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Advantages and Disadvantages of the Satoyama Landscape



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ABSTRACT

The Satoyama landscape (undeveloped woodlands near populated areas) refers to areas located between virgin nature and urban areas; it consists of settlements, surrounding secondary forests, farmland, reservoirs, and grasslands. Japan's Satoyama landscape has recently attracted tourists, particularly foreigners. The national government and administration also view the Satoyama landscape favorably and recommend its continuation. Returning to the definition of the Satoyama landscape, we believe that it is a place created by people and that it has some drawbacks. In this article, we define the "Satoyama landscape" and discuss its advantages and disadvantages.



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INTRODUCTION

“Satoyama landscape” refers to the original scenery existing in Japan (nostalgic scenery reminiscent of how it used to be)¹⁾. A schematic diagram is provided in Figure 1. For older Japanese adults, the Satoyama landscape is the natural scenery that surrounded them during childhood. However, its definition remains ambiguous. A typical definition places the Satoyama landscape between the natural environment and urban space. Settlements (places where households are gathered) are surrounded by secondary forests (forests that have regenerated because the soil has not been destroyed, even if the original forest was lost due to logging and forest fires), as well as mixed farmland, reservoirs, and grasslands²⁾. This scene applies to “rural” landscapes that are not densely populated and contain abundant greenery. The Satoyama landscape can also be thought of as the entire rural environment—a living area where people can coexist with nature—that has remained in the long history of human life. This definition includes both humans and nature. However, in certain cases, mountains do not fit this definition, as they are home to many wild animals and plants that do not require human intervention; yet, the name, “Satoyama landscape” is applied. Some people simply understand the Satoyama landscape as a forest or jungle with trees and rivers. From the multiple definitions, it appears that many people do not fully understand the meaning of the Satoyama landscape.

Many places in Japan have been given the name, Satoyama landscape; recently, they have become tourist destinations, especially for foreigners. However, most places that have become tourist spots are places where people live and have souvenir shops and lodging facilities³⁾. Currently, the Satoyama landscape is Japan’s number one tourist destination (attractive spot) for international visitors^{1),3)}. Few people view the Satoyama landscape negatively⁴⁾. In Japan, the government (Ministry of the Environment) also regards the Satoyama landscape favorably and recommends its continuation⁵⁾. Since some points make continuation difficult, Japanese people are considering ways to improve the landscape⁶⁾. Returning to the definition, the Satoyama landscape is considered a place created by people, and we think that it has some drawbacks. In this paper, we reexamine the definition of the Satoyama landscape and state our opinions regarding its advantages and disadvantages.

Definition of Satoyama landscape

In a simpler definition, the Satoyama landscape refers to a mountain close to villages and settlements, with an ecosystem influenced by people. “Satoyama” is considered a combination of *sato* and *yama* (mountains), but *sato* can also be understood as “hometown,” referring to a place, such as a place where someone was born and raised. In this case, the infrastructure development is inadequate and much of nature has remained, although some inconveniences exist. Alternatively, Satoyama landscape refers to fields and mountains that exist in rural areas. All these places are within the living sphere of people. Originally, they were not to be places isolated from people. In other words, people remade nature for convenience, based on their own ideals. This description does not mean that nature is completely destroyed, but it reflects how people envision nature (e.g., flowing rivers and mountains). The Satoyama landscape is a natural environment created over a long period by people living close to nature. It is characterized by diverse natural environments, such as farmlands, reservoirs, forests, and grasslands (i.e., biodiversity). Although human power has been added, various creatures live there, though it is difficult to determine whether these creatures are entirely wild. In the Satoyama landscape, leftover human food and crops grown in the fields are sometimes eaten by wild birds and other wildlife; suggesting that that the area is not truly wild. The same is true for the creatures being fed.

Characteristics of the Satoyama landscape include **a)** resource production; **b)** water resource recharge and water purification; **c)** sediment runoff and collapse prevention; **d)** preservation of wildlife habitats; **e)** mitigation of the urban microclimate; **f)** air purification, buffer green space, and evacuation space; **g)** sensibility, imagination cultivation, and culture succession; **h)** a space for recreation, refreshment, and exchanges; and **i)** a place for environmental learning²⁾. Of these, **a)** indicates the creation of human food, the ability to harvest rice from fields, and the harvesting of wild things, such as mushrooms and wild plants. Further, **b)** refers to the purification of water for drinking. These natural processes are rarely observed in urban areas; however, they occur in rural areas with low population densities. In **c)**, the soil is not on the side of urban housing, meaning that the movement of soil can be suppressed by the roots of plants spread all over the ground. Regarding **d)**, wildlife habitats can be maintained even if people are present; however, in many cases, the number of individuals has deteriorated and the survival area appears to have

narrowed. The characteristics described in **e)** and **f)** may be a matter of course for locations other than cities, whereas **g)** indicates that local events and rules exist where people have lived for a long time. However, **h)** may apply to people from both cities and foreign countries because communication with neighbors is decreasing as a result of urbanization. The same can be said for **i)**. No opportunity exists for experiencing the natural environment in the city. Among these characteristics, **h)** and **i)** are considered the key objectives of the Satoyama landscape, and **g)** are often regarded as an added value. Items **a)–f)** are areas in which Japan's rural areas are considered preferable to urban areas and cities abroad.

Problems regarding Satoyama landscape survival

In recent years, Japan has been experiencing a declining birth rate and an aging population. In addition, the Satoyama landscape faces various challenges. The industrial structure and lifestyles changed rapidly and the economy grew quickly after World War II (Japan was the last war to suffer). The reasons are as follows: **a)** stagnation in the use of firewood, charcoal, grass, and kaya (which are abundant in the Satoyama landscape as fuel); **b)** depopulation and aging of *satochi* (mountain villages known as Satoyama areas) due to an outflow of the population to urban areas; **c)** a decrease in the use of forest resources because of the progress of plantations and subsequent expansion of imported foreign timber; **d)** development of residential land and golf courses; and **e)** alteration of nature through development, such as farmland and river improvement²⁾. The current Satoyama landscape has problems related to forests and agricultural land, deterioration of the natural environment (e.g., waterways), disappearance of Satoyama-specific habitats, loss of species and local culture, deterioration of the landscape, occurrence of disasters due to deterioration of national land conservation functions, and a reduced ability to maintain water sources properly. This finding indicates that most characteristics described in **a)–i)** in the previous section have been damaged and are not functioning according to the Satoyama landscape as originally imagined. Although many tourists visit areas that make up the Satoyama landscape, it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage and maintain them.

To solve these problems, the following have recently been observed: induction of heightened awareness (e.g., migration by people who are interested in the natural environment); an emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR)—which should be borne not only for the profit of a

company, but also for relationships with employees, customers, investors, and local communities—and the social factors surrounding the company, with the aim of encouraging action; and movements that promote the activation of Satoyama conservation activities.

The Satoyama landscape is characterized by biodiversity but is considered to be in danger². According to a 2002 survey, approximately 60% of the areas where endangered animals and plants are concentrated in Japan are located in areas that make up the Satoyama landscape³. This finding indicates that people influence and feed wild animals; as a result, animals become subordinate to people. The conservation of the Satoyama landscape is similar to the conservation of biodiversity. However, this conclusion may be partial. People live in the Satoyama landscape; yet, wild animals are easily observed. We think that surveys of flora and fauna may not be sufficient because people do not enter other fields and mountains. Therefore, biodiversity cannot be protected unless the Satoyama landscape is properly maintained.

Disadvantages of the Satoyama landscape

The Satoyama landscape is forest-based, created by local residents for daily living, subsistence agriculture, and traditional industries. It has been maintained through the use of natural resources and by their subsequent transformation. The significance of Japan's Satoyama landscape is recognized internationally from the standpoint of sustainable resource use, the tradition of local culture, and the conservation of biodiversity, including endangered species. Although the Satoyama landscape has changed over time, it is unique to Japan and has formed hometown scenery for Japanese people⁴. Therefore, preserving the scenery in which the Japanese have lived for a long time is positive, but the fact that residents have modified nature for their own benefit has a negative connotation³. For example, some mountains, ponds, and rivers have been artificially created or changed. Because of the absolute requirement that greenery remain without urbanization, it is not necessarily easy to live in such an environment. At a minimum, the environment must be maintained so that people can perform activities for daily living and self-sufficiency. However, the strict definition and extent of discrimination in the city are left to the thoughts of individuals.

From an example of one village, we see that the Satoyama landscape has been maintained, though its appearance has changed because of the human lifecycle and people's livelihoods, as

well as extraordinary events, such as fires, and natural disturbances⁴⁾. In the long run, things are gradually changing rather than remaining the same as before. The Satoyama landscape has a diverse natural environment depending on the region (of course, it is not uniform) and a long history of the ingenious use and management of local resources. However, the close relationship with people (or a sense of distance from nature) is ambiguous, and the conservation of nature is now a thing of the past. Rapid urbanization and depopulation, uniform development, and the abandonment of land management are serious problems⁵⁾. Limitations exist in preserving the previous state with individuals and volunteers, and some high-rise housing has been built without properly recognizing the value of preserving the Satoyama landscape. Further, many souvenir shops and restaurants are invited to engage in business in the landscape environment. Although the Satoyama landscape is not completely wild, unfortunately, as a result of seeking too many conveniences, it has become urbanized. Accordingly, the natural environment has rapidly diminished.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have presented a definition of the Satoyama landscape, problems with its survival, as well as its pros and cons. The Satoyama landscape is generally a place where nature, including mountains, rivers, animals, and plants; coexist with people's homes and places of work (mainly places where agriculture, forestry, and fisheries support primary industries). It is a place where many Japanese people used to live or where they can maintain lifestyles characterized by self-sufficiency. If people's lives become too convenient, nature will be destroyed; thus, they will be forced to experience inconveniences in air conditioning, shopping, and infrastructure development, and they will have to make concessions to wild animals. The Satoyama landscape is associated with the maintenance of the biodiversity of wildlife while also attracting the attention of tourists, including foreigners, because of the opportunity to experience the historical culture of Japan.

The Satoyama landscape is a place where nature remains as imagined and created by people. Not all parts are natural; the shape of mountains, plants, and the direction in which rivers flow might have been artificially altered from their original state. In addition, cases exist in which people intentionally live close to each other because of tourism. Even if the exterior of a house looks

old-fashioned, the interior may be modern and all-electric. It is better to think that nature, in this case, has been modified by people according to their preferences and is different from untouched things. Living in a city may feel more natural considering that nature and wildlife have not been threatened or destroyed. For the Japanese, it is good that things with a long history become tourism resources¹, though we think that it is better to reconsider this idea.

We believe that areas of the Satoyama landscape are similar to biotopes, golf courses, and gardens. They exist for temporary experiences, such as learning about or comfortably spending time in nature. Maintenance requires sustained human effort and, in the truest sense, the landscape is an imitation of the natural environment rather than nature itself. A large aspect of nature can be used for human learning and recreation. In the future, it will be necessary to examine the past and present of the Satoyama landscape from the perspectives of sustainable resource use and the preservation of local culture and biodiversity¹. People should coexist while having a good sense of distance, but it may be better to consider the types of relationships that are “good.” These issues should not be addressed at the individual level but through laws and established rules on the extent of human intervention, which, if unchecked, could lead to the destruction of nature. We believe that there will be no more Satoyama landscape with the same definition.

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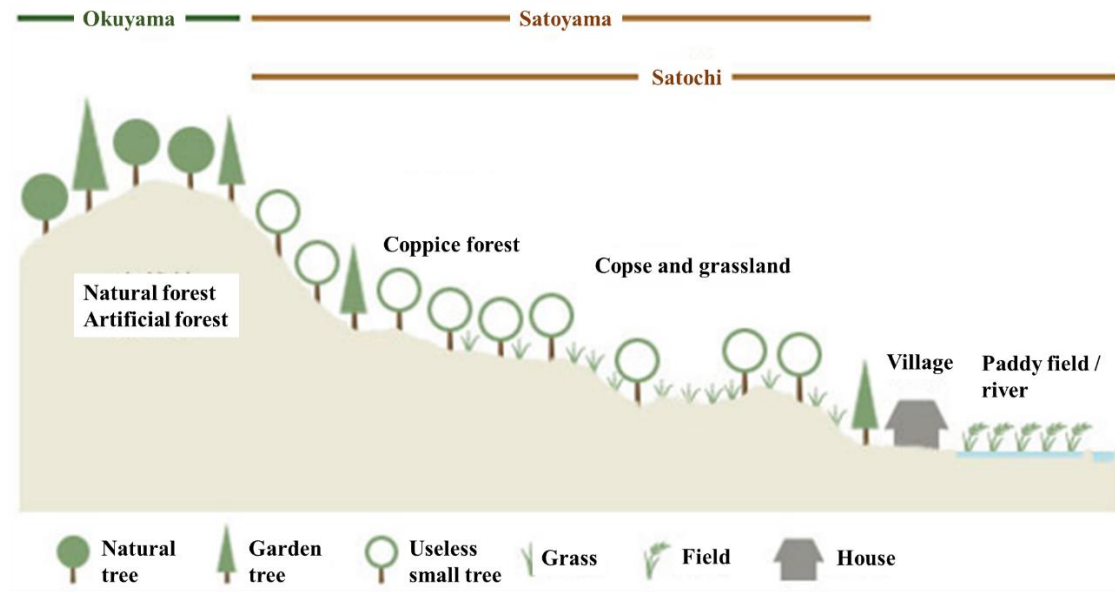


Fig. 1 Conceptual diagram of Okuyama (deep mountain), Satoyama (outskirt of country), and satochi (mountain village)

