

Original Paper

Converting the Forces of Nature to a Cultural Force—An
Invitation to Pursue the Study of “Satoyama” (A “Satoyama”
May Only Be a Little Village Near the Mountains, Only at Best
a “Satoyama”. Yet, Even So, It Is a “Satoyama”!)

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Abstract

“Satoyamas” are important geographical spaces related to the living zones inhabited by humans that can be made affluent through human agency, unlike the Okuyamas (mountain recesses) located far from villages. It was important for us to reconsider the force of nature that we could not have predicted so far by studying “Satoyama”. I hope that “Satoyama Studies” will develop to become a study pursued by global citizens and another field of human study, combining, blending, and mediating among the existing sciences.

Keywords

“Satoyama”, “Satoyama Study”, cultural & nature Force, three nuclear crisis, old calendar, death preparation education, discovering tree burials and courage

1. Three Values Arising from Satoyama Studies: Dreams, Breathing Space, and Courage

We have lived through the coastal effects of the tsunami and the nuclear power plant accidents caused by the unprecedented great earthquake. These experiences lead us to radically reconsider human beings' relationship with nature. I have been focusing on the importance of Satoyama Studies. I believe this is a source of ideas for reintroducing the forces of nature to human culture. This could lead to creating a way of life in which humans coexist with nature, recovering true quality of life while renouncing economic growth. First, this report introduces the importance of Satoyama Studies as a sort of Local Research, reviews the old calendar as a cultural force and the value of Satoyama Studies as a

source of education about preparations for death and the discovery of the practice of tree burial. Finally, I would like to explain why Satoyama Studies are important to everyone.

1) A Dream of Participating in Satoyama Study as an Exercise in Local Research

Satoyamas (the land and villages in the vicinity of mountains) are nonurban resting places, set a bit apart from urban settings. They are spots for people to recover their humanity. However, you can practice Satoyama Studies even in an urban setting. Indeed, people living in the city may find they have an opportunity to discover the value of Satoyama Studies in their local setting. For example, consider the “Inochi no Mori (Forest of Life)” that was established by citizens at a park in Osaka City. Only a few people involved in local research know that Utsubo Park in Nishi Ward in the middle of Osaka City was once an airport for the U.S. occupying forces. After the U.S. forces left, the park provided natural space for businessmen and young couples to enjoy after the War. But, after a while the park faced the problem that the city was closing in on it and threatening its natural beauty. At that moment, the people living there held a meeting focused on preserving nature in Utsubo Park and they requested the Osaka City government to create “Inochi no Mori” inside this park. Park visitors are prohibited from entering the “Inochi no Mori” area. Trees and grasses grew in there, and insects, frogs, and lizards were able to return, as well as birds to eat them. This is an example of a Satoyama space created in an urban environment.

I myself found a new lifestyle in Satoyama Studies as an extension of local research at the rural Takayama site in Ikoma City, Nara (next to Osaka). I plowed idle land (once used for growing farm produce but then left uncultivated) in the company of volunteers who lived near there (members of the committee on a Meeting to Create Takayama Satoyama Park, Ikoma) and students (including foreign students). In addition, we held meetings four times per year (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter) to discover the treasures of Takayama, Ikoma (performing local research). We divide into groups and teach each other various subjects including local Natural History, Cultural Environment and Cultural History, and Images of the Future. This Takayama area is full of cultural treasures related to Bamboo, Green Tea, and Rice culture. There is the Ikoma Takayama Bamboo Forest Park, holding a collection of bamboos from all over the world. More than 90% of the *chasen* (tea stirrers: a tool used for the tea ceremony as established by Rikyu Sen: 1522-1591) are manufactured in Takayama. Nara Institute of Science & Technology in Takayama researches bamboo and the improvement of rice varieties (especially Yamato rice and old strains of rice). You can see that there are lots of treasures that arise from the combination of natural and cultural elements in Takayama. Finding these treasures is also one of the appeals of local research. Now we are trying use the study of the wisdom of the people of antiquity arising from our Satoyama Studies to develop new images and reveal wellsprings of creativity to solve the problems of the future, which we have identified as Food, Energy, and Care (FEC).

2) A Recommendation to Apply the Old Calendar: A Source of True Wealth and Breathing Space

While plowing our fields, we began to arrive at the understanding that agricultural produce, including rice, vegetables, and potatoes, used to be grown on the basis of the old calendar (that is, a calendar that divides time in relationship to the phases of the moon and other natural phenomena). For example, a local farmer instructed us that it is better to seed rice when the cherry trees are starting to blossom. So, we have begun managing our farm activities and ceremonies (marriages, funerals, ancestor worship, and festivals) using the old calendar, not the Western calendar. Once I was told by Mr. N., a man who pursues Satoyama Studies, that it is important to recover the old calendar if we want to recapture the slow paced life and escape from the super-busy lifestyle of modern people. He said this old calendar provides an explanation of the recent deviation, as seen against the modern calendar, of the emergence of cherry blossoms over the years. Surely modern people using the Western calendar do enjoy the emergence of seasonal flowers and the circle of the seasons. But the people of antiquity, using the old calendar, emphasized human ties while enjoying the changing seasons and the round of festivals. In many countries in Asia, the old calendar is still used to structure daily life and to schedule important events each year. The old calendar may be a symbol of a culture that supports breathing space in Asia. The Old Ones had celebrated a life enriched by green tea, rice, and bamboo, during which they enjoyed each season, chatted with neighbors, and observed ceremonial occasions. Now, these elements are not even observed in the way we care for the aged. By taking a second look at the old calendar, do you think we can recover our true lives, lived at the pace of nature?

3) The Satoyama as a Place for Preparing for Death: Discovering Tree Burials and Courage

I had been worried that I could not find means of research that links Peace Studies with the Study of Human Welfare. Now my hope has risen, having encountered Satoyama Studies. By discovering the value of the Satoyama as a place to prepare for death, I have become more interested in Satoyama Studies. Have you ever heard of a tree burial? In a tree burial human remains are buried under ground that has been legally approved as a graveyard, with a tree used as the grave marker. There are some cemeteries where the whole area is reserved exclusively for tree burials, and some other cemeteries specify that a part of the site is designated exclusively for tree burials. In Japan, the first tree burial cemetery was established in 1999, in Ichinoseki City, Iwate prefecture Japan. This cemetery was created to be friendly to the natural environment in the surrounding area, because only trees are used, not stones or concrete. The trees used as grave markers are generally low trees or bushes. *Hanamizuki* (Flowering Dogwood), Crape Myrtle, *Umemodoki* (Japanese Winder-belly), *Ezoajisai* (Hydrangea), *Mushikari* (Viburnum), *Tsuribana* (Korean Spindle-tree), and Maple are used. The trees are selected on the basis of whether they can be grown locally and whether they will be compatible with the local ecological system. Living as we do in the slender islands of Japan, the only way that we can now return freely to the ground after we die is to be buried under a tree, not by being confined to the tiny space in our family's tomb.

I think that Peace Studies and Human Welfare Studies should educate people about the fact that they need to study deeply the phenomenon of death (i.e., education in preparation for death). I am now coming to the opinion that the Satoyamas are the most suitable places for this education about death. For sure, learning about tree burial gave me an opportunity to review my own attitudes toward death and life, as well as various concepts of value. Next, I would like to describe what Satoyama Studies should be focused on, today.

2. The Three Crises That Threaten Human Beings and How They Intersect with Satomaya Studies

After World War II the culture of the global citizen burst upon us, and as a result we are faced with three crises. The 1st crisis is that affecting the natural body (as a material object). The 2nd crisis is the crisis of the living body (the result of a biological process). The 3rd crisis is that of the social body (the outcome of the interactions of many beings). An example typifying the 1st crisis (to the natural body) is radioactive contamination resulting from the nuclear power generator accident. An example typifying the 2nd crisis (to the living body) is the biochemical hazards such as dioxin, the biochemical agent hazards such as cloning technology and chromosome manipulation. The 3rd crisis (to the social body) is the crisis of the family system, the basic social unit. This crisis includes social problems, typical family dysfunction and the collapse of families. How can we human beings overcome these problems? We are forced to face the issue of how we should solve them. Now that we have experienced the great tsunami and the nuclear power plant accidents caused by the Great Tohoku Earthquake, as well as huge floods caused by climate change around the world, in order to overcome these crises we need to review our attitudes toward life, our views on death, and our ideas about history. Furthermore, we will benefit from studying again the cultural forces that can be found in the traditional spiritual realm. That is a resource for concepts of value derived from natural forces. Specifically, we need to depart from the principle of competition (that puts a premium on economic growth), and re-examine human culture from the perspective of nature. We must recognize that the Satoyama is a repository of the strength of culture and we must look back on past of history. The three major cultural icons of Asia: Green Tea, Rice, and Bamboo, were all born in the Satoyama. We are in danger of forgetting someday that the Satoyama is the root of the origin of these cultures.



Figure 1. Goshawk Family as a Symbol of “Satoyama” (Mr. Yona’s Photo Collections)

3. Satoyama Study Is another Way of Linking the Past with the Future

The term Satoyama refers to human modified forests and grasslands near villages, while the term “Satochi” refers to areas more clearly modified for human use, including agricultural lands, villages, and water sources. Some researchers who have been tackling the study of the Satoyama say it is “nature as culture”. Namely, Satoyama studies are not only about the regeneration of nature, but are at their core also about the regeneration and reformation of “nature as culture”. This idea leads us to a very important matter. Since the Jomon era (c. 8000 to 200 BC), our ancestors derived their cultural energy from the blessings of the Satoyamas.

Others say that Satoyama Study is a pursuit of eliminating the barrier between specialist (scholars) and amateurs (citizens), stepping outside the framework of conventional academism. I believe Satoyama Studies not only link the past and future, but are also a field of intermediation linking citizens and specialists. I believe these Satoyama Studies are a kind of practical research leading from the preservation and regeneration of the ways of life developed while surrounded by Satoyama nature and the Satoyama itself, to a sustainable society, and finally to a peaceful global citizenry (the global village). Satoyamas are important geographical spaces related to the living zones inhabited by humans that can be made affluent through human agency, unlike the Okuyamas (mountain recesses) located far from villages. Satoyamas have been cultural spaces that served as a base for the development of cultural resources, including the lifestyles, ways of thinking, and senses of value of the people who

lived near them. That is, humans ventured into an easy and wrong way of thinking that they could control nature, and they have significantly damaged the nature around them by their desires and lusts to capture and control the things in front of them. As a result, we have been completely overcome by a force of nature we never could have predicted before. Now we have to come to grips with the existence of the two faces of nature: nature as a threat and nature as a healer. It can heal human society and can help create cultures. We must pass on to the next generation of children recognition of these two aspects, and we can do that through Satoyama Studies. In the modern age when we classify the world into the natural and the social, the obvious idea is that natural science was developed to comprehend nature, and social science and cultural science were developed to comprehend society and culture. These have been developed, specialized, and elaborated in various ways. I hope that Satoyama Studies will develop to become a study pursued by global citizens and another field of human study, combining, blending, and mediating among the existing sciences.



Figure 2. In Japan's Oldest Satoyama (Ikoma, Nara Pref.)-Collaboration Program with International Students

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