

***Cip* (Dugout Canoe)**

The *cip* (pronounced *chip*) is a dugout canoe (*marukibune* in Japanese). It is an indispensable part of traditional Ainu life, used for transport, trade, and fishing.

A *cip* is always carved from one large section of wood, ideally from either a Katsura tree or a willow, as the wood from these trees is strong, light, and flexible. When a new boat is being made, the wood is cut into shape, then filled with water, which is heated with hot rocks to expand and toughen the wood.

Ainu communities have traditionally used other boats as well, such as the *yarcip* and the *itaomacip*. The *yarcip* is similar in size to the standard dugout *cip* canoes but made instead from bark (usually birch). The *itaomacip* is a larger boat, also with a dugout base.

The *itaomacip*'s size is extended using extra wooden planks, which are attached with robust rope threaded through holes in the wood. These boats use sails as well as oars, making them better suited to long journeys. As such, they were used for centuries for trade between Hokkaido and Honshu (Japan's largest island), and between Hokkaido and the Asian mainland. Ainu traders took goods such as fur and dried fish over to China and Honshu, bringing back iron, *sake*, brocade fabrics, lacquerware, beads for necklaces, and other materials.

Religious rituals mark various stages of the *cip* construction process, starting when the tree is selected for felling. The mountain god must be asked, through prayers and *inaw* (prayer sticks), for permission to fell the tree. Next, the spirit, or *kamuy*, of the tree is thanked by reciting this prayer:

“We will make you into a boat, and decorate you with beautiful prayer sticks, then fill you with grain and salmon. This is the highest honor for a god, and on your return to the world of the spirits, the other gods will praise you for it. Please hold your toughest flesh inside, and expel the soft.”

When the boat is ready, a launching ceremony (*cipusanke*) is held to bless the vessel. Participants decorate the boats with newly made prayer sticks and pray to the god of the river for safe travel, inviting a spirit to inhabit the new *cip*, before rowers venture out onto the water.