

OZAKI AKIHIRO 尾崎彰宏¹

THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE AND FURUSATO/HOME

Towards *furusato* as a Sacred Space

Introduction: What 3/11 Made Visible

The sound of the term *furusato*/home (hometown, birthplace, homeland, native place, or *Heimat* in German) evokes an unconscious sense of nostalgia for the Japanese. Such feelings might even increase, as one gets older. While we are not normally conscious of *furusato*, it may well represent a key to opening the door to human sentiments. This article will use the concept of *furusato* to consider the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, which wreaked horrific destruction across the Tōhoku and Kantō regions, and how the area has recovered and revived since the disaster.

The Disappearance of furusato and the Wealth of Things

Furusato has been heralded in Japanese poetry as a term and concept from antiquity to the present. The *Man'yōshū* 『万葉集』 anthology, compiled from the latter half of the 7th century through the latter half of the 8th century, and the *Kokinwakashū* 『古今和歌集』 anthology, dating to 901, both include frequent mentions of the term *furusato*. Its appearances in these two anthologies express two different meanings. First, poem 992 in the *Man'yōshū* refers to Asuka as the poet's *furusato*, and then creates a pun on different characters for the term Asuka referring to Nara. Here the term refers to an old, dilapidated village. In

1 Tohoku University

the past *furusato* meant old lands that were previously cities or capitals. The second usage, found in *Kokinwakashū* poem 42, states that the scent of past flowers reminds the poet of his *furusato*. Thus, the term here means a land long loved and familiar to the poet. From antiquity the definition of *furusato* included something similar to what we might today call nostalgia. Beginning in the Meiji period (1868-1912), the term came to refer to thoughts of somewhere far off, of traveling to a city where one succeeds and then returns home, covered with honors. Thus, *furusato* refers both to the place of one's birth, for which one is nostalgic, and at the same time to its exact opposite, the advanced place or country where one lives in the present, busy with work and the accumulation of wealth.

This is not to suggest that the term had universally positive associations. Dazai Osamu's 太宰治 (1909-1948) novel *Tsugaru* 『津軽』 (1944) includes a scene where the protagonist takes pains not to speak the Tsugaru dialect, his native form of the language. This is a typical example of a situation in which identification with rural roots becomes as source of embarrassment. *Furusato* equaled the countryside, a place seen as providing raw resources in the forms of labor and foodstuffs but offering little else. Conversely, this means that, while the countryside produces resources and labor, rural areas are not themselves understood as sites of consumption or places to work. Thus, these areas are supporting actors, and people there come to internalize the idea that they inhabit places that progress left behind.

Let us take the situation of power companies in Japan to highlight an example of the ways ambiguous feelings toward *furusato* shape rural realities. Electric power companies in Japan, which are public utilities, often face criticisms that they take advantage of feelings of inadequacy in the countryside by promoting themselves as standing at "the cutting edge of civilization" and by promising rural areas that host them financial grants and local job creation as part of Japan's nuclear power policies. The major power companies have been divided in accordance with the eight major regions of Japan, and each of them is tasked with providing its region with electrical power.

Based on that regional division, the Tohoku Electric Company should be responsible for the running of the Fukushima nuclear plants where the nuclear crisis occurred in 2011 and where even now the difficult work of stabilizing the reactors continues. However, despite the fact that the Fukushima nuclear plant is located 250 km from Tokyo, it is managed by the Tokyo Electric Company and functions as a power generation base for the capital region. It is an example of the situation discussed above, in which a local government allowed a power company to establish nuclear facilities dedicated to other regions in order to create employment opportunities and to enrich the local area through supplemental grants. *Furusato* as the countryside became emblematic of places that were simply less developed than their urban analogues. For areas with historical associations and those known for agricultural success, tourism offers some hope for local prosperity, but this promise often turns out to be false. Most areas fail to generate enough interest to maintain viable populations, leading to the loss of local cultural heritage, for example when local arts or festivals fail to be passed on to succeeding generations. This can cause already struggling communities to be further marginalized. There appears a vicious cycle in which a dearth of economic opportunities leads to the abandonment of villages and towns by their residents, contributing to a further darkening of local economic prospects.

This is not a new story. Situations like that described above have been standard in the course of government-directed modernization from the Meiji period onward. The plans of officials focused on the belief that wealth building was possible and that its pursuit justified significant sacrifices. Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867-1916) understood the dangers of this path and what would result. His novel *Sanshirō* 『三四郎』 (1908) recounts its title character's journey to Tokyo from Kumamoto in Kyūshū in order to study at Tokyo Imperial University. Sitting in the railway carriage, his eyes widened as he saw how ever-progressing Japan was changing and spoke of his excitement. The middle-aged man sitting next to him poured cold water on the young man's enthusiasm, suggesting that the current version

of progress could only end in destruction. Japan today, a century after *Sanshirō*, is no different. People continue to press forward with single-mindedness, eyes constantly on what is ahead in order to live. The shadow of the Meiji era darkens the present, still defining modern Japan.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of January 17, 1995, 16 years before the Great East Japan Earthquake, was a clear warning. And yet, we continued to stand by and disregard the impatience and despair that modern Japan evoked prior to that. Contrary to that indifference, the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear plant accident it caused has led to radical reconsideration of the dominant ways of life and value systems in Japan. The scale of the destruction was immense, spreading more than 300 km from Fukushima to Iwate and Kantō. It was a disaster of a nearly unparalleled magnitude in Japan, but previous centuries faced their own repeated disasters, though smaller in scale. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 and Sanriku earthquakes and tsunami in 1896 and 1933 are ready examples of these. The accident at the Fukushima nuclear facility, however, was a disaster that defied, and continues to defy, imagination.

Nine years have now passed since the disaster. When I hear how recovery is proceeding in the different areas, it only strengthens my sense of how difficult it is to do the cleanup after a nuclear accident. Progress is being made in the decontamination of the radiation-contaminated region, and restrictions have been lifted on parts of the evacuation zone. Still, progress remains slow on the return of displaced people to their evacuated homes. There is a lack of detailed information on the health of the citizens affected by the radiation, making it difficult to obtain accurate information and doing little to reassure former residents.

Recovery and regeneration after the March 11th disasters involve discussions about the building of seawalls that are higher than previously thought necessary, the creation of safety measures to protect coast lines that could be overwhelmed by tsunami, and the movement of residential areas to higher ground. And yet, that process has been less welcomed by the residents than expected. Why is it not linked to their desire to live active lives?

Undoubtedly the ability to live in safety is important to them, but their reluctance to take what have been deemed appropriate measures betrays a deep sense of dissatisfaction. Much of this feeling surely derives from thoughts of being separated from the lands where they and their families have lived for so long. This is a clear demonstration that human life is not something simply built on safety and convenience.

So, what can be done? The answer isn't easy. Let us change our perspective and ask again. Instead of asking what can be done, we must consider what links people so determinedly to the places where they have lived for long times, for the lands where their ancestors lie buried. Why are these locations so essential? Solutions to the current problems will surely come from such questions.

From Scenic Spot to Landscape

Many of the disaster zones were background zones, the regional or countryside areas I mentioned previously that support the prosperity of the cities, or industrial areas, places that contribute both labor and materials. These areas served important roles in the course of Japan's development. As a result, the group structures of traditional religion, the organizations and collective practices connected with ancestors, have been neglected. If we talk about the blood links that connect people, the landscapes of a community that has grown over time, the cold mornings of winter when one is enveloped in a soft warm overcoat, these are the impressions that undergird human lives. This is why the residents feel such nostalgia for their *furusato*. This nostalgia evokes in human hearts images of such scenes, such landscapes.

Since antiquity, poets in Japan have written prose regarding scenic spots and landscapes. Those scenes were then implanted in the hearts of their readers. Not simply sad, or happy, or lonely, they contained internal realities that could not be conveyed to others. Ariwara no Narihira's 在原業平 (825-880) poem about the evanescence of a cherry tree, "Were there no cherry

blossoms/in all the world,/how tranquil in the spring/would the hearts/of people be (*Yononaka ni taete sakura no nakari seba, hito no kokoro wa nodokekaramashi*, 世の中にたえて桜のなかりせば春の心はのどけからまし) “, is well known from the *Kokinwakashū* anthology. Cherry blossoms, first noticed when they begin to bloom, reach full bloom very quickly and have fallen and scattered in a matter of days. Because the flower’s existence is so short, it evokes a sense of pity in the hearts of those who view it. It stands as a symbol of the transience of life. The scene described by Narihira spreads in an instant to the hearts of all those who read the verse.

Then we can consider another example of evoking a scene or landscape. That is Bashō’s 松尾芭蕉 (1644-1694) famous verse, “The summer grasses/for many brave warriors/the aftermath of dreams (*Natsukusa ya tsuwamono-domo ga yume no ato*, 夏草や兵どもが夢の跡)”, presents another example of the affecting depiction of the human and natural landscapes. This poem evokes human fate, its rise and fall, composed on the site of an old battlefield in Hiraizumi in Tōhoku. It refers to the tragic end of Yoshitsune no Minamoto, chased by the forces of his older brother, the first shogun Yoritomo no Minamoto, to the far north, where he took his own life at age 30 after being betrayed by the second son of his erstwhile host, Hidehara Fujiwara. The stage for the decisive battle is today a plain of waving grass with only shadows of the great families’ existences remaining. This poem speaks with deep emotion of the fleetingness of human endeavors. Here too, rather than a long rambling text, the succinct 17-morae verse form conveys a limitless sentiment seemingly in opposition to its textual brevity. The reader senses that expanse, and indeed the power of the imagery overshadows that of its specific content. And yet, the evoked image is not the bare description of a scene. It is suffused with narrative elements that inject movement and human life into an actual landscape, a real place. The text imposes the transience of the human experience to the still and unchanging backdrop. The verse presents a tableau, yes, but strictly speaking it is not only a tableau.

From a Land of the Gods to a Real-World Land – Furusato in Europe

The ancient Greeks and Romans were aware of the *furusato* concept, and this awareness persisted in the Europe of later centuries. The Renaissance - a term that speaks specifically of a rebirth of ancient classical culture – can also be seen as a “*furusato* and rebirth movement.” At the same time, the view that one’s individuality was based on one’s birthplace, those who live there, and particularly the language spoken there can be traced back at least as far as 14th-century Italy. In parallel there began to be an awareness of each region as landscape or scenic view.

The 16th century saw various dramatically opposing movements emerge. In northern Europe painters rediscovered the ruins of ancient Rome and, beginning with Jan Gossaert, individuals and groups traveled from the Netherlands to Italy, where they were moved by the works of the Italian Renaissance and antiquity. The Romanists recognized the previously unvalued ancient works as their own source and began to include similar imagery in their paintings. In the process, the classics and antiquity became part of their own identity. And yet, their devotion did not represent simple and unadulterated praise for antiquity. The antiquity that they celebrated expressed different qualities than that idealized in Italy. In other words, the Renaissance based on antiquity did not exist solely in Italy, it took on other forms in northern Europe. While northern artists took Italy as their source, their creativity was all the more strengthened by the pains they took to distinguish themselves from Italy. This movement, this search for individual identity, repeated over and over again until the 18th-century German Romantics. As they assigned increasing importance to their places of birth, their *furusato* came to be expressed in ways that went beyond the purely spiritual. Indeed, where they were from was also a political matter, their own selves standing at the center of the world. This reflected another type of *furusato* that already existed separately from *furusato* as source or origin. In the early 13th century in Europe, the place where one was raised and lived one’s everyday life came also to be recognized as *furusato*. The

concept that one's duty to defend one's ancestral land was loftier than the feudal duty of a vassal to one's lord was expressed by legal scholars. The idea gradually spread that what was important was not a far-off heavenly realm, a land of the gods as described by Augustine, but rather a land of the gods here on earth. This thinking, which emerged from one aspect of Christianity, saw in the midst of the Reformation a heightening of the meaning of pride in one's own land. While previously such land was depicted in painting as background without much importance, the land where people lived, rather than the royal family, came to be used as the central subject of painting. This worked in tandem with the recognition of landscape paintings as a genre. These places were sanctified by their depiction in painting, enshrining within them the voices of the nameless multitudes. The landscape was their identity and its symbol.

Let us consider the *Baptism of Christ* in the *Turin-Milan Hours* by Jan van Eyck, the painter credited with bringing realistic depiction to Northern European art. The viewer's gaze immediately shifts from the scene of Christ's baptism in the foreground to the landscape behind. The depiction of nature is arresting. The castle reflected on the river's surface and the landscape that spreads out from both banks of the river show that the person who conceived the composition did not want to focus attention on the heavens, but rather on the earthly realm. God's realm is thus shown to exist on Earth, and at the same time the scenery depicted is not the town of Bethlehem on the outskirts of Jerusalem, but rather evokes a sense of the Netherlandish countryside. Heaven is realized on Earth, and the painting entrusted to the hearts and emotions of the people who live there the answering of the question of whether their faith was strong enough to accept this.

Eventually the Netherlandish landscape shifted from the 16th century painters Joachim Patinir, Pieter Bruegel and others to 17th century Holland, where it became the medium for expressing the identity and pride of the citizenry. In other words, there came to be the understanding that landscape paintings were a way to create visible forms of a person's own identity. The birth of landscape

painting can be seen as a sign that God's realm had shifted from the heavens to the Earth. The pursuit of that realm represented a movement in accord with the Protestant Reformation and, in turn, became linked with various forms of community based on *furusato*. The landscape functioned as a medium linking people into social groups, and people who viewed landscapes as such recognized the world around them as landscapes.

What factors shaped people's awareness of the landscape as visualizations of *furusato*? The answer to that question can be found in Blaise Pascal's famous words about painting: "How useless is painting, which attracts admiration by the resemblance of things, the originals of which we do not admire." (*Pensées*, 134). If painted in a picture, even an uninteresting person can appear remarkable. Pascal emphasized the falseness of paintings, describing it as something that imitates the actual form in an effort approximating vanity. What he holds up for derision, however, is precisely where others find the principle value of painting. This same situation also arises for landscapes. Encountering their own *furusato* in a landscape, the people who see it (as well as the artist who rendered it) rediscover that place as a special location. The *furusato* as seen in a picture was an element that paved the path for the consciousness of modern citizenry. We can see Johannes Vermeer's famous *View of Delft* (1660-1661) as a typical example of this concept. Vermeer's painting reveals his *furusato* as a shining holy place, replete with a sense of quiet solemnity.

In 17th century Europe, there was a shift from the teleological view of the world to the mechanistic view of the world, and religious spaces became human spaces that could be measured. This transformation in European history, in which the main actors shifted from a set ruling class to the citizenry, was also seen in Japan. The Warring States period ended in the century-long Ōnin War of the late 16th century in an extended political transformation that concluded with the unification of the country under Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. At the beginning of the 17th century, Tokugawa Ieyasu destroyed both these rivals and forged the polity that would become known as the Edo shogunate. Peace was established and the foundations laid for

what would become a 250-year long period of relative peace and stability. By the 18th century, the merchants who helped develop the economy made great strides in cultural terms, and though, art, and aesthetics began to focus more on such emotive qualities as beauty and pleasure, rather than on religious concepts. The flourishing culture of the townspeople displayed in *ukiyoe* 浮世絵 arts – the “floating world (*ukiyo* 浮世)” – took root in cities and cultural products alike.

Discovery of the Landscape and the Rebirth of furusato

And yet, this movement, too, was to pass. As previously noted, Japanese society was plunged into turmoil when its leaders chose to open the country after pressure from the West in the latter half of the 19th century. This brought about a fundamental change in the dominant social systems. The movement from the Tokugawa-led government to the self-consciously modern Meiji government centered on four clans, those of Satsuma, Choshū, Tosa and Hizen, who together assumed important roles in the events leading to the Meiji Restoration. The previous social caste system, which centered on samurai, farmers, craftsmen and merchants, was abolished and the four classes were made nominally equal. The moral basis for society began to undergo a broad shift from Confucianism to the rationalism and the economic theories presented in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. New technologies and Western individualistic viewpoints were introduced. From the previous human relationships based on master-servant basis, Western ideas of the worth of the individual began to spread.

The thought that civil society was made up of a gathering of individuals was backed up in landscapes. The discovery of the landscape is thoroughly discussed in the well-known “Fūkei no hatsugen 風景の発言” chapter of the long essay *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* by Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人 (1941-). The key point of this chapter was that the landscape was discovered in Japan in 1887, and Kunikida Doppo’s 国木田独

歩 (1871-1908) *Musashino* 『武蔵野』 (1898) and *Wasureenu hitobito* 『忘れえぬ人々』 (1898) were important milestones in the process of its spread and acceptance. In particular, *Wasureenu hitobito* clearly shows a shift in values in which the painter turns towards the inner man before sketching the landscape.

Karatani's book describes the narrative paradigm in which the protagonist struggles with the eternal questions of human life, nostalgically thinking of different people as he suffers a sense of loneliness and isolation. During this process, we are told, it is landscape scenes, not images of people, that come to his mind. The unforgettable people of his life have been absorbed into the landscape. Though completely uninterested in the person in front of him, Doppo feels a sense of identification with the chance-encountered person who is absorbed in the landscape he is looking at as "none other than me." Karatani says that the person who views the landscape is the person who does not see "the external". It is essential to notice one's own existence in order to discover the landscape on a personal basis. In the shift from the Edo to the Meiji periods, there was a rethinking of morals and social structures and systems. During that process people lost track of their support systems but were able to discover themselves through the landscapes. In other words, rather than being absorbed in their relationships with the gods or the Buddhas, it was necessary for them to find a place where they could have an emotional transference as the other who is aware of the self.

In this manner scenery was transfigured into landscape. This entailed a de-familiarization with the visually known landscape elements, and through that process an imbuing of the landscape with the emotions of unease, sadness and nostalgia. While a landscape is an ordinary scene that might be anywhere, for the viewer it is an inimitable scene; this is what makes it a landscape. It could also be thought of as a shining, sacred place. Luminescence is transformed into personal autonomy, and is reborn as a will to live.

In Conclusion – The Restoration of Furusato is a Milestone on the Path towards a Worthy Nation

Since the birth of modern Japan, and especially from the 1960s onwards, *furusato* has been a site in which country is placed at odds with city in a manufactured conflict that has contributed greatly to the expansion of high-level capitalism. This order was shaken by the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent nuclear plant accident. The damage the disasters caused, both economic and material, was almost irreparable. Devastated landscapes cause deep despair, yet if we can discern a holy light in the destroyed *furusato*, we will remember the forgotten narrative in the wind that flows from lost places. These are the lands where generations of ancestors sleep, sacred and connected to the hearts of people. Thus, *furusato* as a site of prayer is a place filled with a multitude of spirits, it is a land of affection, a place in which life has ended and will revive itself.

The restoration of *furusato* done to support people's spirits is not a case of a subordinate relationship between country and city; it is the rebuilding of a country with *furusato* as an organic body that closely binds the two. As 19th-century French historian Jules Michelet has stated in his *The History of France*, such a nation resonates with the people's character, and as a laudable nation that honors individuality, it can project an exemplary social nature internationally.²

Main References

Jirō Abe阿部次郎, *Tokugawa jidai no geijutsu to shakai* [Art and society in Tokugawa period] 『徳川時代の芸術と社会』 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten 角川書店, 1971 [1931]).

Hiroki Azuma東浩紀, *Genron* 『ゲンロン』 (Tokyo: Genron ゲンロン, 2017).

2 Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, Japanese version published by Fujiwara Shoten, 2010, pp. 165–166.

Augustin Berque, *Nippon no fūkei, seiō no seikan* 『日本の風景・西欧の景観』 (Tokyo: Kōdansha gendai shinsho 講談社現代新書, 1990).

Piero Camporesi, *Le belle contrade* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1992).

Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

Osamu Dazai 太宰治, *Tsugaru* 『津軽』 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha 新潮社, 2004).

Shunsuke Hirose 廣瀬俊介, *Fūkei shihonron* [Capitalistic theory of landscape] 『風景資本論』 (Tokyo: Rōbundō 朗文堂, 2011).

Norihiro Katō 加藤典洋, *Nippon no fūkeiron* [Theory of Japanese landscape] 『日本の風景論』 (Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko 講談社学術文庫, 2000).

Hiroshi Kainuma 開沼博, “*Fukushima*”ron: *genshiryokumura ha naze umaretanoka* [“Fukushima” theory: Why did atomic power villages appear?] 『「フクシマ」論：原子カムラはなぜうまれたのか』 (Tokyo: Seidosha 青土社, 2011).

Hiroshi Kainuma, *Hajimete no fukushimagaku* [Introduction to fukushimology] 『はじめての福島学』 (Tokyo: East Press イーストプレス, 2015).

Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

Riken Komatsu 小松理虔, *Shinfukkōron* [New theory of reconstruction] 『新復興論』 (Tokyo: Genron, 2018).

Doppo Kunikida, *Musashino* (including Wasureenu hitobito) (Tokyo: Shinchō-bunko 新潮文庫, 1949).

Koichirō Kuniwake 国分功一郎, *Genshiryoku jidai ni okeru tetsugaku* [Philosophy in the age of nuclear power] 『原子力時代における哲学』 (Tokyo: Shōbunsha 晶文社, 2019).

Jules Michelet, *Furansushi* [The History of France] 『フランス史』 (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten 藤原書店, vol. 1, 2010).

Raffaele Milani, *L'arte del paesaggio* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2001).

Masaki Ōsawa 大澤真幸, *Sekaishi no tetsugaku-Kinsei hen*

[Philosophy of world history – The modern age] 『〈世界史〉の哲学 近世篇』 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2017).

Susumu Nakanishi 中西進, *Man'yōshū* 『万葉集』 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978).

Akihiro Ozaki 尾崎彰宏, 'The Beginning of the Never-ending Struggle', in: Christopher Craig, Enrico Fongaro, Akihiro Ozaki (ed. by), *Knowledge and Arts on the Move: Transformation of the Self-Aware Image through East-West Encounters* (Milan: Mimesis, 2018).

Akihiro Ozaki 尾崎彰宏, 'AFTER 3.11: Toward a Rehabilitation of the Mind', in: Christopher Craig, Enrico Fongaro, Andreas Niehaus (ed. by), *3.11: Disaster and Trauma in Experience, Understanding, and Imagination* (Milan: Mimesis, 2019).

Shigetaka Shiga 志賀重昂, *Nihon fūkeiron* [Theory of Japanese landscape] 『日本風景論』 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店, 1995 [1894]).

Natsume Sōseki, *Sanshirō* (London: Penguin Classic, 2017).

Hideo Takahashi 高橋英夫, *Mikurokosumosu: matsuo bashō ni mukatte* [Microcosmos: toward Matsuo Bashō] 『ミクロコスモス—松尾芭蕉に向かって』 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992).

Yutaka Tanaka 田中裕, Shingo Akase 赤瀬信吾 (ed. by), *Kokinwakashu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1981); Shin'ichi Yamamuro 山室信一, *Kimera: Manshūkoku no shōzō* [Chimera: a portrait of Manchuria] 『キメラ—満洲国の肖像』 (Tokyo: Chūōkōron shinsha 中央公論新社, 2004).

Akira Yoshimura 吉村昭, *Sanriku kaigan ōtsunami* [The big tsunami of Sanriku shore] 『三陸大津波』 (Tokyo: Bungeishunjūsha 文藝春秋社, 2004).

Yutaka Zakota 座小田豊 (ed. by), *Shizenkan no henshen to ningen no unmei* [Changement of nature's vision and destiny of human beings] 『自然観の変遷と人間の運命』 (Sendai: Tohoku University Press 東北大学出版会, 2015).