



# Mountains, water and people

～山と水と人のつながり～





With participation of

Taki Kentaro	Noma Naohiko
Nishinoko Fisherman	Komura Hiromitu
Ishizuka Sadajiro	Miyoshi Iwao
Fukamachi Katsue	Hirade Naoatsu
Andre De Antoni	Hamada Kiyoshi

Sound mixing

Michal Krajczok

Literature

Miyake Hitoshi

“Concept of Natue in Japanese Folk Religion”

Image / Editing / Concept

Mikhail Lylov

Translation

Ayabe Kaho	Muratsu Ran
Ishii Junichiro	Tanaka Riaki

Thank you

Elke Marhofer	Fukamachi Katsue
Yoshida Takehito	Nakai Hiromu

Research Institute for Humanity and Nature  
Laboratory of Environmental Design, Kyoto University  
University of Gothenburg

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Mikhail Lylov

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Research Institute for Humanity and Nature  
457, Kamigamomotoyama, Kita-ku, Kyoto-shi  
TEL : 075-707-2100 (in charge)  
FAX : 075-707-2106  
URL : <http://www.chikyu.ac.jp>

Design

Shimauchi Risa

Brochure editing

Shimauchi Risa	Nakai Minami
Ando Koichi	Senda Masako
others	

Edition

2020.03



## Fukamachi Katsue

Kyoto University, Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies

Associate professor   Landscaping



## Yoshida Takehito

Research Institute for Humanity and Nature/The University of Tokyo, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Associate Professor   Ecology



## Mikhail Lylov

International video director who specializes in research projects and video production that focus on the relationship between people and the environment. His works are published in countries such as Russia, Germany and Japan, and are actively involved in education and social activities.





# Dialogue with people, dialogue with nature

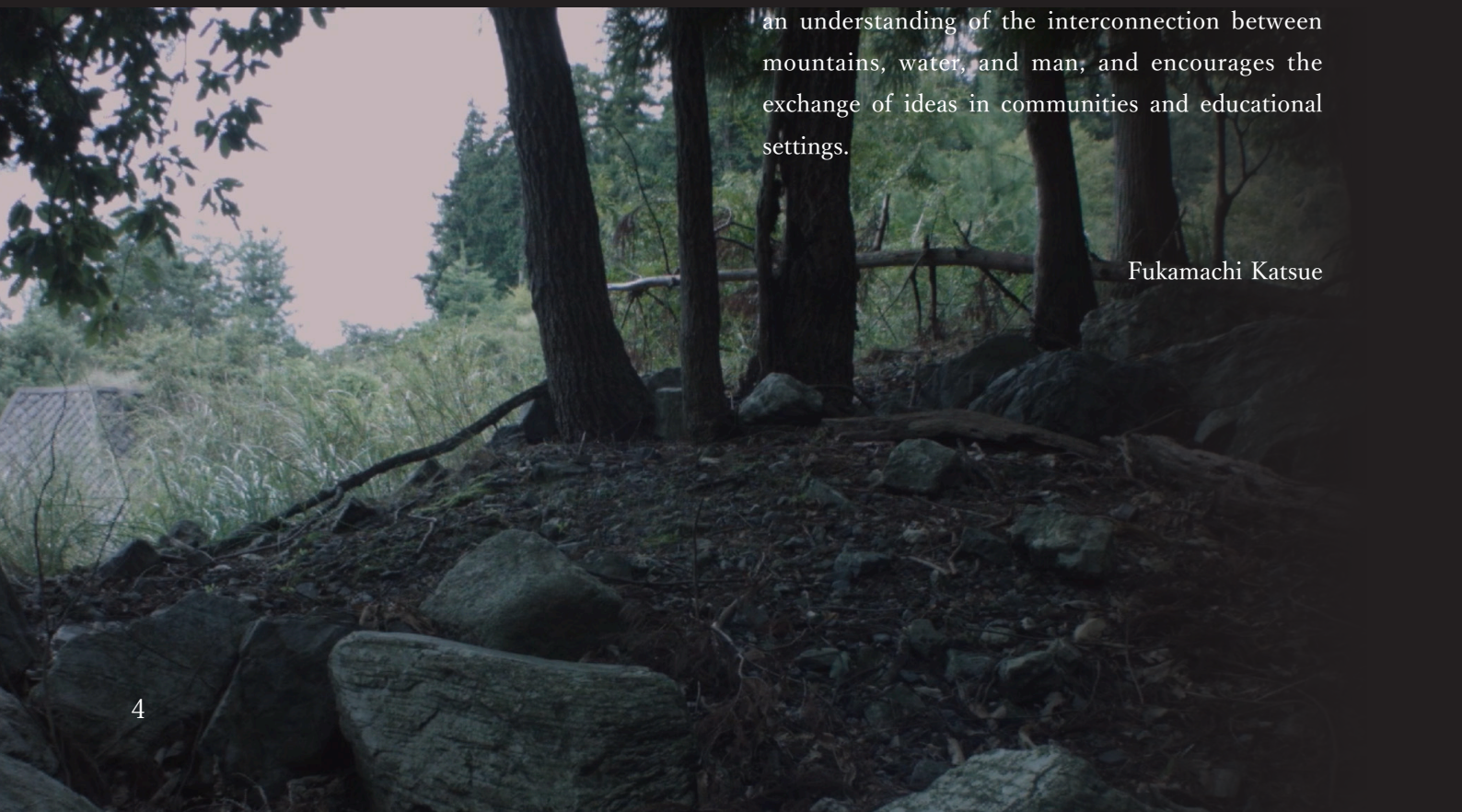
*Satoyama*, near the human settlements of Lake Biwa in Shiga Prefecture are a unique habitat type that connect a series of mountains, rivers, and lakes with a human culture that has developed slowly over time through the interchange between man and nature. Ecological and cultural networks have developed and become manifested in the lives of the people that inhabit these *satoyama*, as they have leveraged their relationship with the diverse nature of this unique environment. Roads and waterways have played important roles in furthering the physical and spiritual activities of these networks. Connecting regions in every direction, they have brought food, clothing, and shelter to their inhabitants, and are closely connected to local annual events and religious beliefs.

This documentary was created by Mikhail Lylov, an internationally renowned video director who recorded his experiences in the Ado-gawa River and Nishi-no-ko lagoon areas in the foothills of the Hira Mountains, as well as Sakamoto, the temple town of Mount Hiei, all located around Lake Biwa. The

work takes the form of a series of conversations that Lylov had with local people. By examining the theme of “the relationship between mountains, water, and man,” the film explores the importance of the connection among them, as well as their beauty. As Lylov navigates through *kasumitei* embankments rooted in traditional flood-control systems, lagoons that connect land with Lake Biwa, and watercourses and stonework produced using locally sourced materials, he interprets and depicts the region's fertile natural resources, as well as the traditional wisdom and skills in disaster prevention and reduction. Moreover, in the discussions on traditional tools that have been handed down through generations in the region, and in the scenes of the Sanno Festival at Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine, Lylov helps us understand the connection between the mountains, water, and man through examining people's daily lives and beliefs.

Produced and released as an educational film in both Japanese and English, we hope that the movie presents the viewer with the opportunity to foster an understanding of the interconnection between mountains, water, and man, and encourages the exchange of ideas in communities and educational settings.

Fukamachi Katsue





# Knowing the Connection between People and Nature

The blessings and challenges that nature provides are closely related. While the many blessings of nature support and enrich our lives, sometimes nature can also bring challenges. Ever since people first inhabited, they have always prospered and suffered as a result of nature. Indeed, it is the trials and tribulations of this relationship with nature that have become woven into people's history. Over time, people have learned how to live in harmony with nature. However, the once-close relationship between people and nature is unravelling, and traditional wisdom and skills are at risk of being lost.

The Hira Mountains lie to the west of Lake Biwa in Shiga Prefecture, Japan. The rain that falls upon these steep mountains runs down its slopes, passing through deep forests, villages, and eventually into Lake Biwa. Along this path, grasslands, forests, and crops can be found, and dragonflies, fish, and birds thrive. The rain also carves soil and rocks from the steep slopes, which are then transported in rivers and deposited to create the beautiful shores of Lake Biwa. In between the mountains and the lake are villages where people have lived since ancient times. The blessings conferred by these nearby mountains and lakes have long supported these communities who have prospered by protecting themselves from the disasters that the mountains and lakes have wrought upon them. During the time when people's lives were closely connected to nature, people integrated the positive and negative aspects of mountains and rivers into their lives. When supplies

of fuel and food started coming in from outside the local area, people's lives and their relationship to nature changed, and so too did nature's own existence. However, evidence of nature remains intact to this day. The climate is changing around the world, and even the way that the rain falls upon us is expected to change. Indeed, nature's blessings and challenges will continue to impact people's lives. Given this trajectory, perhaps it is time to rebuild our relationship with nature by learning from traditional wisdom and skills.

The movie "Mountains, water and people" depicts how the lives of people living in the foothills of the Hira Mountains are connected to the mountains, rivers, and the lake that surround them. This work conveys both the beauty and challenges of nature in this area. What will you take away from watching this movie, and how will you feel about people's relationship with nature? We hope that this opportunity will present you with the chance to reflect deeply upon the connection between people and nature.

Yoshida Takehito





# Studying the River, Learning from the Water

I have spent roughly a year following the work of a group of researchers and students, who investigate communal responses to natural disasters and technologies for ecological disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR) around Lake Biwa. While I was learning from the researchers, the researchers were learning from the stories of residents, and the stories originated from the people's experience of daily interaction with the environment. Collective learning is an interesting process in its own right, as the shared experience leads to different results for every participant. Hence, knowledge, facts, and information are only parts of the valuable outcomes of the collective research process. For example, before one learns something, (s)he develops an interest in the subject. The attention that is created is as important an outcome as the knowledge itself. Making a film—making an image of something—is first of all an exercise in paying attention. And as soon as some attention is given, it provokes attention in response. Drawing from my experience of participation in various research projects, I think that a researcher or a filmmaker, despite the particularities of their practices, becomes entangled with the local community precisely because of this exchange of attention. This basic exchange underlies the creation of values: attention associated with a particular person becomes a perspective of appraisal, an attitude; becoming aware of the difference of another's perspective leads to a change in your own attitude. As a filmmaker, I am interested in this dimension of learning, which underpins and parallels the formation of knowledge *per se*.

Ancient Chinese philosophers, such as Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, formulated their philosophical knowledge by observing rivers and the qualities of water. Mountains and rivers appeared to them as self-governing entities; through the observation of the river's way of living we can understand its ethics

and use of power. In other words, what the ancient Chinese philosophers wanted to transform into knowledge—what they paid attention to—were the attitudes of rivers and the habits of water.

For example, Lao-tzu recommends observing how water follows the river's path and to use your power and energy in a similar way, thus formulating the principle of *wu-wei*: “The world is ruled by letting things take their course. It cannot be ruled by interfering.”<sup>1</sup> Are not the *kasumitei* an example of the early-modern engineers learning how to live with the rivers, to govern them without governing, by letting them follow their habit? To do something in accordance with *wu-wei* is therefore considered the achievement of the aim through acting in accordance with the propensity of things.

In the context of modern disaster prevention engineering, water is understood as an object of governance because it possesses a destructive potential: the purpose of managing a river is to counteract the water's force. In my opinion, this represents a distinctly modern concept of force, which defines force as the potential to exert violence. In the view of ancient philosophers, water, corresponding to yin, is also a force, but of a different kind. Because water can take any form given to it, and, without any additional effort and utilizing only its own weight, can pass through even the tiniest of fissures, it can be considered the force of perceptivity, a creative yet passive force. Using the modern language of technology, one can say that the attentiveness of water teaches us to use our energy efficiently, to achieve more by doing less. “Practice non-action. Achieve without doing,”<sup>2</sup> recommends Lao-tzu.

While working on the film, I encountered another fascinating example of learning from the natural



environment in the Sanno Festival of Hiyoshi Taisha of Otsu City. The festival's celebratory events are staged in accordance with the path of the river that runs down from the mountaintop, passes the villages with their rice paddies and arrives at its “home”<sup>3</sup> Lake Biwa. When I see the image of people flowing down the hill, all wearing white *happi* jackets, I cannot but think that the observation of mountain rivers must be at the source of the Sanno Festival of Hiyoshi Taisha. A river travels unlike a person: it has not left its source although it has already arrived at its destination. If the river, in following its path neither leaves nor arrives, then it eternally returns, just as the festival returns every year. Although the river returns eternally, one cannot enter the same river twice, for every time it is different water that flows past your feet.<sup>4</sup> In the same manner, the Sanno Festival of Hiyoshi Taisha celebrates the season's change: “Change and difference are what returns and repeats” the river tells us.

In a time of serious ecological crisis, we are tempted to search for recipes for living in organic harmony with nature. This seems to be a strange way of thinking because disagreement and discord are as much a part of the unfolding of ecological processes as peace and harmony. For example, recurrent ecological disturbances, such as landslides and floods diversify ecological conditions and contribute to the richness of ecosystems. Just as the *satoyama* is exemplary in articulating the value of human-induced ecological disturbances in maintaining diverse ecologies, examples of Eco-DRR mechanisms such as *kasumitei* can articulate the value of rivers and their habits for maintaining healthy ecosystems.

If we compare pre-industrial technologies of disaster risk reduction, which are the focus of the Eco-DRR research project, with modern mainstream methods of disaster prevention engineering, it becomes apparent that the two methods reference the two varying conceptions of force described earlier. As

the environmental philosopher Marion Hourdequin puts it:

The view of nature inherited from enlightenment puts its faith first of all in human rationality, it emphasizes controlling and planning, directing our lives and shaping the world around us. What is lacking in this view is ... receptivity. Receptivity involves “a capacity of seeing and a tendency of seeing others' viewpoints ... in the favorable light, in which they appear to those others” . As such it is bound up with care and empathy, and with our emotional lives more generally<sup>5</sup>.

Receptivity is a virtue attributed by Chinese philosophers to water. Paying attention to the attitudes and habits of water allows them to understand what it means to act receptively. Hence, it is not the power to affect that we learn from water, but the power of being affected. It is from water that one learns to appreciate the perspectives of others and to act by the propensity of the environment.

*Kasumitei* weirs, stone water channels *suiro* and *shishigaki* stone fences—the technologies at the focus of the Eco-DRR project—take advantage of the power of being affected by environmental events just as much as they manifest the people's power to affect their environment. Hence, the contemporary value of these old technologies does not stem solely from their efficiency, functionality or durability, but also derives from the fact that they encapsulate a receptive attitude towards the environment. Re-evaluation of these technologies may bring our attention to the necessity of learning from the rivers and water, mountains and stones.

Mikhail Lylov

1, Daodejing , chapter 48.

2, Daodejing, chapter 63.

3, “Dao is like a river flowing home to the sea” , Daodejing, chapter 32.

4, Words attributed to the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus: “You could not step twice into the same river.”

5, Marion Hourdequin. 2016.



# STORY



## 1. Moriyama Community Center (Session)

The first screening of the film was held in Moriyama. Local residents attended the screening, they shared their opinions about the film and discussed the issues addressed in it.



## 2. *Kasumitei*

Our research began at the office of Professor Taki. After he explained about *kasumitei*, we visited the places, where *kasumitei* were located in the past. Nowadays, just by observing the riverbank, it is very hard to see *kasumitei*. Not surprisingly, only a few residents know about them.



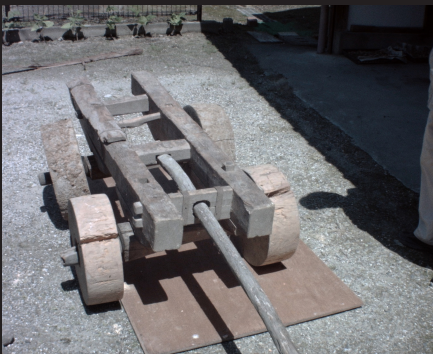
## 3. Nishinoko fisherman

Meeting with a fisherman at Nishinoko was a chance encounter. We learned a lot by simply observing activities of this person: how he throws his net into the water, how he relies on both chance and skill to catch the fish. As a result, we understood, that the fisherman's net is a technology, with which a person embraces chance. Isn't *kasumitei* also a technology, with which people embrace natural disasters?



## 4. Moriyama stones

Moriyama village is located between steep slopes of Horai mountain and west lakeside of Biwa. From the story told by Ishizuka Sadajiro, we learned, that famous Moriyama stones were procured after landslides. The latter were bringing stones down to *sato-yama* area.



## 5. Folk implements

Ishizuka Sadajiro and Nakai Hiromu showed us the cart used to gather Moriyama stones on the slopes of Horai mountain. The cart was driven downhill using the cows, who nowadays vanished from the villages. Appreciating the intricate ornament of Moriyama stones, we were interested to see their birthplace.





#### 6. Chogoro-iwa

Not far from that modern disaster-prevention installation, we found Chogoro-iwa. It is an enormous rock, which is admired by the residents of Moriyama. Maybe, this stone materializes people's consciousness about natural disasters? Noriko river bends around the rock, so Chogoro-iwa acts as a shield behind which old Moriyama village is safe from big landslides.



#### 7. Sand control dam

Descending along Noriko river, we found a series of enormous concrete dams and embankments. These were built upon the Noriko river in the recent past to prevent landslides common to the area. These constructions provided security to the newly developed areas of the village, train line and road at the cost of "freezing" and damaging the riparian ecosystem.



#### 8. Vegetation of Mount Horai

Following the Noriko river further down, we arrived at the *satoyama* area. Professor Fukamachi explained how the composition of the forest reflects the history of "environmental disturbances". Such disturbances as small landslides, typhoons, and firewood coppicing contribute to the diversity of the forest species. The effect of these disturbances depends on their scale and timing. Pointing to the abundant stones under our feet, she explained that Moriyama stones were also used to create stone weirs to fence out the wild boars and sediment flows in case of landslides.



#### 9. Sanno Matsuri of Hiyoshi Taisha

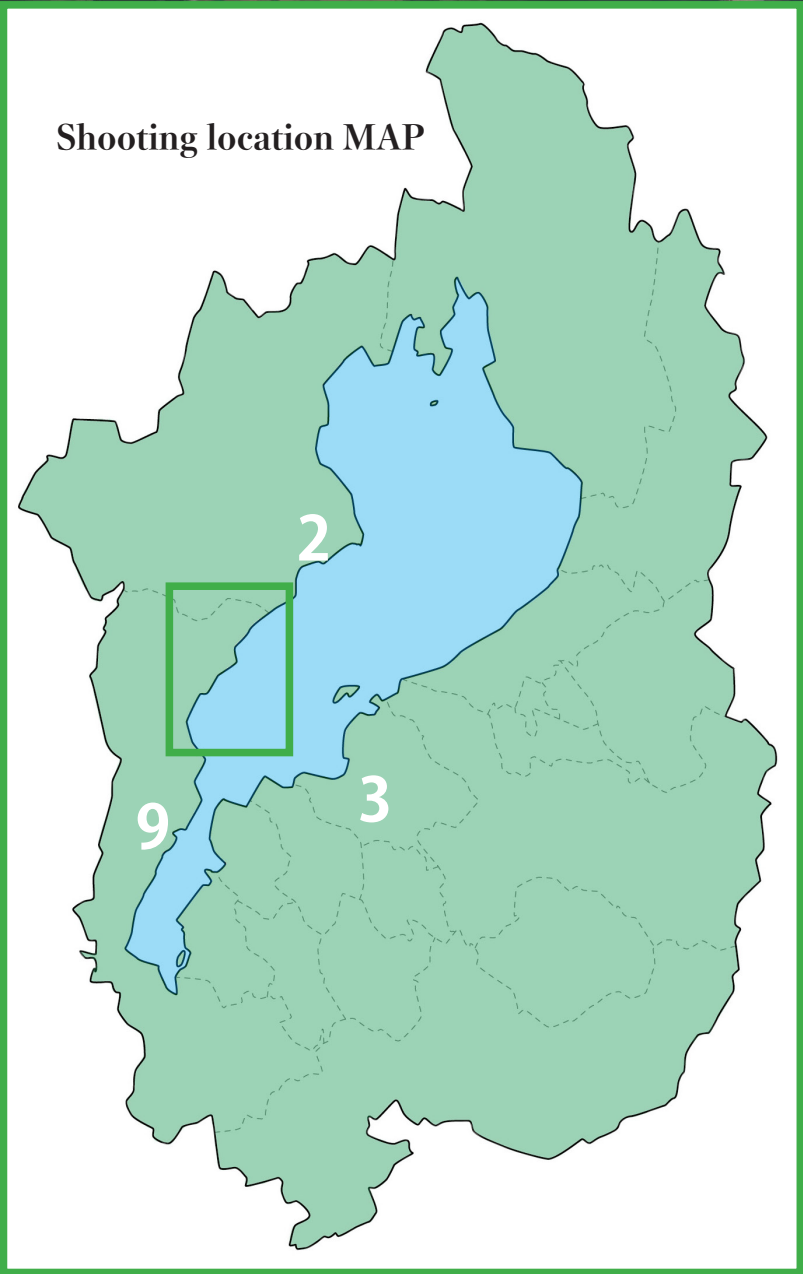
Traveling down the Horai mountain with the water of Noriko river we finally arrived in the village area. We were lucky to see Sanno Matsuri of Hiyoshi Taisha which takes place a few kilometers south of Moriyama. A flow of people, who descend from the mountain top to the shore reminded us the waters of Noriko river. Similar to a mountain river, the procession 'flows' downhill, passes the village and reaches Lake Biwa.



#### 10. Kitahira old map

Rice growing cultures depend on the element of water and the element of earth to thrive. At the shore of Omimaiko and Lake Biwa, our group stood between water and earth. From the interview with residents and through the exploration of the past land use we learned how people have changed their relationship to these elements.





7

6

4

**Shiga**

8

1

5

**Horai**

**Wani**



# Omi-Takashima

2



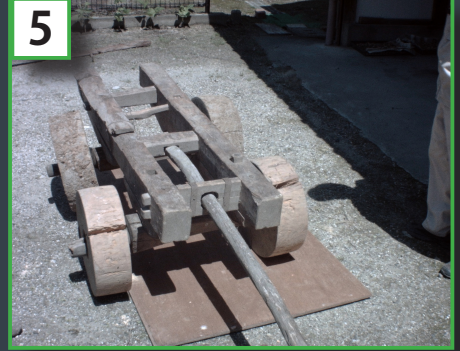
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Omi-Maiko

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Hira



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Eco-DRR Project

Research and Social Implementation of Ecosystem-based  
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in Shrinking Societies

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