

Cartoon version!

Japan Heritage Site in Our Community

Awa-The Home of "Ai" Searching for the Supreme Blue of Japanese indigo.



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Character
Ai-chan
A 12-year-old girl
living in Tokushima Prefecture

In 2019, A story of our community was designated as a Japan Heritage.



It's something we can be proud of!
By the way, what is Japan Heritage?

Japan Heritage is **an initiative to rediscover the charms of Japan**. The purposes of this certification are to promote the local tourism and to energize the community by compiling the charms of the community into an easy-to-understand story and propagating it both domestically and internationally.

There are currently 104 stories across Japan.

The story of our community, now recognized as a Japan Heritage site, consists of nine cities and towns in the Yoshino River basin in Tokushima Prefecture (Tokushima-shi, Yoshinogawa-shi, Awa-shi, Mima-shi, Ishii-chō, Kitajima-chō, Aizumi-chō, Itano-chō and Kamiita-chō).

The 32 cultural assets that have been carefully passed down from generation to generation in each community create the story of Awa-Ai (Awa indigo).

A story of our community designated as a Japan Heritage

Awa-The Home of “Ai”

Searching for the Supreme Blue of Japanese indigo



“Ai” (Japanese indigo) has been deeply involved in Japanese people’s lives since ancient times and is known as a mysterious blue color.

The basin of the Yoshino River, which flows majestically through the northern part of Tokushima Prefecture, is the largest production area of *Sukumo* (Japanese indigo dye made of indigo leaves) in Japan.



The high stone walls and white walls of the houses of wealthy farmers on the plains of this area, the gorgeous *Udatsu* (firewall) in Wakimachi, and the rhythm of *Awa Odori* dance, all of which suggest that *Ai-Shōnin* (indigo merchants) were once prosperous and active to distribute *Sukumo*, traveling all over Japan.

In this region, *Sukumo* is still produced using traditional techniques, and the indigo colors produced by the *Sukumo* continue to fascinate people.



Let's find out more about “ai”,
which has a deep connection
with our community!

Ai and Our Community

In fact, the townscape we are familiar with, the Yoshino River, and even *Awa Odori* dance seem to have a deep relationship with *ai*!



In the plains of the Yoshino River basin, known as “*Awa-no-Kitakata*” (the northern part of Awa), indigo production has long been practiced, and was a major industry during the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods.

This was largely due to the influence of the Yoshino River, as the climate and land of Tokushima were well suited for indigo production. Even today, indigo production continues in this area.

When you explore the town, you will find the influence of the *ai* industry here and there that has flourished.

This includes the magnificent buildings known as *Ai-Yashiki* (indigo mansion) and the *Udatsu*-lined streets that are a symbol of affluence.

The prosperity of “*ai*” is also the base for a representative traditional performing art of Tokushima, *Awa Odori* dance.

In Tokushima, when did “*ai*” start to be grown?

Although we do not know when “*ai*” started to be grown for sure because no historical records remain, it is believed that Tokushima was a major producer of *ai* during the **Muromachi period** (1333-1573).

It is known from an old document called “*Hyogo Kitaseki Irifune Nohcho*” (account book for ship arrival at the north barrier of Hyogo) that a large amount of indigo was brought from Tokushima to the port of Hyogo in 1445, in the middle of the Muromachi period.

There is no record that indigo was transported from any regions other than Tokushima at that time, and it is said that *ai* was already a specialty of Tokushima then.

Tokushima bustling with “*ai*” trading



A scene of *Ai-ōichi* (reproduced)

This is a scene from *Ai-ōichi* (the Indigo Grand Market) held in the castle town of Tokushima in the middle of the Edo period. The large numbers of banners and people indicate that the town was bustling with a lot of activities.

All of these are also related to “*ai*”!

The history of *ai* is linked to our community today.



Ai-Yashiki
(The Okumura Family Residence)



The Yoshino River



Awa Odori dance festival



The Historic *Udatsu* Area

What is *Ai*?

By the way, what is “*ai*”? I thought it was named for the blue color, but...



Japanese indigo leaves



In Tokushima, a type of indigo called “*tade-ai*” is cultivated.

The leaf part of the plant, which contains the blue pigment, is used.

“*Sukumo*”



The dye called “*Sukumo*” is made by fermenting indigo leaves.

It takes about 100 days for masters called “*Ai-Shi*” to produce *Sukumo*.

Indigo dyeing



Masters called “*Some-Shi*” use *Sukumo* to produce an indigo dye solution.

When the fabric is dipped in this solution, it is dyed blue.



It's amazing how the green leaf color can turn into the beautiful blue.

There are 48 kinds of color names for “*ai*”!

The colors produced from *ai* come in a wide variety, with as many as 48 different colors. They range in appearance from light blue to dark blue.

It may be interesting to consider the origin of the name of each color.



“*Ai*” is popular all over the world



Indigo dyeing has been practiced around the world for centuries.

In Egypt, for example, a 4,000-year-old mummy wrapped in indigo-dyed cloth was discovered.

In North America, indigo-dyed garments were also used as work clothes.

This is said to be the origin of “*jeans*”, which are still loved by many people today.

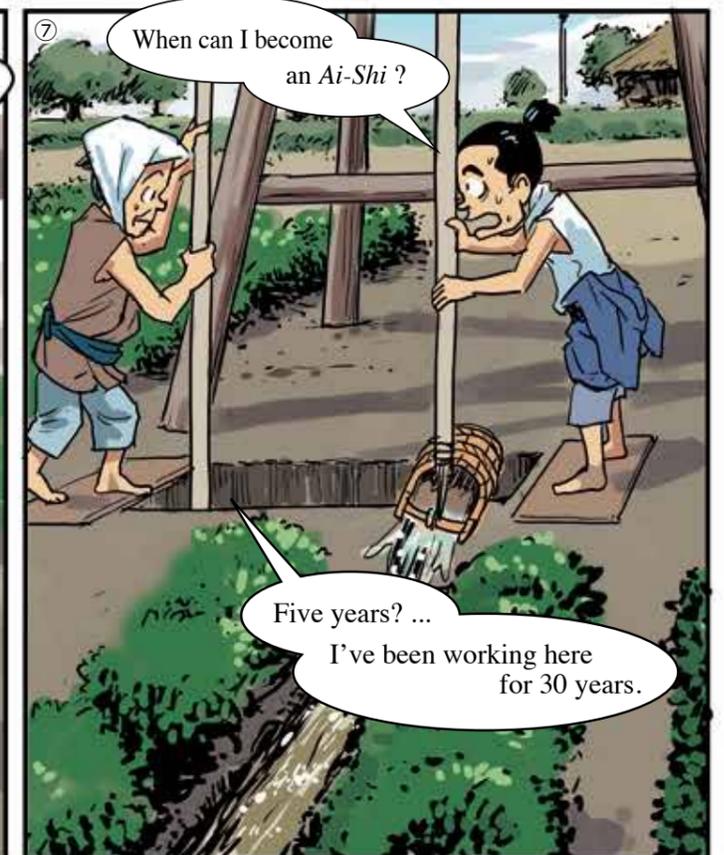
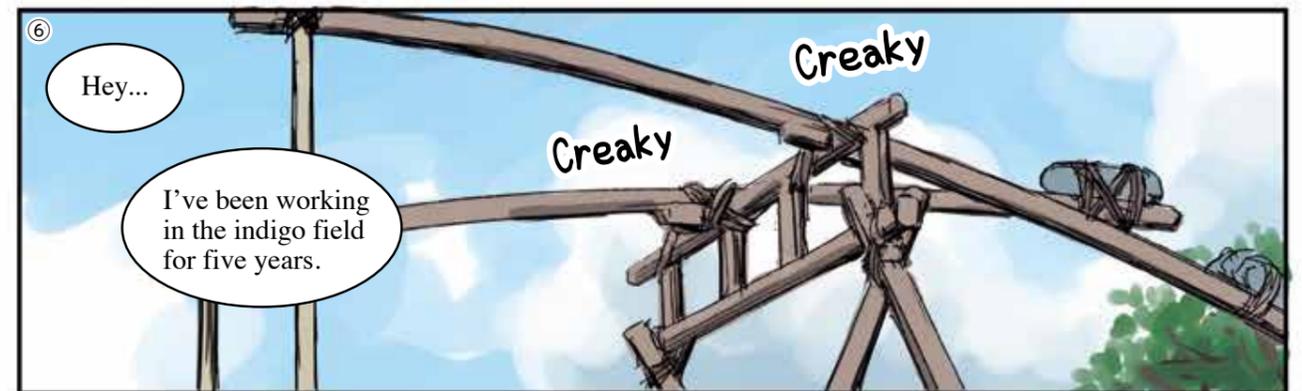
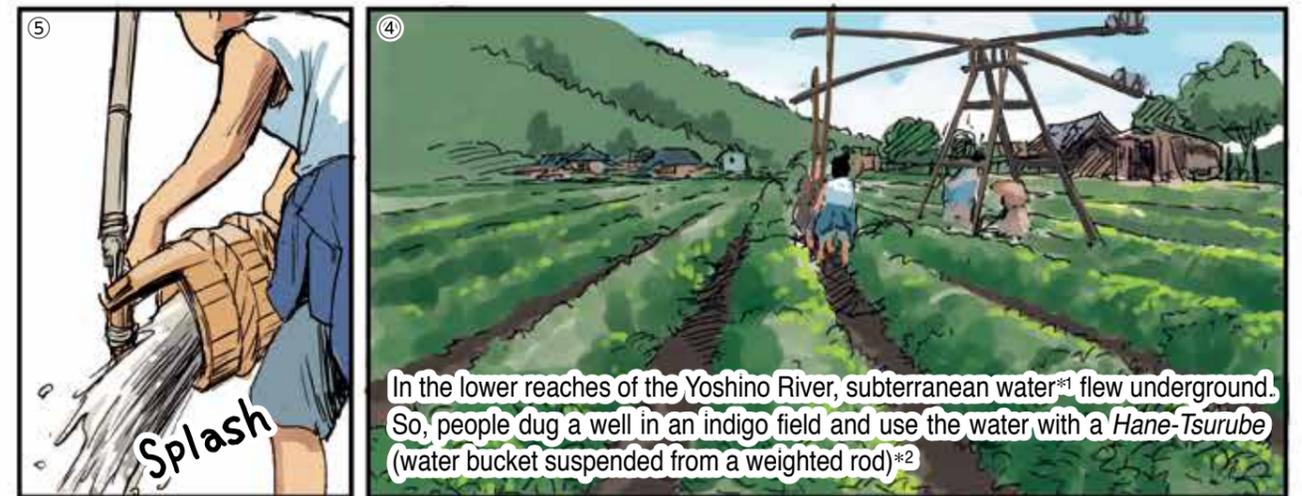
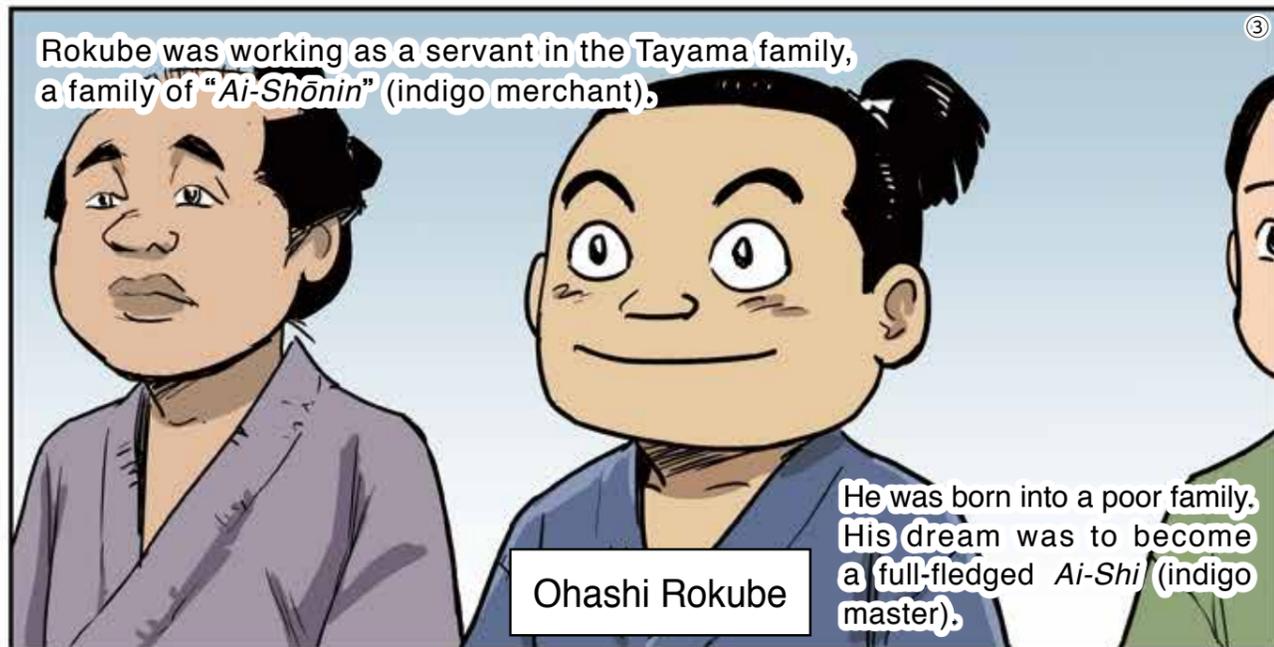
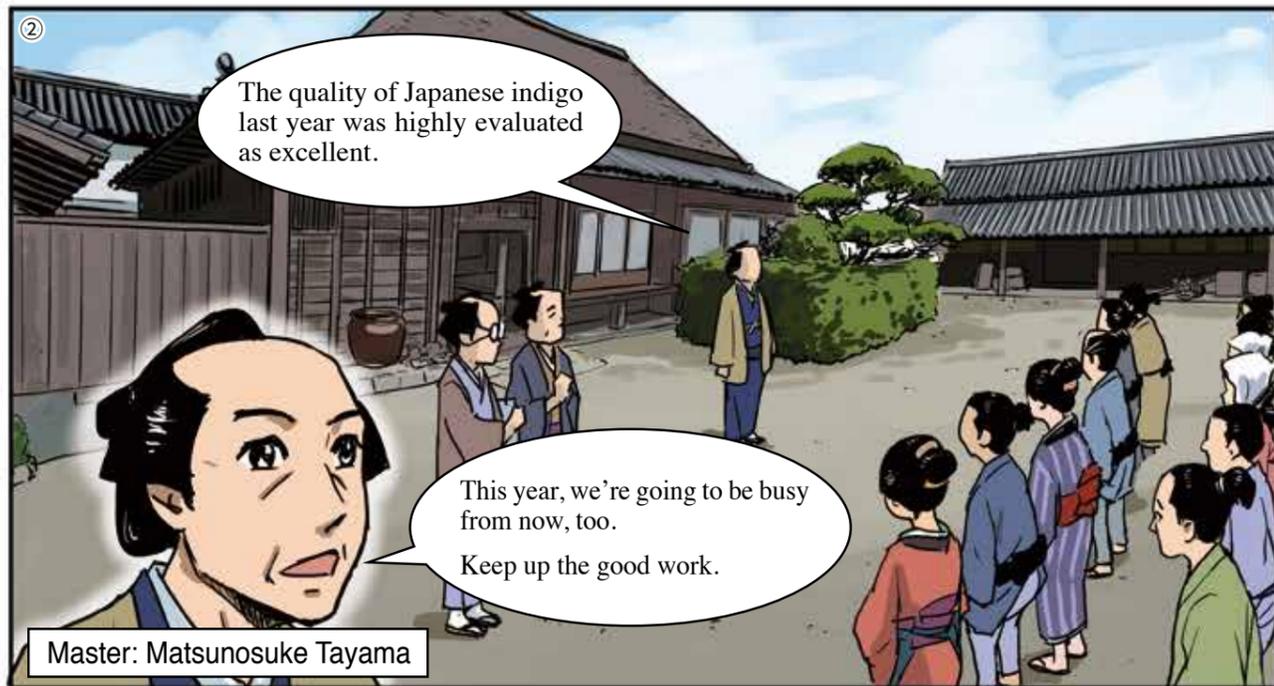
From the next page, let's take a look at Japanese Indigo production in Tokushima during the Edo and Meiji periods, using **cartoons!**

The story is based on historical documents such as “*Randen Kansui no Zu* (irrigation of indigo fields)”. It depicts a story of a young man working in indigo fields during the Edo period who, through hard work, became an accomplished *Ai-Shi* (indigo master) and *Ai-Shōnin* (indigo merchant).

The cartoon shows!

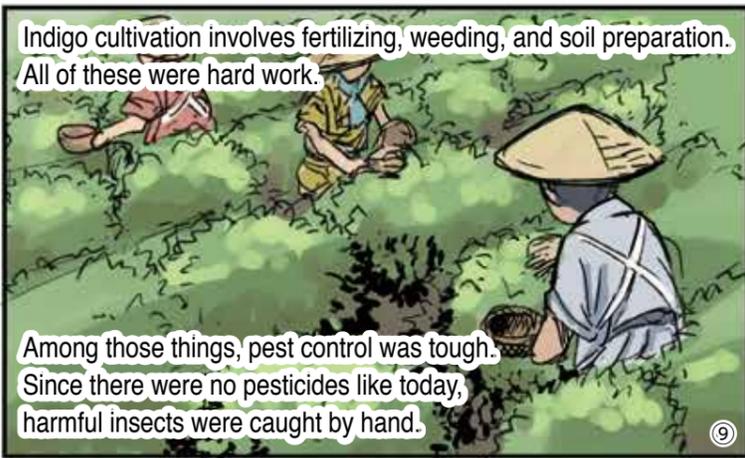
-A Story of Awa and Japanese Indigo

Starting from the next page!



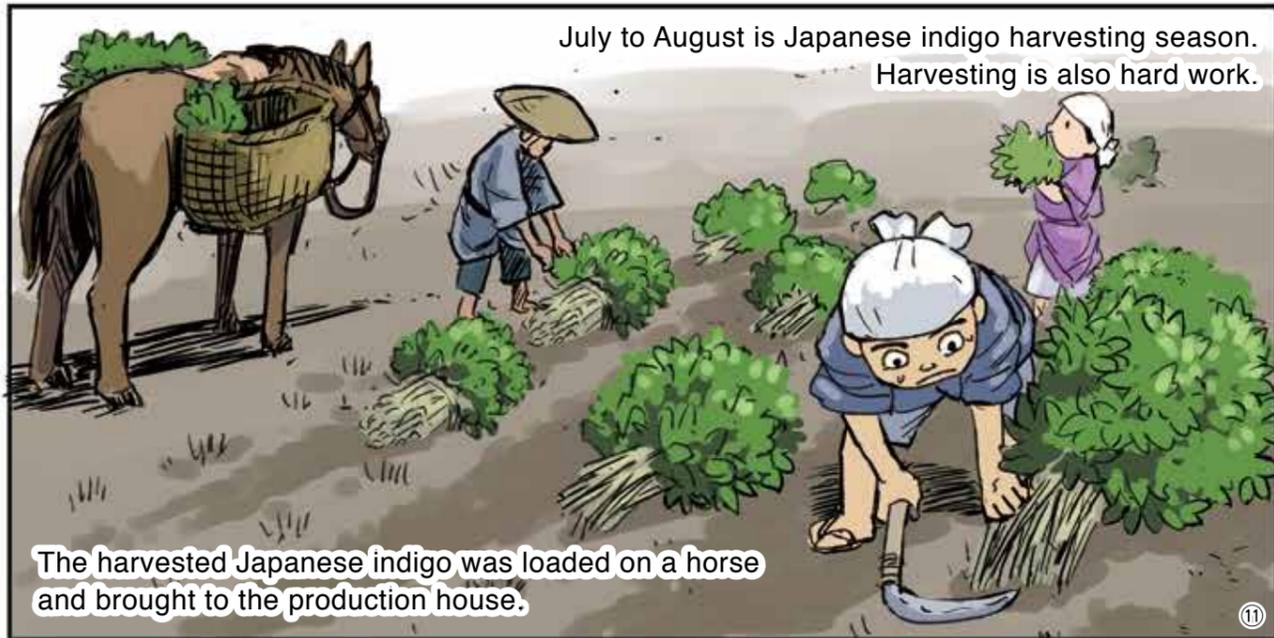
*¹Subterranean water...River water seeping under the stream and flows underground.

*²Hane-Tsurube...A mechanism for pumping water from a well. A weight is attached to one end and water is pumped up like a seesaw.



Indigo cultivation involves fertilizing, weeding, and soil preparation. All of these were hard work.

Among those things, pest control was tough. Since there were no pesticides like today, harmful insects were caught by hand.



July to August is Japanese indigo harvesting season. Harvesting is also hard work.

The harvested Japanese indigo was loaded on a horse and brought to the production house.



Yes, I will!
I will do my best.
Let me learn it.



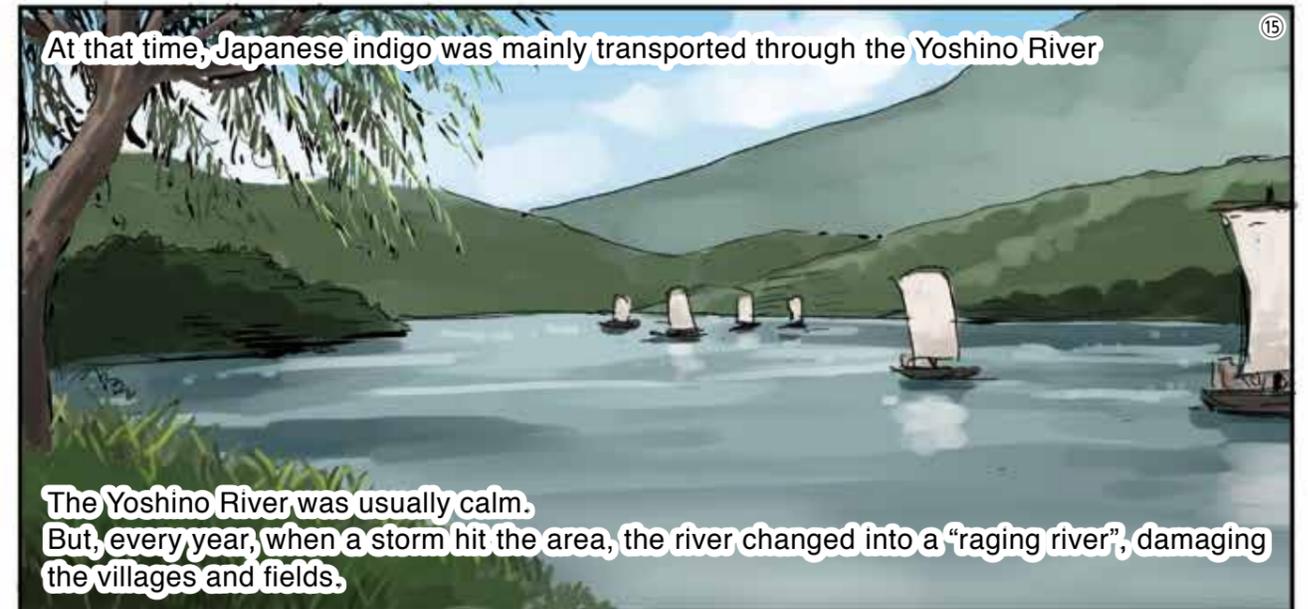
Are you Rokube?

Ah... yes.
Oh...
You are our master!

Won't you learn indigo production more.



Thud



At that time, Japanese indigo was mainly transported through the Yoshino River

The Yoshino River was usually calm. But, every year, when a storm hit the area, the river changed into a "raging river", damaging the villages and fields.



Roaring...

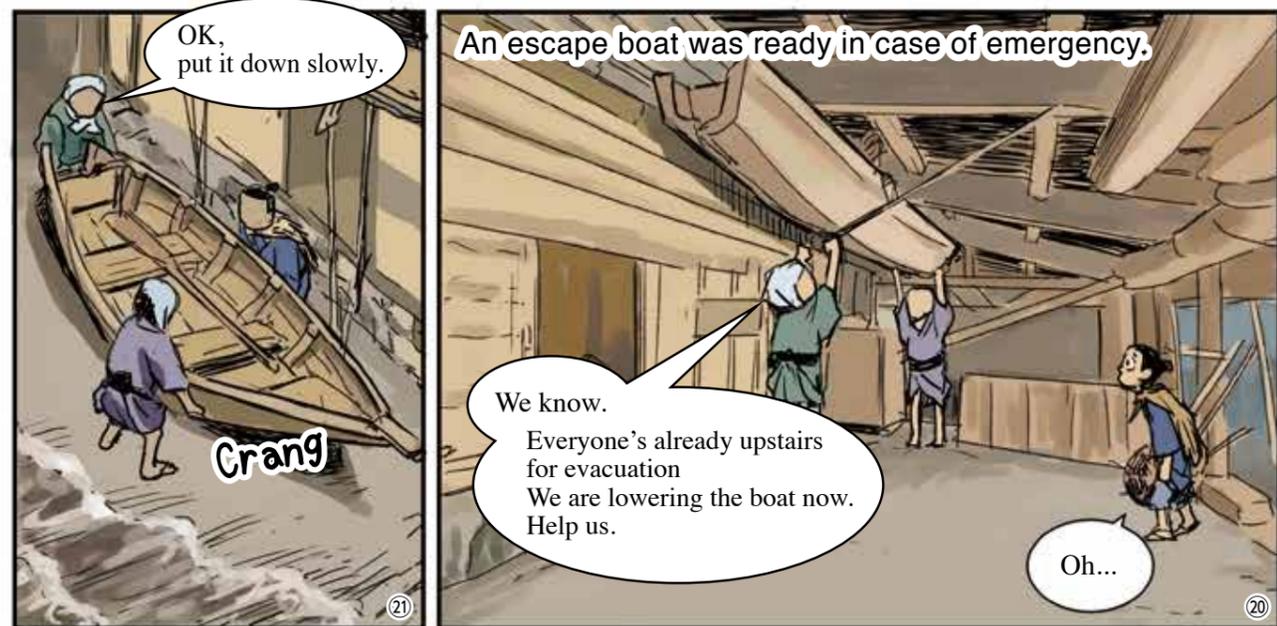
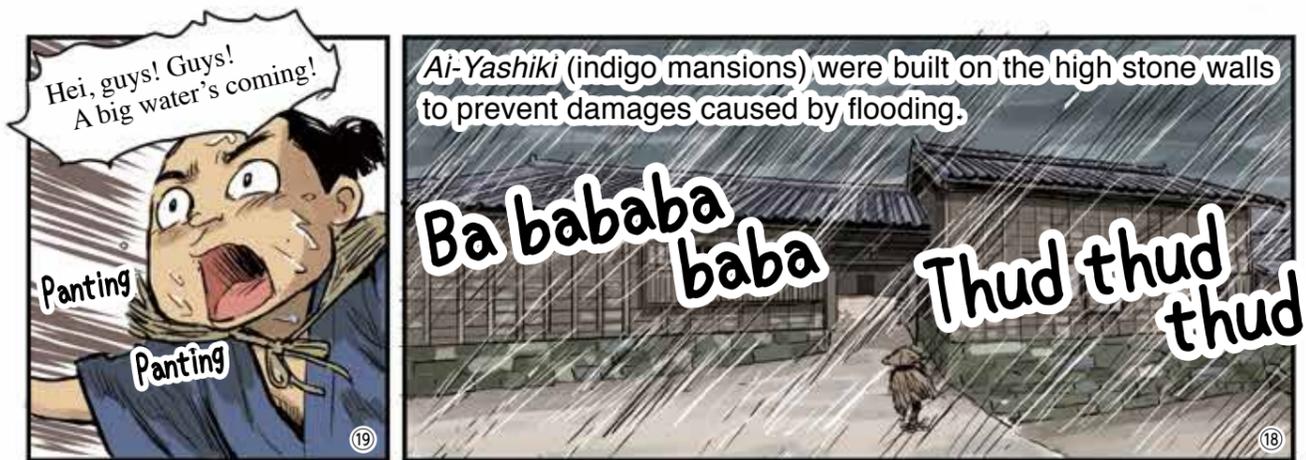


Uh...uhh...

Wuthering

Oh, my God!
It's going to flood.
Need to get everyone out of here.

bababaa



*Flooding of the Yoshino River tormented people, but on the other hand, it also brought nutrient-rich soil from the mountains to the region.

Point Work in indigo fields

I see that indigo plants are carefully cultivated in the indigo fields by using a lot of time and efforts.



Around April to May: Planting seedlings



When the seedlings have grown to about 20 cm, they are transplanted into the main field.

Around June: The indigo fields are all over green



Broom to expel insects

One of the hardest tasks in the indigo field is pest control.

In those days, farm tools like the ones above were used to brush off insects from the leaves. Manual extermination of insects required considerable patience.

Point Flood control in *Ai-Yashiki*

People at that time used to live in their houses with various measures to prevent damage caused by a flood.



Protective measure 1:

A mansion built on high stone walls

There are many *Ai-Yashiki* built on top of high stone walls to keep them out of the water during floods. The Tanaka Family Residence in Ishii-chō has a stone wall of 2m 70cm high at its highest point. In Mainakashima, Mima-shi, which is located in the midstream of the Yoshino River and was frequently flooded, there are houses and temples with high stone walls.



Ai-Yashiki
(The Tanaka Family Residence)



Mainakashima District

Protective measure 2:

Preparation for emergencies! Escape boat

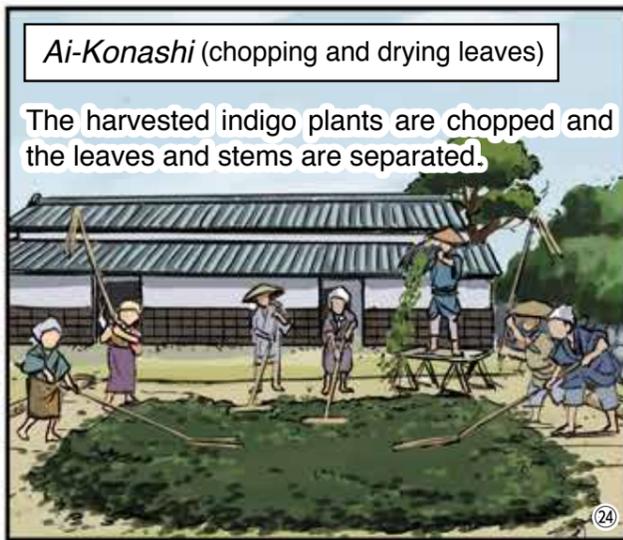
In an indigo mansion, there was a processing area for indigo dye materials called *Nedoko* (fermentation bed) where *Ai-Shi* made *Sukumo*. Boats were hanging from the eaves of the *Nedoko* for escape in case of flooding.



*The three most raging rivers in Japan: The Tone River in Kanto, the Chikugo River in Kyūshū, and the Yoshino River in Shikoku. They are called "*Bandō Tarō*," "*Chikushi Jirō*," and "*Shikoku Saburō*," respectively.



Indigo leaves are beaten, loosened and dried.



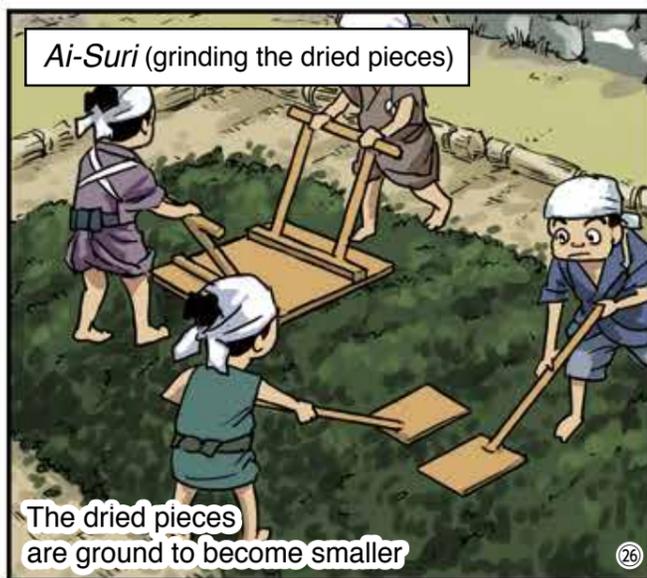
Ai-Konashi (chopping and drying leaves)

The harvested indigo plants are chopped and the leaves and stems are separated.



Thud...

The dried indigo leaf pieces are put in a sack and the sack is put in a temporary storage.



Ai-Suri (grinding the dried pieces)

The dried pieces are ground to become smaller



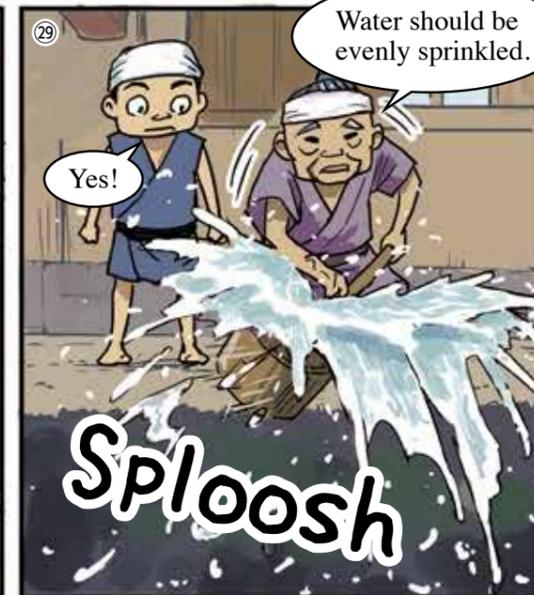
In September, finally, *Nesekomi* (repeated watering and mixing for fermentation) is the most important process in the *Sukumo*-making stage.

The stored leaf pieces are stuck on the wide earth floor called *Nedoko* (fermentation bed)

Thud...



The amount of water sprinkled over the leaf pieces is very important and *Mizu-Shi* (watering master) controlled *mizu-uchi* (sprinkling water).



Yes!

Water should be evenly sprinkled.

Sploosh



Water is sprinkled over the piled leaf pieces and the pile is well mixed and then the pieces are piled again.

Scrubbing hard



By piling up, some pressure is applied to the indigo leaves to ferment them well. This is called *Nesekomi*.

This series of processes are repeated every 5 days for 100 days to make *Sukumo* finally,

Thud, thud, thud

◆With the support of the Tokushima Clan government, Awa indigo had grown into a high quality *Hon-Ai* (authentic Japanese indigo) that was recognized throughout the country.

Point
TTTT

Production of *Sukumo* in *Nedoko*



Once the leaves are harvested, it's time to make *Sukumo* in *Nedoko*! It seems that there are various processes until it is completed.

In the northern part of Awa, you can still see the traditional way of making *Sukumo*, which has remained unchanged since the Edo period. The process of making *Sukumo*, is an important step in bringing out the beautiful color of Japanese indigo.

Harvesting indigo leaves

Ai-Konashi (chopping and drying leaves)



The stems and leaves are separated, and the leaves are dried for about 2 days.

Around September to December: *Nesekomi*



△Applying water



Kirikaeshi (mixing) ▶

The indigo leaves are spread out in *Nedoko* and repeatedly watered and mixed (*Kirikaeshi*) to ferment the leaves.



It is getting closer and closer to completion!



Covering *Nedoko* with *Futon* (straw mat)



From late October, when the weather turns cold, the indigo leaves are covered with a straw mat called *Futon* to keep them warm while they ferment.

Covering *Nedoko* with *Futon* (straw mat)



About 100 days later from *Nesekomi*, the fermentation process is completed to produce *Sukumo*.

Point
TTT

Masters who have reserved *Awa-Ai*



Masters who have taken over the tradition still continue to produce Japanese indigo today.

Awa-Ai has been passed down through the generations by masters who devote themselves to indigo production.

Ai-Shi (indigo master)



Ai-Shi mixes indigo leaves, which become as hot as 60 to 70°C due to the fermentation heat, wearing short pants in bare feet. The heat is unbearable for most people, but they cherish their ancestor's teaching that *Ai-Shi* should feel indigo directly by his skin while making it.

Some-Shi (dyeing master)



Using *Sukumo* made by *Ai-Shi*, *Some-Shi* dyes various items a beautiful blue color. In lye fermentation process, the dyeing solution is made from only natural materials such as lye and bran without using any chemicals. The blue dyed hands of *Some-Shi* show his passion for indigo-dyeing.

10 years later, Rokube started to sell Japanese indigo by himself.



He got his own indigo farm, employed workers and started producing *Sukumo*.

Today is Indigo Grand Market Day and a competition of Japanese indigo dyes in Awa is held.



This Year's Award of Excellence went to the *Sukumo* produced by Mr. Rokube Ohashi

Congratulations! Please continue to make further efforts from now on, too.



The indigo dyes brought in were evaluated with so-called *1 *Teita* (hand board) judgement method.

Well...now, I will make an announcement.

(Shout of joy)



Yes! Thank you very much. *2 Award plate

(People clapping their hands to congratulate him)

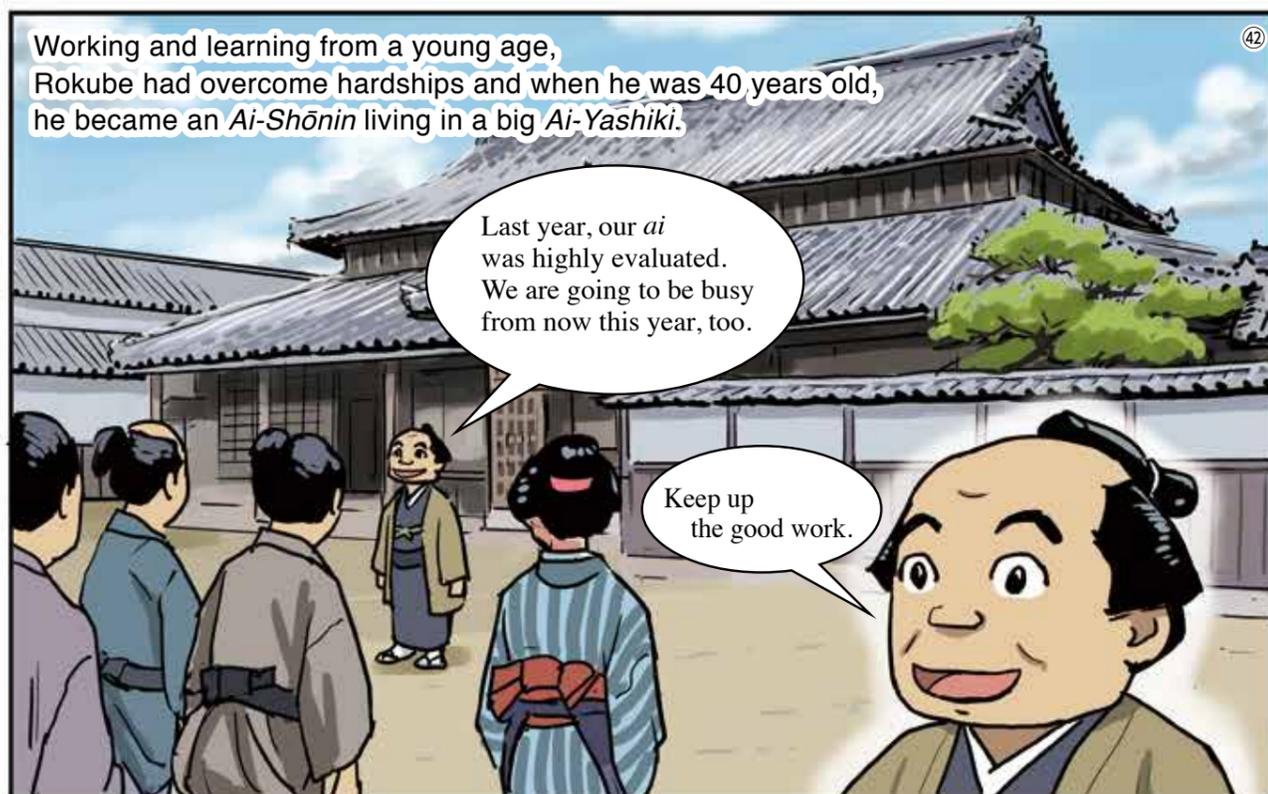
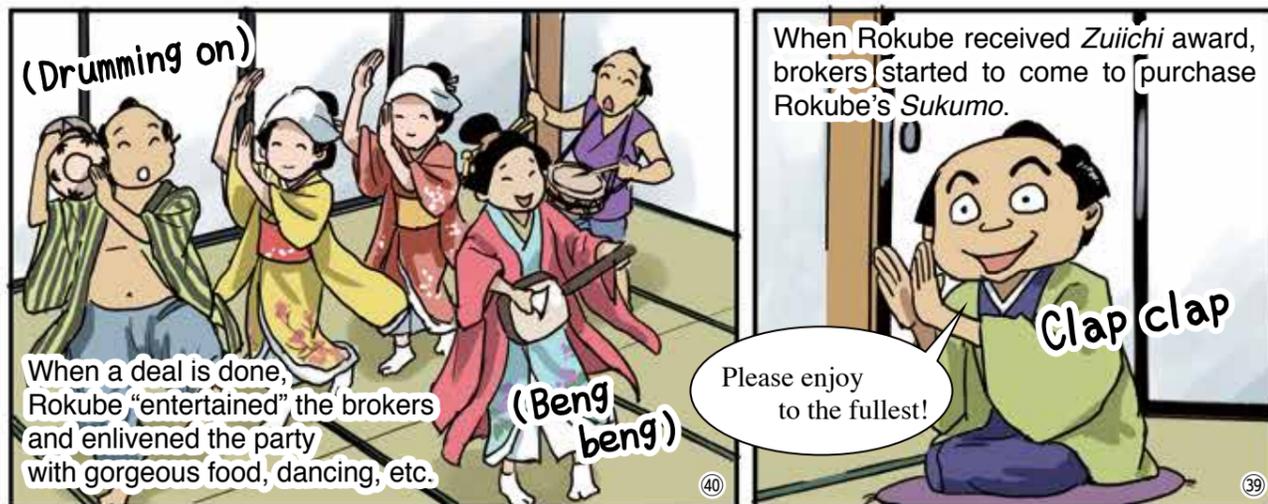


I'll do my best for the development of *Awa-Ai* from now on, too.



Oh~!

*1 *Teita* judgement method...using a small amount of *Sukumo* kneaded with a few drops of water, it was pressed like a stamp on Japanese paper (*Teita*-paper) to judge its quality.
*2 Award plate...equivalent to today's trophies. The grades of "*Zuichi*", "*Junichi*" and "*Tenjo*" were assigned from the top in order in indigo quality.



Wealthy lives of *Ai-Shōnin*

I am interested in the life of "*Ai-Shōnin*" who grew Awa indigo to be the best in Japan in both quality and quantity.



The interior of *Ai-Yashiki* (The Okumura Family Residence)



It looks like a castle! This is where they entertained other merchants.

Thanks to the support of Tokushima Clan government and the activities of *Ai-Shōnin*, Awa-Ai gained a high reputation throughout Japan. *Ai-Shōnin*, who handled everything from indigo cultivation to sales, built magnificent mansions and fully entertained other merchants from all over Japan who came to Awa to buy the indigo.

The rows of mansions built by those *Ai-Shōnin* made the "The Historic *Udatsu* Area".

The luxurious decorations, as if competing with each other for richness, suggest their wealthy lifestyle of the time.

A town where "*Udatsu*", a symbol of affluence, is built

The "*Udatsu*" built between the first and the second floor roofs of the mansion at the both ends was originally a firewall to prevent the spread of fire. It gradually became a symbol of opulence and wealth.



Performing arts fostered by *Ai-Shōnin*

I see that performing arts are very important to make a "dinner party" more entertaining. What are some of the performing arts fostered by "*Ai-Shōnin*"?



Awa Odori dance



Awa Odori dance today incorporates various elements from different communities. As the dance has been influenced by the cultures of *Kamigata* (current Osaka), Kyushu, Kanto, and Mie, you can sense how actively indigo merchants had been traveling around the country.

"*Bon*" dance songs were often sung in dinner parties in the Edo period. *Ai-Shōnin*, who were traveling around the country for their business, mixed them with folk songs and other types of music from various communities. As the results, "*Awa Odori* dance" today was born.

Ai-Shōnin, who loved performing arts, often invited puppet troupes to their homes and enjoyed puppet shows.

Awa-Ningyo-Joruri



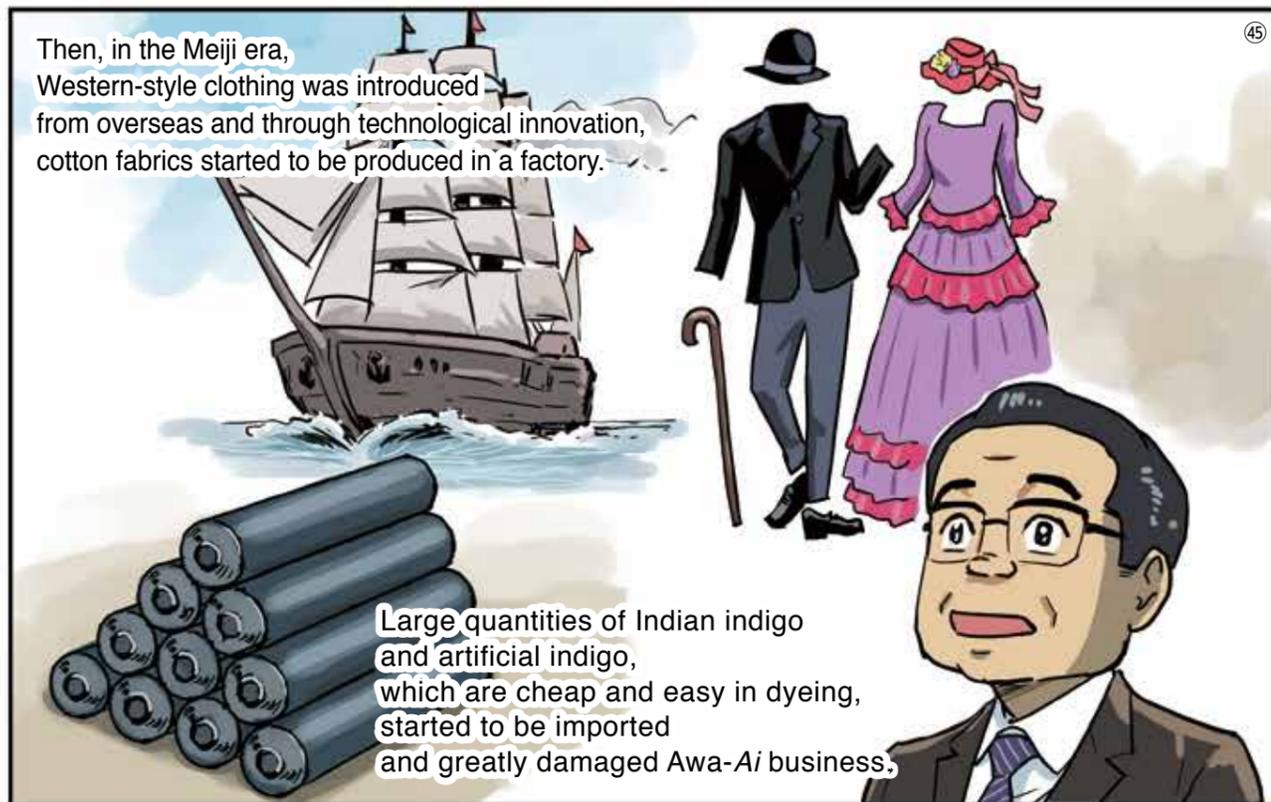
A puppet play consists of three elements: a *gidayuu-bushi-joruri* (*gidayuu*-style dramatic recitation), *shamisen* (Japanese banjo), and *sannin-zukai-ningyo* (a single puppet manipulated by three puppeteers). It is performed with large, shiny puppets and large movements called "*Awa-no-te*".

This led to the development of *Deko* (wooden doll) culture such as "*Awa-Ningyo-Joruri*" (Japanese puppet show with recited narrative and *shamisen* (Japanese banjo)) and "*Sanbaso-Mawashi*" (prelude puppet performer) using *Awa Deko*.

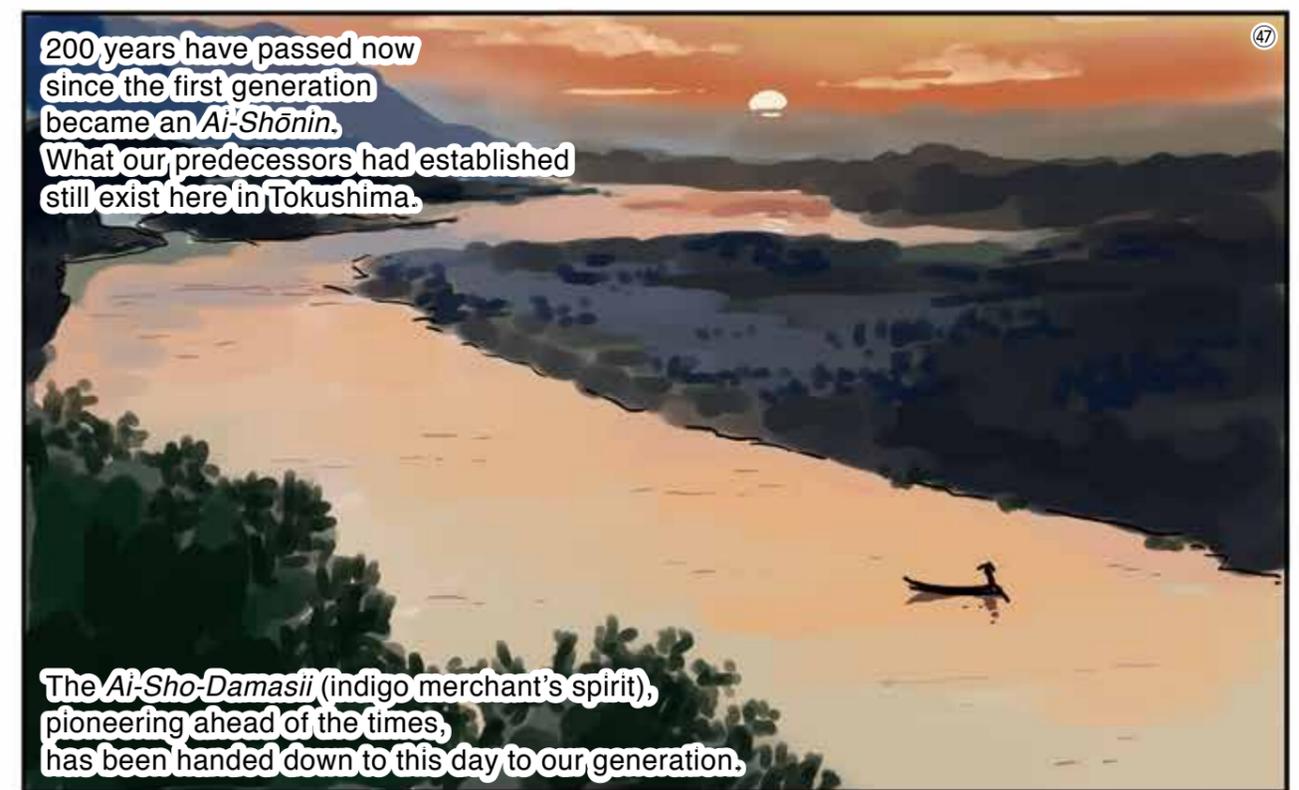
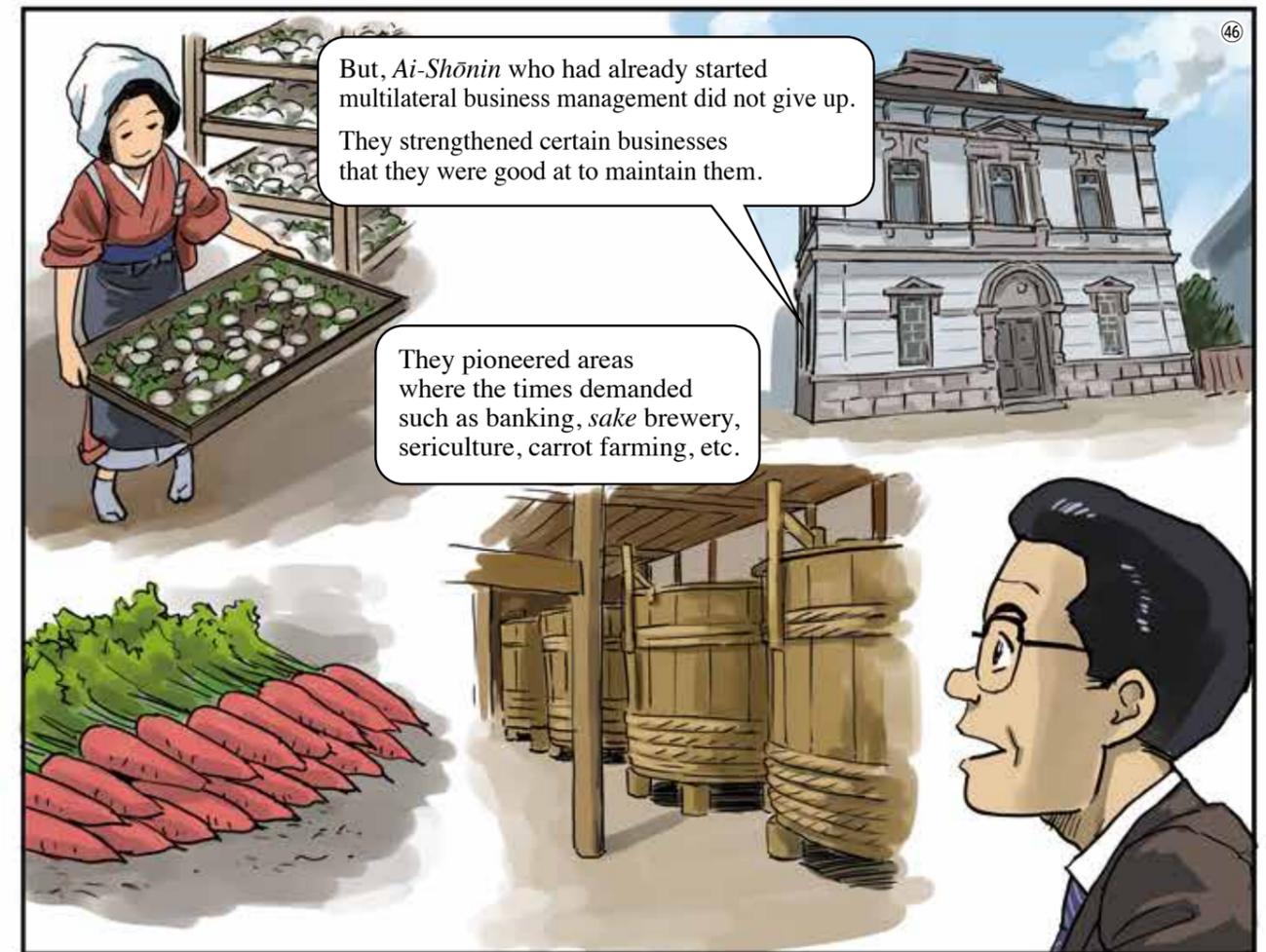
Awa Deko : "*Sanbaso-Mawashi*"



This is a performing art in which four wooden dolls are placed in two wooden boxes and performed by a pair of a puppeteer and a drummer. It is a popular New Year's event, and *Sanbaso-Mawashi* visited the residences of *Ai-Shōnin* and dedicated the performance to the indigo god in *Nedoko*.



*Multilateral management...operating in more than one type of business.





We have compiled a list of Japan Heritage stories from our community!

Awa-The Home of "Ai"

Searching for the Supreme Blue of Japanese indigo

Tokushima Prefecture

Tokushima-shi, Yoshinogawa-shi, Awa-shi, Mima-shi, Ishii-chō, Kitajima-chō, Aizumi-chō, Itano-chō, Kamiita-chō

"Ai (Japanese indigo)" has been deeply involved in Japanese people's lives since ancient times and is a representative color of Japan.

Foreigners visiting Japan during the Meiji era were amazed at the abundance of clothes dyed with Japanese indigo throughout Japan, and praised the country as "a country full of mysterious blue".

The Yoshino River basin in the northern part of Tokushima Prefecture, known as "Awa-no-Kitakata", was the source of this mysterious blue color.

This area is the largest production site of *Sukumo*, which is Japanese indigo dye, in Japan, and is the homeplace of *ai*, where masters still produce *Sukumo* using traditional techniques and continue to support Japan's culture of dyeing and weaving.

The landscape and climate of the homeplace of ai

In the basin of the Yoshino River, which flows east to west in the northern part of Tokushima Prefecture, large mansions erected on high stone walls can be seen everywhere.

These castle-like mansions are called *Ai-Yashiki* and symbolize the area.

Ai-Shi (indigo master) and *Ai-Shōnin* (indigo merchant) responsible for the production, processing, and distribution of indigo dyes, lived and worked in these *Ai-Yashiki*, sending out indigo dyes to all parts of Japan. *Ai-Shi* and *Ai-Shōnin* responsible for the production, processing, and distribution of *Sukumo* (Japanese indigo dye), lived and worked in these *Ai-Yashiki*, sending out *Sukumo* to all parts of Japan.

Frequent floods from the rampaging Yoshino River, caused devastating damage to the people living along the basin.

On the other hand, however, the area was rich contained fertile soil from flood that made it suitable for *ai* cultivation.

Ai is said to have been a specialty of this area during the Muromachi period (1336-1573), and in the Edo period (1603-1868), the Tokushima Clan government supported *ai* production and actively worked to improve its quality.

Awa *ai*, which have improved in quality, are now called *Hon-Ai* (authentic Japanese indigo) and have become popular throughout Japan.

Awa *Ai-Shi* and *Ai-Shōnin* competed to construct magnificent mansions and held gorgeous parties to entertain their clients who came



▲The Okumura Family Residence



▲The Yoshino River



▲A boat suspended under the eaves of the *Nedoko* building.

from all over the country to earn their trust.

This is the historic background behind the numerous and splendid *Ai-Yashiki* in the area. *Nedoko* (fermentation bed) to produce *Sukumo* still remain on the premises of these mansions, underneath these eaves, boats used for evacuating during floods are also suspended. This is what it was like in the homeplace of *ai*, where the techniques of *Sukumo* production have been inherited.

Sukumo manufacturing techniques

In northern Awa, you can still witness the traditional *Sukumo* manufacturing process, which remains unchanged since the Edo era. In early spring, seeds are sown, and at the end of the rainy season, the entire area turns completely green with *ai* fields spreading all over. The *ai* leaves harvested in early summer are finely chopped, dried and fermented to produce *Sukumo*.

In *Nedoko*, the accumulated *ai* leaves are repeatedly moistened with water, mixed, and fermented during the autumn to winter. The masters there exert their utmost effort to produce *Sukumo* whose color is extremely beautiful.

The fermentation temperature of *ai* leaves exceeds 60°C at some point, and the *Nedoko* is filled with steam, hot air, and pungent odors. The temperature and smell tell the end of the *Sukumo* production phase.

Then, after about 100 days of fermentation, it takes on the appearance of black soil clumps, when whole *Sukumo* production procedures are completed.



▲*Ai* plantation



▲*Ai-Shi* sprinkling water on *ai* leaves



▲*Ai-Shi* mixing *ai* leaves

Distribution of Awa *ai* and prosperity of the region

Awa *Sukumo* was highly regarded throughout Japan. *Ai-Shōnin* of Awa were also active in their business on a national scale. Not only did *Ai-Shōnin* gain wealth, but they also brought the cultures of other communities back to Awa, which then developed into the unique culture of Awa and is now known as *Awa Odori* dance.

Ai-Shōnin of Awa, who loved the arts and were generous with their money, often enjoyed puppet shows, and this led to the flourishing of the "Awa-Ningyo-Joruri" and other forms of *Deko* culture.

Even now, at the beginning of the year, the "Sanbaso-Mawashi performers" visit *Ai-Yashiki* to perform their art.

In Wakimachi, "Udatsu-no-machinami" (The Historic *Udatsu* Area) established by wealthy *ai* merchants still remains.

"Udatsu" (firewall), originally designed to protect against fires, are decorated gorgeously as if competing with each other for wealth.

The *Udatsu*-lined townscape and the mansions of the wealthy merchants, which even had docks built on their premises, demonstrate the glorious lifestyles of the time when the town flourished.

At the end of the year, the cheerful rhythm of "Shamisen-mochitsuki" (rice cake-pounding event) conveys the liveliness of the indigo economy at the time.



▲Awa Odori dance



▲Awa-Ningyo-Joruri



▲*Udatsu* streets

This is Japan Heritage Map of "Awa-The Home of Ai"!



List of constituent cultural assets

- | | | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ① The Tanaka Family Residence ② The Takechi Family Residence ③ The Okumura Family Residence ④ The Wariishi Family Residence ⑤ The Fujita Family Residence ⑥ The <i>Ai-Yashiki</i> of Suwa, Yamakawa-chō ⑦ The indigo-related cultural assets centered around the Kudō Family Residence ⑧ Color-on-silk agricultural painting "<i>Randen Kansui no Zu</i>" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⑨ <i>Ainōkōsaku no Fūkei Ryakuzu</i> ⑩ Kenshō-ji Temple Documents ⑪ Shōzui Castle remains and <i>Shugo-Machi</i> Shōzui ruins ⑫ Tokushima Castle remains and Tokushima castle town remains ⑬ <i>Aizen-An</i> and the Statue of Inubushi Kyūsuke ⑭ The Okumura Family Documents ⑮ The Motoki Family Document: <i>Kadoya Nikki</i> ⑯ The Takechi Family Documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⑰ The Hayashi Family Documents ⑱ The Tezuka Family Documents ⑲ The Indigo-related documents owned by Kitajima-chō ⑳ The Takahashi Family Documents ㉑ Awa Indigo Production ㉒ Tools used for <i>Awa -Ai</i> cultivation and processing ㉓ <i>Awa-Odori</i> ㉔ <i>Awa -Ningyō -Jōruri</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ㉕ <i>Awa-Deko Sanbasō-Mawashi</i> ㉖ Mainakashima District ㉗ The landscape connecting indigo farmland and its distribution hub ㉘ Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings of Mima-shi Wakimachi Minamimachi ㉙ The Yoshida Family Residence ㉚ <i>Shamisen mochitsuki</i> ㉛ Lye-fermented <i>aidate</i> dyeing ㉜ <i>Awa-Ai chūsen</i> |
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Statue of Inubushi Kyūsuke

Shōzui Castle remains and *Shugo-Machi* Shōzui ruins



Tokushima Airport (Tokushima Awa Odori Airport)

The Yoshida Family Residence



Tokushima Castle remains and Tokushima castle town remains



Awa-Ai chūsen



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Translated by Miyake Emi