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The Multilocality of *Satoyama*
Landscape, Cultural Heritage and Environmental Sustainability in Japan

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Abstract Using the versatile concept of multilocality, the paper analyses the close interrelation between Japanese landscape, cultural heritage and social construction of spatial meaning in the context of *satoyama* (mountain village). Originally intended as a peripheral space of subsistence within the rural economy, *satoyama* is considered today one of the main expressions of the Japanese local culture guided by identity mechanisms and based on complex discursive constructions of native place-based and environmental rhetoric. At the same time, the *satoyama* landscape has also become a transnational symbol promoted by the Japanese government which is used in national and international research programmes for environmental sustainability. The sense of multilocality of the *satoyama* landscape is here interpreted in its double identity value that can be put to a wide variety of political and cultural constructions of place.

Keywords Landscape. Japan. Satoyama. Cultural heritage. Environmental sustainability.

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1 Introduction

Evocative, aesthetic and sensuous geographies characterised by intensely undulating mountainous areas, anthropised territories or the convoluted topographies of the coastline continue to be at the centre of a wide network of narratives focusing on the environmental and cultural history of the Japanese archipelago (Berque 1997; Mather, Karan, Iijima 1998; Totman 2014). The iconic rice fields have historically defined the "Japanese space" (Raveri 2006) as a symbol of national and social identity (Ohnuky-Thierney 1993), while the highly aestheticised mountains have played a key role in several religious imageries and ritual practices (Grapard 1982; Miyake 2005; Raveri 2006a; 2006b), also becoming a dominant symbol in contemporary mass culture (Earhart 2011). Regardless of the perspective from which it is approached, the Japanese territory still represents a complex, polysemic and ambiguous reality, often the object of social and cultural negotiations that place it within a broad debate that intertwines the most disparate humanistic and social disciplines focusing on the perception on space (Mather, Karan, Iijima 1998).

In this regard, the extensive and long-standing literature devoted to an analysis of space still poses many theoretical questions relating to the cultural construction of the territory, which is observed both in its anthropic and environmental dimension and understood as a complex set of political, economic, cultural and symbolic factors that relate to one another and to a certain environment (Buttimer, Seamon 1980; Tuan 1977; Cosgrove 1984; Low, Lawrence-Zúñiga 2006). This perspective is made more explicit by the widespread use of the term 'landscape' – which combines the word 'land' with the Germanic verb *scapjan*/*shaffen*, 'to transform', to convey the meaning of "transformed earth" (Haber 1995) – which has become an object of renewed interest in the social sciences (Soja 1989; Low, Lawrence-Zúñiga 2006). The landscape can be understood as a passive agent in relation to a complex cultural processing of space, whereby humans 'inscribe' their presence in a territory in an enduring way. At the same time, however, the landscape may be seen as an active agent, because it produces a sense of place (Feld, Basso 1996) and creates an identity bond between human experience and the local environments within which certain activities are rooted. The process of transformation "from space to place" (Casey 1996), therefore, implies that spaces are sets of elements used by social actors as an essential part of their social interactions (Tuan 1977). According to this perspective, the meaning of landscape – in the sense of transformed territory – would thus indicate a double interactive function: on the one hand, the social perception of the landscape plays a *passive* role in defining the quality of a place; on the other hand, the landscape plays an *active* role, because it influences man's quality of life.

This sense of reciprocity entailed by the landscape-man relationship leads to two main interpretive perspectives, which represent the two sides of the same coin. Basically, any analytical discourse on the landscape can be articulated according to a range of different landscape theories, which generally follow two main – and not necessarily mutually exclusive – approaches: a 'macro approach', that is, an analysis of the local territorial space in relation to the wider national or transnational context for the purpose of identifying the main connections between the organisation of certain territories and the sociocultural and economic structure; a 'micro approach', which focuses instead on how the landscape can become an 'inscribed place' through an interpretative process that transforms the landscape into an ever-evolving 'substantive property' based on different narratives and practices.

These two approaches show how the cultural construction of place can shed light on the concept of multilocality (Rodman 2006), a versatile tool for the creation of place meanings and "for understanding the network of connections among places that link micro and macro levels, as well as reflexive qualities of identity formation and the construction of place increasingly move around the globe" (Low, Lawrence-Zúñiga 2006, 13). Although the concept of multilocality (also known as 'bifocality') was originally used in relation to the phenomena of migration and diaspora (Clifford 1994), to highlight the different relationships that a person has within his/her country of origin and the current location of a mobile migrant, it can also be understood as a broader analytical tool. What should be emphasised is that the concept of multilocal landscape can be culturally 'reproduced' outside its original context, so as to become an exportable identity model subject to different political strategies, practices and ethnic narratives. As Rodman has stated, multilocality highlights "how different actors construct, contest and ground experience in place" (Rodman 2006, 212):

> a physical landscape can be multilocal in the sense that it shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place for different users. This is more accurately a multivocal dimension of place, but multilocality conveys the idea that a single place may be experienced quite differently. (2006, 212)

Rodman concludes that the complexity of place is based "on connections, on the interacting presence of different places and different voices in various geographical, anthropological, and historical contexts" (2006, 216) and that it is used as a conceptual tool to understand the multiple ways of experiencing and interpreting place meanings for the various individuals interacting with a given landscape (2006, 216).

In order to contextualise the concept of the multilocality of landscape in Japan, it is necessary to start from some lexicological reflections: the most common term used to define a landscape in the Japanese language is *fūkei* 風景, which generally indicates a scenery, landscape or *paysage*. However, *fūkei* does not indicate only a visual experience or a portion of territory as it appears when encompassed by a subject's gaze. In this regard, on the basis of a series of interviews focusing on the concept of landscape in contemporary Japanese usage, Katrin Gehring and Ryo Kōshaka have stated that *fūkei* represents the most widely used term to define a landscape, distinguishing it from *keikan* 景観, a term that is instead used to describe any modern, man-made artificial landscape (2007):

> *Fūkei* can be described as referring to a traditional or cultural Japanese landscape, dominated by more natural elements. The interviewees described *fūkei* as a landscape dominated by elements like mountains, rice fields, trees, flowers and villages, as well as cult objects like shrines and temples and sacred natural elements. As one interviewee said, it is seen as "the typical landscape of Japan" showing natural and cultural elements associated with Japan. Furthermore, people tend to have strong personal associations with *fūkei*. First, *fūkei* is said to be a place of memories – personal or collective – as *fūkei* represents "past landscapes" or as one person said the "original landscape". Second, *fūkei* is described as the place of birth, as "home" or as a "place one belongs to". It may be these two aspects lead people to describe *fūkei* as a part of themselves emphasizing the interactions between themselves and this kind of landscape. In general, *fūkei* is described as a more emotional kind of landscape than that described by the term *Keikan*. It is associated with positive and warm feelings, and as two interviewees emphasized, with a sense of wellbeing. (Gehring, Kōshaka 2007, 278)

The term that best contextualises the concept of *fūkei* is *satoyama* 里山 (mountains near the village), a word composed of *sato* 里 (village) and *yama* 山 (mountain), and which represents a complex environmental and cultural model in Japan today. *Satoyama*, which originally referred to any semi-managed peripheral woodland area surrounding rural settlements, has now taken on a wider and more complex meaning: it is used to indicate the 'Japanese landscape', and has become a symbol of the national and international efforts to protect local territories and enhance human well-being, eco-justice, ecological awareness, the cultural heritage, policies of tourism enhancement and environmental protection. The *satoyama* landscape, then, has become part of the complex discursive constructions of environmental and place-based rhetoric concerning development regulations, environmental sustainability and the conservation of natural energy resources.

Starting from these initial premises, the present essay will offer a brief critical reflection on how the *satoyama* landscape today is subject to two different ideological forces: a 'centripetal force' that identifies the *satoyama* as the national, mass media symbol of local culture, intimately connected with the 'green Orientalism' and rarefied, nostalgic imagery associated with the *furusato* 古里 (ancient village); a 'centrifugal force', whereby the *satoyama* instead becomes a transnational symbol of cultural heritage and environmental sustainability. As we will see, the example of the multilocality of the *satoyama* landscape can therefore be analysed according to the two macro and micro approaches previously mentioned, which highlight how the landscape, regardless of its context, is essentially a 'text' (Duncan 1990) that must be interpreted as the embodiment of different value systems (Cosgrove 1984).

2 Defining a Landscape

Although the most common translation of *satoyama* is 'mountains near the village', it is generally considered a rather ambiguous one, because it overlaps with other terms that apparently express similar concepts. Basically, *satoyama* is defined as a liminal space set

> between the category of the cultivated and that of the wild, precisely on account of the particular type of cultivation that characterises it and the organisation, both material and symbolic, by which society has appropriated the forest. In turn, the type of crop in this ecosystem was conditioned by the type of vegetation.[1] (Raveri 2006a, 34)[2]

However, this definition, as will be seen below, is often juxtaposed to others that broaden and enrich the semantic field of *satoyama*. Today, the most common definition of *satoyama* falls within two different contexts of meaning that are complementary: on the one hand, *satoyama* indicates a cultural model that can be defined by a series of terms that highlight its identity value; on the other hand, the term *satoyama* indicates a particular type of environmental model which, up until the postwar period, was an integral part of the small-scale rural economy and which today is defined as the '*satoyama* landscape'. Below, these two categories are discussed in detail, by drawing attention to their most salient aspects.

1 Unless otherwise indicated all translation are by the Author.

2 One of the typical activities that still takes place today in the *satoyama* landscape is the rotating *yaki hata* (slash and burn) technique, still present in the rural areas of Kyūshū and Shikoku.

2.1 *Satoyama* as Cultural Model

Satoyama is generally used in various contexts (academic studies, environmental movements, literature, politics, etc.) and, in particular, is found in movies, radio programmes, musical albums, and in several television documentaries, such as *Furusato no yume* ふるさとの夢 (*Dream of my Hometown*, 2017) and *Furusato no mirai* ふるさとの未来 (*The Future of my Hometown*, 2020). Each episode in the latter documentary series features one village (*sato*) or hamlet (*shūraku* 集落) whose inhabitants are trying to liven up the local area by embarking on challenging new business ventures, in an effort to preserve their hometown (*furusato*). However, despite its large-scale mass media coverage, *satoyama* only became popular in the 1960s and originally had a different meaning. As Kazuhiko Takeuchi (2003, 9) has noted:

> The term *satoyama* was used as long ago as 1759 by a Kiso area assistant wood manager by the name of Hyouemon Teramachi, who described *satoyama* in a book entitled *Miscellaneous Stories of Kiso Mountain*. He described *satoyama* as mountainous landscapes close to rural villages […]. The person who revived the term in modern times was Tsunahide Shidei, a forest ecologist, who proposed the idea of *satoyama* in the early 1960s. He later explained that this term is just a modification of *yamasato* (village in the mountains) to *satoyama* (mountains near the village) so that everybody can understand the meaning. Based on this idea came the concept of the *satoyama* as an agricultural woodland.

The mass media has contributed to 'naturalise' *satoyama* which, along with *sato*, *furusato*, *shūraku* and *yama* 山, has created a complex identity horizon. Although these other terms often overlap, they each have a precise meaning that is, either directly or indirectly, linked to the rural imagery evoked by *satoyama*. As already mentioned in the introduction, *satoyama* is a term composed of two characters which indicate two different types of space or landscape. According to the *Kōjien* dictionary, the first term, *sato*, means:

> 1. Place where there are human settlements. […] 2. Synonym of *ri*.[3] 3. Antonym of *uchi*.[4] 4. Paternal home of a married woman or adoptive son, servant etc. see *satogaeri* 里帰り (return home, for example, during Bon festival in commemoration of the dead). 5. House

3 The term indicates the smallest land unit (fifty households) and it is associated with the Ritsuryō system, a historical legal system developed at the time of the Taika Reform (mid-seventh century).

4 An ancient term used to indicate officials' personal accommodation.

> other than parented home, where a child lives in exchange for payment of board and lodging. 6. Opposite to *miyako* [capital] and indicates provinces or countryside (*inaka* 田舎). 7. Synonym of *yūri* 悠里, *kuruwa* 廓.[5] 8. Upbringing [that one has received]. (Shinmura 2000, 1081)

Within these various definitions, there are two predominant meanings of *sato*: 'man-made place' and 'family place', which express the concept of a culturalised space, also including *satoyama* landscapes. In common contemporary parlance, *satoyama* is often associated with things like rice fields, folk religion (*minzoku shūkyō* 民俗宗教), small scale farming activities, and social cooperation. Consider, for example, the following definition of *satoyama* proposed by Yuko Honda and Toshihiko Nakamura:

> *Satoyama* and *satoumi* [sea village] have significant implications for culture. First of all, the Japanese word 'bunka' is a translation of the English word "culture". Culture is a derivative of the word "cultivate". 'Cultivating' activities include involvement and interaction with nature. *Satoyama* and *satoumi* have been created through these activities with nature. Hence, it would be fair to say that *satoyama* and *satoumi*, as well as human activities within them, comprise *satoyama* and *satoumi* culture. Human activities in connection with rice paddies are the most familiar *satoyama* and *satoumi* cultures in Japan [...]. The Chinese character *sato* (里) consists of two other Chinese characters: *ta* (rice paddy 田) and *tsuchi* (soil 土). *Ta* is the most commonly used Chinese character in Japanese family names. [...] Thus in *satoyama* and *satoumi*, people incorporated festivals and events into their daily lives through occupations which developed over a long period of time in harmony with nature. In this lifestyle, in addition to the feeling of awe inspired by nature, people learnt from nature and applied this learning to their everyday lives. Additionally, they established various cooperative systems to achieve a sustainable use of resources, using the land as a mosaic environment for production in various manners, which enabled the conservation of abundant biodiversity. The lessons from *satoyama* and *satoumi* cultures are important for the development of a sustainable society in the future. (Honda, Nakamura 2012, 40-1)

This description highlights how *satoyama* has come to describe sustainable ways of life and how it possesses a certain meaning in sociocultural milieus where it is associated with rural ways of life, regard-

5 Pleasure district.

ed as more harmonious and natural. The nostalgic desire to return to one's roots and to a rural idyll is built on representations of sustainable forms of consumption and production, living standards, and values that offer new moral, aesthetic and social relationships (Strathern 1982). In Japan, these images, projected from and onto specific rural localities, contribute to defining culture (*bunka* 文化), often through the dialectic between authenticity and inauthenticity, and to the negotiation and re-negotiation of identity values.

> Representations of both tradition and modernity in Japan have been tied up to indigenous conceptualisations of *bunka*, a notion that translates as culture and which emerged in the popular discourse of modern Japan during the Taishō era (1912-26). This idea was employed in part as a means of juxtaposing true culture qua superior, traditional lifestyle to emerging patterns of urban society, such as the increased involvement of women in the working world, that charactered the period […]. *Bunka*, however, was not simply the intellectual domain of those interested in preserving a real or imagined traditional society. As Tamanoi notes, the term was polysemic, used to represent not only something rural, genuine, and even modern; yet decidedly not urban. […] Indeed, in contemporary Japanese society, the polysemic nature of the term continues to be evident. In rural areas, in particular, *bunka* is a concept often employed in slogans devised to imaginatively represent a town's character to outsiders, and to remind residents that their town is at once technologically progressive and democratic, and to remind that their town is once technologically progressive and democratic, while retaining traditional values associated with the rural countryside. (Thompson, Traphagan 2006, 3)

In this regard, Christopher Thompson and John Traphagan have also argued that the terms 'rural' and 'urban', which are used to describe the relationship between national centres and peripheral areas (such as *satoyama*), are no longer relevant as analytical categories in the Japanese context, although they continue to be important for the way in which Japanese society conceptualises itself and the nation-state (Thompson, Traphagan 2006). An interesting starting point, in this respect, is the identification of the *satoyama* with the 'landscape of nostalgia' associated with *sato*. The various definitions given of *sato* highlight the strong sense of 'family place', which is also connected with *furusato* (Schnell 2008), a term that implies a spatial and temporal dimension:

> *Furusato* comprises both a temporal and spatial dimension. The temporal dimension is represented by the word *furu*(*i*), which signifies pastness, historicity, senescence and quaintness. Furthermore,

> *furu*(*i*) signifies the patina of familiarity and naturalness that objects and human relationships acquire with age, use, and interaction. The spatial dimension is represented by the word *sato*, which suggests a number of places inhabited by humans. These include a natal household, a hamlet or village, and the countryside (as opposed to the city). *Sato* also refers to a self-governed, autonomous area, and, by extension, to local autonomy. (Robertson 1988, 494)

Furusato, then, incorporates a dominant ideology which affirms that this is the authentic nature of Japanese society. It implies a process of romantic construction of the rural landscape, which can also be extended to the nation as a whole: *nihon furusato* 日本古里 (ancient Japanese village). According to Akatsuka, *furusato* refers to a "retrospective age" (1988, cited in Creighton 1997, 241) which entails a nostalgic view of the past.[6] In this regard, Jennifer Robertson has observed how *furusato* is also characterised by nativist and national political meanings:

> *Furusato* is a word, or signifier, whose very ubiquity may camouflage its importance for understanding and interpreting Japanese culture. By ubiquity I do not mean trivial or inane, but rather familiar: in other words, the ubiquity of *furusato* derives from the manifold contexts in which it may be appropriated, from the gustatorial to the political economic. My general thesis is that the ubiquity of *furusato* as a signifier of a wide range of cultural productions effectively imbues these productions with unifying? and ultimately nativist and national political meaning and value. *Furusato* can only be fully comprehended by observing both how the term is used ordinarily and how it has been appropriated by various members of, and interest groups in, Japanese society. The evocation of *furusato* is an increasingly cogent means of simultaneously fostering we-feelings and insideness at local and national levels. *Furusato* Tokyo, for example, is enveloped by *Furusato* Japan. The process by which *furusato* is evoked into existence is called *furusato-zuku-*

6 It is interesting to note that *furusato* could also be connected to *inaka* 田舎, a term used to indicate specific isolated regions of Japan, even if this term does not refer to any particular geographical location. *Inaka* can also be translated as 'province' and presents two important characteristics: first, this concept is defined in terms of negation; second, it refers to terms associated with it or derivatives. With regard to the first characteristic, the term *inaka* takes on a negative meaning, as it does not refer to any specific place, thus remaining in a completely imaginary dimension, such as *furusato*. This imagined 'elsewhere' brings us back to the second characteristic of the term *inaka*. According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, *inaka* describes "the land and districts removed from cities" (Shōgakukan 2001, 451). Standard definitions suggest that *inaka* generally indicates that which is unrefined or uncivilised. *Inaka*'s sense of inferiority seems to derive from its lack of cultural sophistication and economic prosperity.

> *ri*, or home/native-place making. Ultimately, *furusato-zukuri* is a political process by which culture, as a collectively constructed and shared system of symbols, customs and beliefs, is socially reproduced. (Robertson 1988, 494)

Regardless of these linguistic nuances, the community-landscape link, expressed by the terms *sato*, *furusato* and *satoyama*, includes both socioeconomic and emotional factors: demographic hemorrhaging from rural areas and the sense of uprootedness have often involved an absence of place associated with the concept of "territorial anguish" (De Martino 1952), which affects individuals forced to leave their place of birth, their *sato*, their own space of lived experience, thus creating "the experience of a presence that is not maintained before the world, before history" (De Martino 1952, 60). Since the post-war period, the demographic transformation of rural areas has been too substantial not to arouse the concern of the Government, which has begun to intervene through policies aimed at re-adapting the economic and productive system of those areas to suit new needs, while also attempting to redefine the social system of rural communities. Depopulated areas are often described using the words *bukimi* 不気味 (sinister), *sabishii* 寂しい (sad), *akiya* 空家 (empty houses) and villages of death 死の集落 (*shi no shūraku*) (Matanle, Rausch 2011). Here too, *satoyama* is brought into play in the context of rural revitalisation policies, environmental activism and the recovery of small-scale economies.

Finally, a careful reflection must also be made on the term *yama*, which today is often commonly associated with *satoyama*, and has different, overlapping meanings. According to the various etymological interpretations, *yama* means "mountain", "forest", or "place where men do not live" (Ōno, Satake, Maeda 1974, 1315; Raveri 2006). It was originally used to emphasise the agricultural unproductiveness of areas excluded from the rice paddy ecosystem. *Yama* is part of the complex symbolic organisation of productive and settlement spaces. As Massimo Raveri has observed:

> in Japanese culture, mountains are sacred spaces par excellence. To understand its sacredness, we must start from the paddy field, because it is the focal point of the technical organisation and of the social and symbolic logic according to which Japanese society has interpreted its ecosystems throughout history and which has led it to identify the mountain as a 'separate' spatial dimension, an 'other' space, with characteristics that embody the connotations of the "sacred". [...] Two cultural spaces correspond to these two ecosystemic spaces. Traditional Japanese society draws a first general distinction: on the one hand, the space structured by man, *sato*, the village and the cultivated countryside that surrounds it, considered as a unitary spatial dimension; on the oth-

> er, the space of the wild mountain, *yama*. Japanese tradition draws a contrast between the ordered and the disordered, the realm of man, who controls nature, and the natural realm, in which man does not interfere. (2006b, 287)

Yet, *yama* is closely linked to a traditional model of classification of the rural landscape, based on a precise symbolic geometry. According to the so-called 'model of radiant space', typical of sedentary societies, the centre – the productive and settlement space (*sato*) – is surrounded on all sides by concentric spatial bands: the rice fields (*ta* 田) and other common places (*no* 野), the surrounding woodlands (*satoyama*) subject to exploitation by the local community, steep mountainous areas (*dake* 岳) and *okuyama* 奥山 (deep mountains), remote mountains that are considered otherworldly. In this regard, Keisuke Matsui has proposed a model of the Japanese rural landscape divided into a series of spatial units (2014, 34):

> A *sato* is a residential space comprising housing, an *ujigami* (guardian god), temples, tombs, and various small shrines. It plays a part not only in the everyday lives of people but also in festivals and religious ceremonies. The village border includes stone monuments and a stone Buddha, which is used for disaster prevention ceremonies. A *Ta* is space used for farming where rice and other fields are located. Common places for the villagers to obtain building materials, fuel, and fertiliser include a *no* and a *satoyama*. Those residing in a *Sato* work at a *Ta* and obtain living necessities at the *no* and *satoyama*. These three spaces form the living space of the people who reside in the community.
>
> The spaces in which those people who are not related to the community may gather include a *Hara*, *okuyama*, and *dake*. […] *Hara* is an uncultivated, primitive field in front of a *Ta* that can spread beyond the gathering space to form a city. An *okuyama* is situated behind the *No* and *satoyama*, where descendants of mountain people ousted by those growing rice were once residents. A *dake*, placed even further back, is a steep mountainous area and the source of rivers. It was regarded as a sacred place that led to heaven and a place to train monks of Mountain Shugendō. A *dake* was understood to incorporate the nature of another world.

The definitions given by Massimo Raveri and Keisuke Matsui therefore highlight the perceived radical otherness of mountains with respect to agricultural areas, confining the former to the dimension of the sacred and the religious. What is interesting to note, however, is that the cultural perception of mountains – their conceptualisation and symbolic organisation, i.e. the 'idea of the mountain' – seems to derive not from mountain themselves, but from the intermediate

and liminal space between paddy fields and mountains, where local communities used to interact with the surrounding natural environment: the *satoyama*. In this regard, Catherine Knight, drawing upon Kitamura (1995, 116), has pointed out that

> it is the nature of the *satoyama*, rather than the 'wild nature' of the *yama* (mountainous forests) with which the Japanese have formed an affinity over the centuries. Further, […] it is the Japanese interaction with this category of half-cultivated nature that has been instrumental in shaping the Japanese view of nature (*shizenkan*) and that has led to the much-vaunted Japanese "love of nature". As evidence of this, [Kitamura] points out how it is *satoyama*, rather than *yama*, that forms the backdrop to the majority of Japanese folktales (*mukashi-banashi*). […] the folktales frequently feature activities such as wood-cutting, picking of fruit or chestnuts from the woods, and *yama-batake* (cultivation of crops in mountain fields) – all activities associated with the *satoyama*. Similarly, it is the animals that frequent the *satoyama*, such as foxes, rabbits, *tanuki*, rather than those that inhabited the upland forests of the *yama*, such as wolves, bears and serow, which most commonly appear in folktales.

To conclude, regardless of whether the *satoyama* by now has been completely absorbed into the nostalgic imagery of the *furusato* or, what is relevant to note is that this term still reflects its cultural heritage, which is processed through different forms of rediscovery and enhancement. In this regard, it is useful to keep in mind some of Tim Ingold's reflections on how to imagine the landscape and on how its past can be recontextualised in the present:

> We may distinguish, then, at least three ways of imagining the past in the landscape. There is the *materialising* mode, which turns the past into an object of memory, to be displayed and consumed as heritage; there is the *gestural* mode, in which memories are forged in the very process of redrawing the lines and pathways of ancestral activity, and there is the *quotidian* mode in which what remains of the past provides a basis for carrying on. Each, moreover, entails a different sense of the present. In the present of the materialising mode, the past appears as another culture: a 'foreign country' […]. The gestural present is a generative movement that remembers the past even as it presses forward, since to go forth along a line of life is simultaneously to retrace the paths of predecessors (Ingold 2000, 148). In the quotidian mode, by contrast, the very immediacy of the present eclipses the past as the latter sinks into the inconspicuous and unremarked ground of the everyday. What, then, of the future? Are there as many ways of imagining the future in the landscape? (Ingold 2012, 8-9; italics added)

2.2 The *Satoyama* Landscape as an Environmental Model

Based on the interpretative approach of landscape ecology, the *satoyama* landscape may be seen as a wider and more defined spatial context than the individual term *satoyama*, which is constrained by the contemporary linguistic context. Even if the contemporary *satoyama* landscape is the result of political changes in forest management in the mid-twentieth century, the term dates back to the seventeenth century, when it was used to indicate a range of different ecosystems, collectively called '*satoyama* landscapes'. These included agricultural lands, grasslands, secondary forests, irrigation ponds, and even human settlements (Takeuchi 2003). Takeuchi has proposed the following definition of *satoyama* landscape:

> *satoyama landscapes* include not only the mixed woodlands, but also the *yatsuda* (special type of paddies) and the small rivers and artificial ponds used for irrigation. Mixed woodlands of *satoyama* that are very near rural settlements and distributed on mountains, hills, and uplands as major geomorphic sites are very important in the rural villages to be used for coppice woodlands agricultural woodlands. On the other hand, narrow valley bottoms developed by dissecting low-relief mountains, hills, and uplands are known locally as either *yatsu* or *yato*. Further downstream is the alluvial lowland zone, which is a major location of paddy field agriculture. The paddy fields developed on the narrow valley bottoms use springs coming from the valley head. This type of rice paddies is called *yatsuda* ヤツダ or *yatoda* ヤトダ. (Takeuchi 2003, 15)

> Management of both *satoyama* and *yatsu* is also necessary to conserve the complementary wildlife habitats of plants and animals that live in the hills or in the uplands, and those that live in the wetlands. This contributes to maintaining the high biodiversity in the secondary nature. It must be noted that secondary nature has been maintained by the traditional farming activities both managing the *satoyama* and cultivating the *yatsuda*. Nowadays, as the role of the *satoyama* as coppice or agricultural woodland has decreased, it has also broken the tight connection with the *yatsuda*. Further, because of the decrease in the number of farmers and the low price of rice, many farmers have abandoned the both the *yatsuda* and the coppice woodlands. (Takeuchi 2003, 15-16)

From this brief description it is clear that the *satoyama* and the *yatsuda* have played an important role for the subsistence and small-scale economies of local communities, while at the same time providing an ideal habitat for wildlife. Starting in the postwar period, the function of *satoyama* has declined as the result of technological,

demographic and socioeconomic factors: the use of chemical fertilisers, electricity, oil and gas has made *satoyama* economically less important as a source of fuel-wood, organic fertiliser and charcoal. Moreover, the urbanisation and industrialisation process has led to a steady depopulation of rural areas, especially the upland one, radically transforming the social and economic context of rural Japan. The latter now presents itself as peripheral area, afflicted by problems such as demographic aging, due to the sharp decline in births, unemployment and the emigration of young people to urban areas in search of better work prospects. This, in turn, entails a lack of generational turnover in economic activities in the primary and in the secondary sector. In the rural areas of Japan, the economic and demographic crisis has been decisive with respect to the politically sensitive issue of the reorganisation of the productive sectors linked to the exploitation of *satoyama* ecosystems.

As a result, near urban centres, large *satoyama* woodland areas were destroyed during the Sixties and Seventies in order to create so-called 'bed towns' or satellite commuter towns, especially in the vast conurbation of Tōkyō and Ōsaka. The impact of land degradation on landscape and the degeneration of the *satoyama* ecosystem have become critical factors in the increasing incidence of human–wildlife conflict in Japan. As Catherine Knight has observed:

> This makes the *satoyama* woodlands around villages more attractive to wildlife, because they provide a source of high-energy foods, such as persimmons and chestnuts, and because reduced visibility makes the *satoyama* a safer refuge for animals. This, combined with the degradation and fragmentation of the mountainous forest itself, means that wild boar, monkeys, bears and other wildlife are increasingly venturing into depopulated rural settlements and causing damage to crops and property and, occasionally, injury to humans. This is an added burden for the increasingly ageing rural population and has led a not insignificant number of smallhold farmers to abandon farming altogether. (Knight 2010, 425)

In the Sixties and Seventies, the increase in urban development and the environmental crisis it entailed led to the establishment of many environmental organisations focusing on the conservation and regeneration of *satoyama*. However, this interest in the values of ecology and local culture is not limited to NGOs; rather, the protection of the environment and of the health and well-being of local areas has also become a salient theme in the initiatives of the central and prefectural governments, such as, for example, the National Strategy for Biodiversity of the Ministry of the Environment. One of its key objectives is to rebuild a stable relationship between the environment and local communities by selecting 'important *satoyama*' in order to de-

velop specific models of environmental management. In the following paragraph, we will briefly examine how *satoyama* landscapes have become part of the contemporary Japanese cultural heritage and how the concept of landscape today is largely associated with the *satoyama* identity model when it comes to governance strategies for the promotion of the environment and social well-being.

3 The Concept of *Satoyama* in a Global Context

Satoyama has gradually become a key element related to the notion that the common good and collective interests are to be promoted through planning programmes focused on landscape regeneration. In recent years, the importance of *satoyama* has been widely recognised and efforts to promote it have been made by the central and prefectural governments: for example, the 2004 revision of the Cultural Property Act, under which the *satoyama* landscape can be designated as a cultural asset, acquiring the role of *bunkateki keikan* 文化的景観 (cultural landscape) which, according to the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, is considered "indispensable for understanding the lifestyle of the Japanese people" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2009, 40). Cultural landscapes of special environmental and cultural value may be further designated as *jūyō bunkateki keikan* 重要文化的景観 (important cultural landscapes).

These premises serve to introduce some reflections on programmes for the enhancement of the cultural and environmental heritage associated with Japanese landscapes – collectively identified by the term *satoyama* – which adopt an approach based on holistic research planning and environmental education. Contemporary Japan has developed complex interdisciplinary research projects on environmental sustainability, such as the Japan Satoyama Satoumi Assessment (JSSA), commissioned in 2000 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. This research project aims to identify the state of global ecosystems, also evaluating the consequences of their changes and their impact on humans, and providing a scientific basis for future interventions aimed at their conservation. The JSSA represents an international effort jointly initiated by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and the Institute of Advanced Studies of the United Nations University, whose main purpose is to analyse the relationship between local communities and terrestrial and marine-coastal ecosystems, respectively indicated by the Japanese terms *satoyama* and *satoumi*.

These two terms describe ecosystemic landscapes that have become the subject of applied research activities aimed at managing and maintaining both the environmental context and the culture of local communities. Projects and activities mainly focus on understanding the environmental and cultural heritage, restoring ecological services

and improving livelihoods. At the heart of these projects, therefore, lies the creation or maintenance of resilient areas through the restoration or reconstruction of habitats essential for the functioning of local ecosystems. A key point for understanding the ethical principles of these projects is the biodiversity protection policy that enhances the historical and cultural heritage of local communities. These projects highlight the distance between the technical approaches of biological studies associated with the management of environmental resources, and those based on the experiences of the stakeholders themselves, who should be conscious protagonists of resource management. Working on different levels of analysis, JSSA projects provide important qualitative and quantitative methods both to capitalise on local ecological knowledge and to promote environmental and social sustainability.

Finally, a separate reflection should be devoted to the so-called Satoyama Initiative, an international interdisciplinary project that aims to promote sustainable use and biodiversity of *satoyama* in Japan. Sprung from joint collaboration between the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) and the Ministry of the Environment of Japan (MOEJ), the Satoyama Initiative focuses on biodiversity conservation through the revitalisation and sustainable management of "socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes" (SEPLS), in order to realise "societies in harmony with nature" (UNU-IAS, IGES 2019, 6). The main purpose of these projects is to promote

> the conservation of SEPLS around the world, entailing a range of activities including expanding the body of knowledge about how the relationship between humans and nature should function in a wide variety of production landscapes and seascapes from both social and scientific points of view.[7]

The strategic use of these secondary landscapes, according to the Ministry of the Environment, will contribute

> to the exclusive balance of nature by supporting the natural regeneration of the environment and sustainable use of natural resources. This wise use of natural resources and the environment is the product of the traditional wisdom of Asia. (Ministry of the Environment 2009)[8]

The interdisciplinary approach adopted in these programmes represents an analysis model that is in many respects innovative, and which

7 https://satoyama-initiative.org/concept.

8 https://satoyama-initiative.org/case_study/#start.

has also begun to spread internationally (Yanagi 2019). An example is the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI), "one of the major institutional components under the Satoyama Initiative, which is a partnership established to promote the cultural and environmental activities identified by the Satoyama Initiative" (UNU-IAS 2019, 2). One of the most relevant cases in which the *satoyama* model has been associated with a different habitat is coppice woodlands, which have historically been used in England for various environmental applications (e.g. charcoal production for metal smelting, wattle fencing or the collection of timber for building purposes) (Buckley 2020). However, given the vastness of interdisciplinary cultural and methodological contents related to *satoyama* studies, and given the rapid evolution of this research field, it is worth quoting the brief overview of the most recent studies provided by Itō, Hino and Sakuma:

> The term *satoyama* landscape has been used to distinguish the broader meaning from the narrower one. The area comprising *satoyama* landscape is estimated to be approximately 60,000-90,000 km2, or 20% of Japan's land mass (Tsunekawa 2003). Similar traditional landscape or land-use systems are found in Korea, China, Indonesia, Spain and southern Africa (Takeuchi 2010). Park et al. (2006) studied Korean village groves called *maeulsoop* or *bibosoop*, that provide habitats for cavity nesting birds. Kumar and Takeuchi (2009) compared agroforestry in western India and *satoyama* in Japan. Rackham (1986) described the history of sustainably used English woodland. Bélair et al. (2010) compiled examples of sustainable land use systems worldwide. Mason and MacDonald (2002) studied the responses of ground flora to coppice management and discussed which management system was preferable. (Itō, Hino, Sakuma 2012, 99)

Clearly, the extensive search for environmental models similar to the *satoyama* landscape has highlighted an important aspect of the new environmental and sociocultural research policies in global context. However, although the Satoyama Initiative has the merit of using the ecosystem model of the *satoyama* landscapes as a reference point to promote sustainable economic growth and to counter the decline of biodiversity around the world, it has not yet fully clarified the reasons for the decline of the traditional ways of managing these territories, which are less economically productive than more modern methods. In this regard, Knight states:

> The obvious difficulty with the idea of '*satoyama*-like landscapes' becoming a model of sustainable natural resource management and protection of biodiversity is that it does not address the forces that have led to the increasing neglect of the se environments in the first place – i.e. rural depopulation, urbanisation, industrialisation,

> and, in many developing nations, alienation of indigenous peoples from their land. Nor does it address the fact that while the traditional land-uses invariably have a lesser impact on the environment, they are also more labour-intensive and less productive (at least in the short term) than more modern methods of agriculture. It is for these reasons, among a number of others, that these traditional forms of land-use are being neglected in many countries, and without addressing these factors, no amount of convention-holding or expounding on the merits of *satoyama* (however worthy a model it may be) is going to reverse the trend towards more intensive (and economically profitable) land-use. (Knight 2010, 434)

Beyond the criticism raised concerning the actual results obtained by specific projects sponsored by the Satoyama Initiative, it can be affirmed that a key aspect of these programmes is that they are mainly based on a specific geographical and cultural construct – the *satoyama* landscape – which is globally 'reproducible' and culturally assimilated to '*satoyama*-like landscapes'. This means that the search for an ecologically sustainable solution that is economically viable and ethically fair towards local communities, is mainly based on an "emotional vision of *satoyama*" as defined by ecologist Yumoto Takakazu (Yumoto 2011). This particular view of the *satoyama* is directly connected to the still dominant environmentalist and eco-religious rhetoric of nature and connectedness to place: as a Japanese scholar complained during a UNESCO International Symposium, "It is a pity that the traditional idea of the Japanese nurturing the natural world under the guise of the worship of 8 million gods has largely not been maintained in recent times" (Iwatsuki 2006, 92). According to Masami Yuki,

> This particularly romanticised vision of *satoyama* relies on an historical narrative by which 'pre-modernity' or 'native society' lived peacefully with nature, and this harmony was lost with the advent of modernity. This harmony with nature, in turn, has led to various environmental problems, a perspective that – as Yumoto points out – can be read as a particular type of Orientalism turned 'inside-out'. (Yumoto 2011, 17; also cited in Masami 2015, 85)

Masami concludes that Yumoto's analysis points toward a "*satoyama* Orientalism whereby the glorification of nature emerged out of the development of new methods for its exploitation" (Masami 2015, 85). As previously seen, these methods are directly based on the culturally-bound and socially mediated interpretations of Japanese *satoyama*:

> As we can see in German Romanticism in the 19th century, the call for a return to nature developed as a response to modernity even within the West itself. Europeans and Americans who were

> critical of modern civilization's attempt to conquer and rule nature projected an idealized image of "coexisting with nature" onto Native Americans or the East, especially Japan. This projection of what they saw as lacking in themselves onto an 'other' turned the Orientalist's ostentatious claims of superiority inside-out. The idealized projection of coexistence with nature was taken up by some Japanese intellectuals as something worth working toward. In other words, they wanted to cast themselves in the idealized Orientalist image that had been projected upon them. At the same time, and also within Japan, an idealized image of "coexistence with nature" was projected onto the native people of Hokkaido, the Ainu. […] One of the aspects of that Orientalism might have been the topic of *satoyama*. (Yumoto 2011, 17-18; also cited in Masami 2015, 87)

4 Conclusions

Satoyama may be regarded as a multifaceted place inscribed within real or symbolic constructions that are the product of specific social, environmental and cultural circumstances. It is capable both of satisfying cultural and environmental needs, and of conceptually empowering the social construction of spatial meaning. Yet, as previously seen, the multilocality of the *satoyama* landscape could be interpreted as a 'reproducible model' that has progressively assumed a central position in international scientific debate, also reflecting certain neo-traditional conservationist paradigms focused on the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, and connected with the Japanese cultural perception of nature – an aspect that has not been highlighted here, as it has already been widely studied (see, e.g., Asquith, Kalland 1997).

However, these two aspects point to a final key element in relation to the cultural complexity of the *satoyama* landscape, an element connected to the complexity of the environmental issue from both a the technical-scientific and an ideological-political perspective. Besides the fact that the *satoyama* landscape has become part of a larger cultural puzzle, what is interesting to note is that it could also reflect, either directly or indirectly, a certain reactionary ecological ideology which took hold in Japan starting in the Second World War. According to Richard Reitan,

> the key objective of reactionary ecology in Japan (and deep ecology contributes to this) is to bolster a narrative of a homogeneous ethnic community at one with a sanctified nature, where 'nature' signifies the particular Japanese landscape and a unique Japanese culture. (2017, 12)

Furthermore, Reitan argues that

> there is also an effort in reactionary ecology to locate environmental degradation (and the excesses of capitalism generally) geographically outside of Japan. For example, in the East-West (or Japan-West) binary discussed above, Japan is set apart from "Western civilization", defined in terms of a monotheistic Judeo-Christian religious tradition and a will to dominate nature. By situating the roots of global environmental crises in an imagined 'West' from which Japan is detached, reactionary ecology positions Japan outside the conditions of environmental exploitation. Yet, reactionary ecology seeks not only to distance Japanese culture from these problems, but to uphold and disseminate the "Japanese view" as the solution. (2017, 11)

This type of ideology is therefore historically rooted in the question of identity in relation to nature. Within it, it is possible to identify a tension between models of action inspired by the principle of rationalisation of human action and principles of an ethical-political nature. It could thus be argued that the question of the multilocality of the *satoyama* landscape also reflects this type of ideological orientation in some way, although this hypothesis may seem misleading, since it has not yet been fully accredited. However, considering all the various ethnic and Orientalist meanings that the *satoyama* landscape has today, it is worth asking whether this concept might be the centre around which a new form of conservative environmentalist universe gravitates.

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