

The Iwor Restoration Project in Biratori

19

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On the Restoration of Ainu Traditional Living

The restoration of Ainu traditional living is a national project that aims to “reconstruct the traditional way of life (*iwor*) of the Ainu people who lived in harmony with nature by building spaces capable of providing the necessary natural resources for cultural inheritance activities.” (The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture, 2005)

After its initial implementation in the Shiraoi area in 2006, the project came into effect in Biratori two years later (table 1). In the future, outposts of this project are being planned to expand all around Hokkaido in order to broaden the restoration project based on the unique characteristics of the respective areas.

Securing such resources necessary for transmitting Ainu culture is thought to become more and more important in the future. It is essential that we continuously sustain the diversity of flora and fauna in the forest, as well as the bodies of water nearby.

For example, riparian forests where *harunire* (*chikisani* or *Ulmus davidiana*, also often referred to by other names, depending on the area) flourish is a great environment for useful grasses. For example, the *Ulmus laciniata* (*atni*) can be used as the material for *attus* (fabric made from bark).

After the Meiji era, all the coniferous trees in much of the forests in Hokkaido have been felled, and the native mixed forests of conifers and broad-leaved trees are now changing their faces to become forests with only wide-leaved trees.

By planting or assisting the growth of native trees, we are bringing the forests to their original state, which nurtured the culture of Ainu throughout history.

Development in Biratori Area

This initiative in Biratori-cho is



Photo 1: Experiencing the harvesting of assorted grains as a part of Biratori area *iwor* restoration project. The residents pick grains using an Ainu tool called *pipa*

Table 1: The History of Ainu's Traditional Living Space Restoration Project

April 1996

The restoration of Ainu traditional living space advocated via “Utari Measure Conference Report”

July 2005

The “Basic principles regarding Ainu's traditional living space restoration” is completed.

2006

Based on the basic principles, “The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture” first initiated the project in Shiraoi.

July 2007

The “Report regarding the mid-term development guidelines for Ainu's traditional living space restoration project” is completed.

2008

The project is initiated in the Biratori area based on the mid-term development guidelines.

September 2011

The “Report regarding the new development guidelines for Ainu's traditional living space restoration project” is completed.

2011

The project is initiated based on the new mid-term development guidelines.

ongoing and has its headquarters in the inland area of Saru River. Basing its activities on the goals of the restoration project (table 2), the Iwor Restoration Project has been main-

taining the Iwor Forests (Nibutani), the space around the water (Honcho) and have been restoring the *kotan* space (Nibutani).

The restored Iwor Forests, in

Table 2: Principal Functions of “The Restoration of Ainu Traditional Living Space”

1. Securing natural resources needed for transmission of Ainu culture can be done freely under specific guidelines.
2. Transmit the culture of Ainu craftwork techniques deeply rooted in the nature using the natural materials harvested from the area, and host activities to experience and interact with Ainu culture which aims to coexist with nature.

(Ainu Culture Promotion Measures Facilitation Conference 2005)

Table 3: “Iwor” in Ainu Language Studies

Matsuura (1850) “Inside *Iworo teshike*” (erroneously recorded, should have been “*oske* (inside of...)” (notes by Okuda)

Bachelor (1889) “*Iworo*, a. The Whole. All”

Bachelor (1905) “*Iworo*, *Iuoro*, mountain”

Isobe (1936) “*Iworo*, outback”

Chiri (1951) “*iwor(-i)* the world where Gods reside. (=“*Kamuykotan*”). Specifically, outback or offshore for hunting or fishing. *Kimun Iwor* (further in, hunting ground) “deep in the mountains”. *Repun Iwor* (hunting ground off shore) “offshore”. *Iwor Kor Kamuy* <Bihoro> (outback, govern, god) “Bear”

Hattori ed. (1964) “mountain *iwor* (as the place for animals to live)” “cave (*kamuy*) ‘*iwor* (bear hole)” “inside ‘*iwor* (of a house, barrel, box, hole, etc.)”

Hokkaido Board of Education version (1992: Itsuhiko Kubodera version, from Ainu language, Japanese language dictionary)

“A place for hunting or harvesting living resources,” “The world where Gods live,” “A mountain where the village ancestors’ ceremony sites are.”

Nakagawa (1995) “*iwor*, [noun] *iworo*. Hunting ground: where game animals and wild vegetables are. It also can be a place where *Kamuy* meets people.

Tamura (1996) *iwor*. 1 [noun] the fairly flat area between the mountain ridges, ravine (a place for hunting, hunting ground), depth of a mountain. 2 “*iwor*, *iworo* [rank name] inside of ... (middle between two sides or center in the fenced area)”

Kayano (1996) “*iwor*. 1. deep mountain, outback”, 2. Hunting ground: Your own place where you go hunting. One’s regular hunting site in the depths of a mountain

(Okuda 1988)



Photo 2: Chise (shot from the Southside) that lined up in the *kotan* restoration space. The headquarters for the Biratori iwor restoration project has become the place for local residents to get together.

particular, are planned to take over the existing forests of the township (the former Biratori-cho Citizen’s Forest). It is relatively easy to transform these forests into more complex layered structures because it already has a modern forest floor established in the Meiji era. Areas near bodies of water, such as the riverbeds of Saru River are used to grow aquatic plants and restore waterfronts that used to grow *munchiro* (millet), *piyapa* (barnyard millet), *shipushikepu* (glutinous millet), as well as *saraki* (reed) and *shikina* (cattail) so that they can be used in cultural activities in the area. The space being restored as the *kotan* will become the headquarters for the Biratori-cho Area Iwor Restoration Project. Using this space, the residents will transmit and disseminate traditional techniques including chise building and Ainu ceremonies.

Cooperation with the Local Residents

The cooperation of the local residents is essential to this project.

In addition to material restoration, the residents are training people in the area to pass down techniques and ceremonial procedures for future generations.

In order to successfully popularize and promote this initiative, it is important to spread the culture, including the word, “iwor” to the communities (table 3). The main training activities include harvesting and cooking of wild vegetables and assorted grains, *ashirchepnomi* (ceremony to welcome new school of salmon), and *toma* (mat knitting). The contents of these projects are also made public at the Shishirmuka Ainu Culture Festival held every February.

“Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development”

Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

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