ainu at Daisetsu Sanroku, Kawamura Kaneto Aynu Museum, cinevoice, and Yukio Otsuka

[Written by:]

The Hokkaido Shimbun Press Asahikawa Branch Sales Department

[Supervised by:]

Chiri Yukie Memorial Museum

Published in December 2024

Supervised by:



Chiri Yukie Memorial Museum

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for more! ▶



This museum is in Noboribetsu, Hokkaido, which was originally called *Nupur-pet* (river with dark-colored water) in the Ainu language. This memorial museum serves to showcase both the achievements of Yukie Chiri, who was born in the area, and to promote Ainu culture through her story. The museum was built entirely through public donations, with over 2,500 people contributing to fundraising efforts began in 2002. These efforts led to the opening of the Chiri Yukie Memorial Museum in the fall of 2010.

INFORMATION

- Address: 2-34-7 Noboribetsu Honcho, Noboribetsu, Hokkaido 059-0465 ■Phone/Fax: +81-143-83-5666
- E-mail : ginnoshizuku@carrot.ocn.ne.jp ■Opening Hours: 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (Last admission at 4:00 p.m.)
- Closed: Tuesdays (except for national holidays) and Sundays (groups and tour guests can visit by making reservations in advance). Closed during the winter season (from December 20 to the end of February).

About the Town of Higashikawa, Hokkaido

Higashikawa is located close to the center of Hokkaido, with a population of approximately 8,500 people. It is a town rich in nature and beautiful rural scenery, including landscapes of Hokkaido's highest peak, Asahidake (2,291 m). The name "Higashikawa" means "east of the river" in Japanese. This refers to the river of the neighboring city of Asahikawa, which itself originates from the Ainu word "*Chup Pet*," meaning "where the sun and moon rises." Its main industries are agriculture (particularly rice farming) woodworking, and tourism. It is a rare example in Japan of a town where every household subsists on spring water, thanks to the blessing of the nearby Mt. Daisetsu. The eastern area of the town is part of Daisetsuzan National Park, which is the largest national park in Japan. Visitors can enjoy its beautiful alpine plants, vibrant autumn foliage, and mountains covered with powder snow. The area attracts travelers from around the world with its scenery changing from season to season and many outdoor activities, such as mountain climbing.

Since being declared as the "Town of Photography" in 1985, Higashikawa has promoted itself as a photogenic town. It has also promoted cultural exchange between Japan and other countries through photography, and actively worked to develop itself as a town oriented around culture. As a production area for furniture, Higashikawa is home to the Asahikawa Furniture brand. It is also home to many international students, as a result of establishing of the first public Japanese language school in all of Japan.

Check the QR code
for more! ▶

