

THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF SATOYAMA: A PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE FROM CITIZENS OF SUZU CITY, JAPAN

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Abstract: The *Satoyama* Initiative has been successfully launched under the auspices of the Japanese government to revitalize it locally and promote it internationally. It could be further enhanced if the term is properly defined from a social perspective and this study seeks to achieve this. Results indicate that *Satoyama* originated primarily due to remoteness, natural disasters and poverty, resulting in a quest to be self sufficient, resilient and sustainable. This was achieved by living harmoniously with nature which was further cemented by the belief that spiritual power exists in the environment and should be respected by caring for it. Agriculture became pivotal for the survival of the community although supplemented by gifts of nature. These results show that this concept can be promoted globally as a developmental model for the introduction of effective and sustainable agricultural practices if tailored to suit the local culture and existing traditional knowledge based on the revised principles of *Satoyama* in this paper.

Keywords: Agriculture, Resilience, *Satoyama*, Sustainability.

Introduction: *Satoyama* is a Japanese term for landscapes that comprise a mosaic of different ecosystem types which include secondary forests, agricultural lands, irrigation ponds, grasslands and human settlements. These were formed and developed through prolonged interaction between humans and ecosystems [1]. The definition varies from person to person, depending on their perspective [2]. Numerous groups and individuals have attempted to define *Satoyama* from their own backgrounds and interests, and refer to it as ecosystems, coppices and secondary forests, while others refer to it as rural landscapes including human settlements [3]. This study aims to give a social view to the discussion of the term and seeks to determine the perspectives of persons that were born and raised in traditional *Satoyama* areas of Suzu City, Noto Peninsula, Japan. There is an unbalanced proportion concerning the social and natural sciences within past assessments of *Satoyama* with most of the experts and researchers being ecologists resulting in the failure to capture how different social groups perceive and understand *Satoyama* [2]. It is believed that this would be valuable in the quest to promote the concept internationally.

Methods:

Study Area: The study was conducted in the city of Suzu located in the Noto peninsula of Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan (Fig. 1). It covers 1,866km² and homes approximately 189,000 households. It is one of the areas in which the *Satoyama* way of life developed, houses the *Satoyama-Satoumi* promotion and study center setup by the Kanazawa University, and received accreditation as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Site (GIAHS) in June 2011.

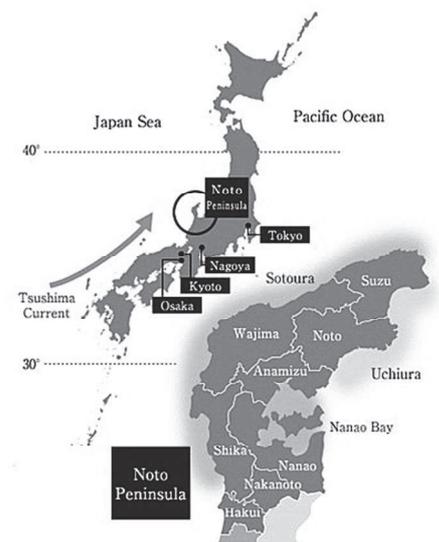


Fig. 1 Location of Suzu City [4].

Data Collection: Data was collected in January and February 2013 in the study site of Suzu city. Field trips were made to 10 sites of interest, 9 cultural activities were attended and available documentations and literature were analyzed during the study period.

Interviews: Key informant interviews were conducted with 8 community members who were identified collaboratively with the Noto *Satoyama-Satoumi* office. By these means, we aimed to reduce participant self-selection with regard to prior knowledge specifically related to *Satoyama*. Participation was nevertheless voluntary. A total of 4 household interviews where all family members of the home participated (Table I) with a total number of 13 individuals were conducted. Interviews were conducted in Japanese and translated into English with the help of an interpreter.

Questionnaire survey: Questionnaires were conducted in Japanese with questions developed

based on open ended questions identical to the interviews. A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed and 20 completed ones returned accounting for a return rate of 33.3% (Table I).

	Interviews	Questionnaires
Gender		
Males	52.4%	60%
Females	47.6%	40%
Age		
26-34	28.6%	30%
35-54	33.3%	55%
55+	38.1%	15%

Data Coding and Processing: We used a qualitative analysis approach to explore the context in which the *Satoyama* concept is perceived to have been originated and developed by members of the general public who participated on a voluntary basis. The aim was not to produce quantitative data and test hypotheses in a strict sense but to explore phenomena in depth based on the mental constructs of *Satoyama* by the citizens. Grounded theory was employed to analyze the qualitative data [5]. All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently verbatim transcribed and checked. The categories and sub-categories were identified. Then themes and categories were related to their sub-categories to form precise explanations about *Satoyama*. The final main coding categories included the definition of *Satoyama*, the origin of *Satoyama*, the evolution of *Satoyama*, the culture of *Satoyama*, agriculture of *Satoyama*, problems of *Satoyama*, and future perspectives of *Satoyama*.

Results and discussion: Definition of *Satoyama*: Views on the definition of *Satoyama* varied on the basis of age and nativity. Persons who migrated to Noto in recent times as well as young residents exposed to the *Satoyama-Satoumi* “Meister” program share the more conventional definition of *Satoyama* as described by [1]. Landscape Sixty five percent (65%) of the participants expressed the view that *Satoyama* could be in other areas of the world irrespective of the landscape that exists while the remainder were unsure. None said no. This is closely linked to the fact that those who are native to such areas view it as simply their way of life. The other aspect that was highlighted from this study was that irrespective of the landscape, what is important is that it is utilized in such a way so as to guarantee sustainability and productivity. What is evident in the data collected was the actual zoning and the specific activities that occurred in each locality. These were: forestry (collection of edible plants and mushrooms, charcoal, and wood gathering); sea and coast line (salt

production, fishery and sea weed collection); farming; and housing areas. This corresponds accurately with [6] as illustrated in Fig. 2.

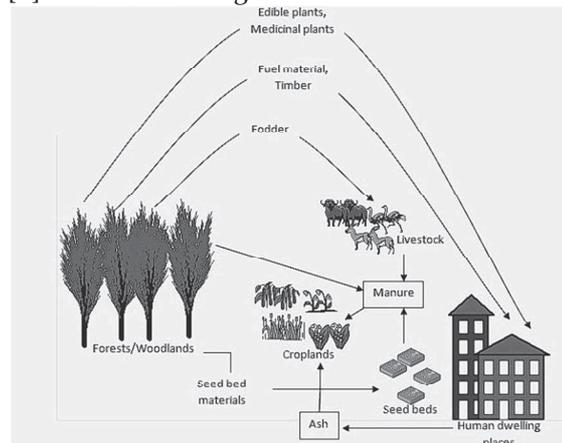


Fig. 2 Resource use and circulation in Satoyama landscapes, modified after [6].

Origin and Evolution of Satoyama: None of the participants gave an exact reason of how and why *Satoyama* began but what is consistent with everyone is that it evolved as a result of a combination of factors. Residents spoke about a time when the community was fairly isolated from other areas perceived to be more progressive in that era. Connectivity evolved due to a demand for pottery during the 13th and 15th century which was usually transported via sea (Suzu Ware Museum visit, 2013) and a demand for high quality charcoal during the Muromachi period (1337-1573) [7]. This remoteness was considered a contributing factor the origin of *Satoyama* because residents were forced to be self-sufficient and find ways and means of living sustainably and productively with their natural surroundings. Another contributing factor cited was multiple natural disasters. Residents mentioned tsunamis, landslides and harsh winters as the main examples. This resulted in the need to be more resilient. The other factor alluded to primarily by the elderly citizens was poverty. They highlighted times in their childhood when it was extremely difficult for families and as a result there was the need to have an increase in food security and adequately utilize gifts of nature to supplement their diet:

The Satoyama social culture: What was highlighted universally by participants was the fact that there was a need to work together as a community for *Satoyama* to be successful. Local rules were laid down and everyone had to respect them. Persons spoke of an auto-policing of citizens where persons simply did the right thing without violating the norms even if they were not being observed by someone else. Boundaries were respected both in forested areas where mushrooms and other edible plants were collected and the coastline where seaweed such as

Kajime (*Ecklona cava*) was collected. Though unawares to the ordinary citizens, it was a manifestation of the principle of carrying capacity as well. The need to lend a helping hand was also pivotal in the responses of participants. Families worked in their farms at the same time of the day, namely early in the morning and late in the evening when the day was cool. In this way, they were capable of assisting someone else who may have needed extra labor to complete a task. Upon returning from the farms, they would meet in the “*Shukaijo*”, a type of community house where meetings and functions were held, and women would sit and knit together. Reference [8] in a letter to her mother expounds on how closely knit the community of Suzu was.

Agriculture and Satoyama: All participants indicated that rice was the most important crop in the *Satoyama*. Most families grew their own rice to support their own families. Vegetables were also grown. There was a very strong culture of preserving many of these vegetables so that they can be used in the winter such as daikon (*Raphanus sativus*) and napa cabbage (*Brassica rapa*). There is evidence of the close cultural attachment to agriculture by the inhabitants of Noto. Tombs were observed in family owned rice fields which is indicative and symbolic of the continued support by the ancestors in the annual cultivation of rice (Fig. 3). This can also be observed in China as well as in Vietnam [9].

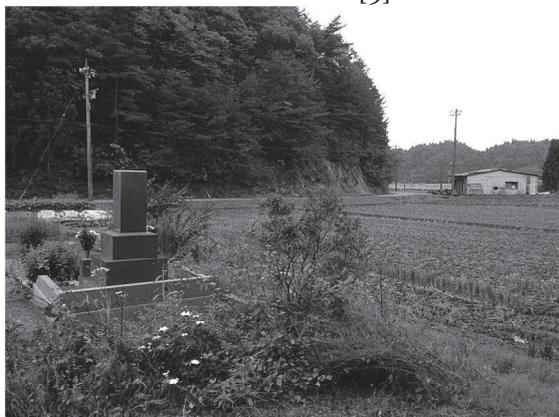


Fig. 3 Tomb in rice field in Suzu, Noto (Credits: Goto).

Aenokoto: This is an agricultural ritual recognized by UNESCO as an intangible folk cultural asset where, in December after the rice harvest, the master of the house welcomes the deity of the rice paddies into the house accompanied by feasting and thankful offerings. In February, the ritual is repeated to send the deity into the fields to bless and prosper the harvest in the new year. Because the deity is said to have poor eyesight, it is guided carefully and with lots of respect [7]. This ritual further reinforces the strong socio-cultural bond between the people and agriculture. Participants indicated that this ceremony

was an important social event because it was a relatively festive time that brought the community even closer and there was much caring and sharing.

Problems Affecting Satoyama: Participants were asked to highlight the factors in their opinion that affected the continuity of *Satoyama*. What is noticeable is that the reasons cited were the factors that reversed the predisposing conditions cited as the contributors of the origin and evolution of *Satoyama*. Many stressed that modernization was an important factor. Infrastructural development while done with good intentions was cited as detrimental in many ways. Economic development was mentioned very often with reduction in family size playing a major role since families eventually had limited persons to work the fields and eventually many abandoned them. This is also a contributing factor in the decline of *Aenokoto* since of the households that still observe the ritual, only a few have successors capable of continuing the tradition [10]. Globalization was mentioned from the perspective of the connectivity with other cities, resulting in the importation of food including rice which would have been unheard of in the past. Rural-urban migration on the part of the youths contributed in no small way to the deterioration of *Satoyama*.

Future Perspectives of Satoyama: When the future of *Satoyama* was discussed most persons were optimistic that it can be revived primarily by those who are non native of Suzu because those who have migrated may be very reluctant to return. Many participants felt that GIAHS recognition was a good boost to the area but because the imported products are cheaper than those produced locally, it may not necessarily translate into an increase in crop production and the use of abandoned farms. Many persons expressed the view that even for those who are currently living in Suzu has not really been necessarily living the “*Satoyama life*” and therefore for them it is still something not quite understood.

Conclusions: This study gives a sociological insight into the origin and evolution of *Satoyama* where aspects such as remoteness, exposure to natural disasters and economic hardships contributed to the community’s resilience and self-sufficiency. Because these are realities of rural and indigenous communities in general, these results further strengthen the quest of the *Satoyama* Initiative in its international promotion of the concept.

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