

new year special

Satoyama offers a chance to narrow economic gaps

KOSUKE MOTANI
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Satoyama is an ecological term that comes from Japan.

In Japanese, satoyama describes the mountains, hills and woods adjacent to rural communities all over Japan.

This meaning has evolved recently to be, "Satoyama encompasses the mountains, woods, farms, fields and rivers surrounding rural communities, which have a stable position in the ecology through the dwellers usage and maintenance over the long term." Human activity, most of the time, is harmful to the sustainability and recovery of the natural ecosystem. However, in satoyama areas, ecological diversity increases thanks to human activity over many years. In other

words, if satoyama loses the human hand, the ecology will start to lose the richness it accumulated over the years. In satoyama, humans are one of the forces that urge the cycle and reproduction of nature.

I have been an advocate of "satoyama capitalism" since 2013. This is a subsystem of the modern economy where anyone can exchange anything using money and success is assessed by the amount of money, more or less. Satoyama capitalism fills the gap of truly money-centered capitalism by putting more weight on the value of cashless exchange, including self-sufficiency, bartering and gifting, in addition to exchanging goods with cash. This new concept also values collaboration over competition, social risk sharing over self-responsibility, securing economic stability after retirement over scrambling to save while working. Conventional capitalism widens the economic gap between people by urging the rich to pile up their wealth, causing stagnation of demand that repeatedly causes the collapse of bubble economies. Piles of immovable assets are left

in the aftermath, at the expense of natural resources, which otherwise would have been passed on to the next generation. In contrast, satoyama capitalism, replicating the human participation in the sustainability and recovery cycle of the Japanese satoyama, ensures the circulation of resources and cash through economic activities and promotes the rejuvenation of younger generations. Values that cannot be secured by money such as relief and trust can be gained through the practice of satoyama capitalism.

Satoyama capitalism is not a new principle. It revisits and appreciates the lifestyle of the elderly who live in declining agricultural and fishing communities. The rural areas of Japan, compared to the Western world or even neighbors such as China and Korea, have abundant rain, rich soil and diverse vegetation which allows cooking on stoves using firewood as fuel and growing your own food in the garden, even today. Contrary to large-scale agriculture in the U.S. or Australia dominating the global market, which exhausts the soil and groundwater, satoyama ecology provides water, food and fuel for free, to a certain extent, without destroying the natural cycle. The satoyama ecology has very high sustainability. Elderly people living in urban areas lose any means of income after retirement and stay haunted by future possibilities of pension cuts. However, the elderly populations in rural areas, who support some, if not all their lifestyle with satoyama capitalism, have less fears in aging. I suppose that the essence of satoyama capitalism can be introduced in urban life to recreate the safety and security provided in rural areas, by utilizing idle resources available due to the reduction of the working population. Using idle land as allotment gardens, promoting the use of solar and woody biomass fuel, rebuilding the culture of mutual aid based on a barter economy are some ideas.

My proposition is often criticized by people who say, "The amount of fuel and food obtained from satoyama is negligible from the national perspective." To this, I would like to say that I am not proposing for a 100 percent self-sustained economy. I am saying that "all Japanese people do not have to depend on 100 percent of their livelihood on money. Even allocating 1 percent of your economy to cashless trade would make a difference." Zero

is not the only alternative to 100. Ninety-nine is also quite different from 100. Businesses that sell and buy goods can include elements gained by self-sufficiency and bartering in their first cost and this will provide leeway in their work. Satoyama capitalism and its promotion is more like an insurance plan that would fill in the gap of conventional capitalism when it fails. Continuing to pay the premium, however small, would help in emergencies, such as large earthquakes and other disasters. Moreover, since the population living in satoyama areas are very small, moving to isolated rural areas from urban areas would allow a self-sufficient lifestyle for one, if not all.

Not including satoyama as an economic insurance and throwing away all other options to pursue "international economic competition," saying "making money through economic growth is the only solution," is just another children's comic that encourages reckless effort without strategy to win in sports. An exit strategy, as well as many options, is crucial in making any project successful. Little by little, urbanites in their 20s and 30s are leaving cities to rural areas to have a whole human life. Younger generations are leaving cities, where child-rearing is a challenge and birth rates are dropping, to move to agricultural and fishery communities. These people are prone to have more children due to the cost reduction effect satoyama has by shrinking daily costs through the provision of its resources. Satoyama capitalism is spreading silently and becoming a hallmark for those who still have hope in stopping the rapid population decrease and increasing sustainability in Japan.



Top: A satoyama scene of a vast field that spreads in a valley. Bottom: Farmers do their own training to grow organic vegetables at a satoyama farm. KOSUKE MOTANI

Gaining non-monetary profit

KYOSUKE INOUE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, NHK ENTERPRISES, INC.



With the overwhelming influence of climate change around the world, satoyama has become the buzzword for all citizens trying to stop it. Repositioning humans as a part of nature and all living creatures on earth, the satoyama concept, which is unique to Japan, has emerged. It urges all dwellers to lend cautious ears to the wilderness nearby and consciously change the environment so both humans and the surrounding nature can thrive.

This concept has been gathering empathy from other countries as a mutually advantageous relationship. The concept has further

evolved in Japan as "satoyama capitalism" and supporters of this new economic policy are increasing. By utilizing resources of the satoyama, namely the culture, history and people nurtured by the nature and their surroundings, the community will gain wealth that is not limited to currency. The younger generations, who have seen the vicious cycle of the rise and fall of bubble economies, have grown to loath the modern economy, which has been built on gaining wealth through any means. In rejection of that, the younger generation has embarked on new projects in regions of Japan where the population has dwindled that have become labeled as "soon to be impoverished" municipalities. These younger people are pioneers in creating a new economy that is beneficial for both humans and nature and does not eliminate people through fierce competition. This movement is what I would like to support and follow this year, as I have done in the past.

Innovation through diversity

TAKASHI MITACHI
SENIOR ADVISOR, THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP K.K.



The word commons in the West often connotes the conservation of natural land resources accessible to all members of society.

Recently, digital commons, or the shared knowledge on the internet, have also become prevalent. Both are based on the almost philanthropic contributions of individuals for public good.

Satoyama started and evolved in a similar manner. Originally, it meant a shared woodland used and main-

tained by local individuals, while today it is associated with new thinking and knowledge on local economies and their sustainability, often participated in by locals, as well as digitally equipped non-locals.

However, satoyama has unique attributes when compared to its Western counterparts.

Satoyama, at its best, both encompasses and is fortified by quite a few Japanese cultural essences — from cuisine to energy utilization.

Being unique contributes to cultural diversity, which is the birthplace of innovation. I sincerely hope to have a plethora of perspectives on satoyama from around the world so that it would become more relevant and valuable in solving global issues such as aging societies in culturally aligned ways.

Natural beauty, ocean bounty

EIKEI SUZUKI
MIE PREFECTURE GOVERNOR



Situated approximately in the center of Honshu on the Pacific coast, Mie Prefecture is rich in nature. We proudly welcomed global leaders to Ise-Shima in 2016

for a G-7 summit where we successfully presented the charms and opportunities of our hometown to the world.

Besides the sacred historical heritage of the Ise Grand Shrine, Mie is famous for pearls, oysters and other treasures from the ocean. The culture of *ama*, women who make a living diving for marine products, has helped enhance the aware-

ness of sustainable fishing and the preservation of biodiversity of the coasts.

In the mountainous and forested regions, we have been trying to keep the natural balance by using resources wisely. Having ways to control the number of harmful animals protects the lives of farmers and natural diversity. Maintaining forests in good condition as a habitat for animals is one, while appreciating the products of nature in the form of game delicacies is another.

Through these efforts, we strive to make Mie an attractive prefecture where younger generations will want to stay and tourists will want to visit. To create the happiness and richness that does not solely rely on financial capitalism, I hope that the Satoyama Consortium serves as a base for the active exchanging of ideas.

Cooperation is key to success

TADASHI MATSUSHIMA
REPRESENTATIVE DIRECTOR, SETOUCHI JAM'S GARDEN CO., LTD



It has been 10 years since I quit my job at an electric power company and started Jam's Garden on Suo-Oshima, an island in Yamaguchi Prefecture, at the age of 35.

Jam's Garden, now consisting of a farm, jam factory, cafe and shop, as well as 30 staff making 150,000 jars of jam every year, started out as nothing more than a small lab inside the Buddhist temple that my father-in-law runs on the island.

The business grew in collaboration

with local farmers, photographers, web designers and many others in the community. The key to succeed in starting a business in rural areas is to network with people there and to use their ideas and knowledge for the benefit of all.

At the same time, it is equally important to connect to the world outside the community to make your business economically sustainable, especially in this era of rural depopulation and decline.

The situation has greatly changed since 10 years ago with municipalities offering extensive support for new residents in the countryside and more tools that shorten the distances between cities and rural areas such as the internet and improved transportation systems.

I believe that the Satoyama Consortium can provide additional support for regional revitalization.

The Japan Times
Satoyama Consortium

Join us!

Participating Municipalities (as of Dec. 22)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mie Prefecture, Eikei Suzuki (Governor) Hiroshima Prefecture, Hidehiko Yuzaki (Governor) Kumamoto Prefecture, Ikuo Kabashima (Governor) Nagano Prefecture, Shuichi Abe (Governor) Okayama Prefecture, Ryuta Ibaragi (Governor) Chiba City, Toshihito Kumagai (Mayor) Fukuoka City, Soichiro Takashima (Mayor) Fukuyama City, Naoki Edahiro (Mayor) Hamamatsu City, Yasutomo Suzuki (Mayor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iina City, Takashi Shirotori (Mayor) Kamakura City, Takashi Matsuo (Mayor) Kumano City, Kanji Kawakami (Mayor) Kuwana City, Narutaka Ito (Mayor) Minamisoma City, Katsunobu Sakurai (Mayor) Nara City, Gen Nakagawa (Mayor) Nichinan City, Kyohei Sakita (Mayor) Numata City, Koichi Yokoyama (Mayor) Odawara City, Kenichi Kato (Mayor) Onomichi City, Yuko Hiratani (Mayor) Toyama City, Masashi Mori (Mayor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toyota City, Toshihiko Ota (Mayor) Tsukuba City, Tatsuo Igarashi (Mayor) Yamagata City, Takahiro Sato (Mayor) Zushi City, Ryuichi Hirai (Mayor) Assabu-cho, Masami Shibuta (Mayor) Hakone-machi, Nobuo Yamaguchi (Mayor) Hayama-machi, Takahito Yamanashi (Mayor) Jinsekikogen-cho, Yoshinori Irie (Mayor) Ohnan-cho, Ryoji Ishibashi (Mayor) Suo-oshima-cho, Takumi Shiiki (Mayor)
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