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## Time as Folklore

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## Time as Folklore

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### Introduction

When we think of *time*, we normally consider that it proceeds only forward, never going backward. While the turn of the century is just around the corner, there is a general tendency in society that, reflecting the widely accepted perception of time, people regard the coming of the year 2000 as the 'end of a century'. What is important is that this perception is a notion based on the solar calendar developed in the West. It derives from the modern concept of time, which Japan assimilated during the Meiji era. The notion of an ending century is deeply interrelated with eschatology in Christianity, in which people's apprehension is accompanied by fear. According to eschatology, when the end is reached, the future is also to be extinguished. Today, we are exposed to a situation in which the 'end of the world' is not merely an abstract notion, but imposed on us almost as an imminent reality. In this context, people have been quite sensitive to the implication of the 'end of the world'.

Having said so, however, we should also note that it is not clear whether we can elucidate 'time' simply by referring to Western ideas. In this paper, I would like to focus on time in Japanese folklore, which was integrated in people's life long before the advent of pre-modern times.

### 1. Original Definition of Time: *Toki*, *Aida* and *Sechi*

*Saiji Shūzoku Goi* (歳時習俗語彙: Glossary of Seasonal Rituals, Festive Occasions and Custom), which was edited and compiled by Kunio Yanagita, delineates traditional expressions of time in Japanese folklore that have been preserved in various regions. For instance, there is a temporal expression *tokiori*:

Farming people in Nara Prefecture call holidays such as *bon* (盆) (Buddhist observance honouring the spirits of ancestors), New Year's Day, festivals and other days off *tokiori* (時折) or *tokiyori*. On the other hand, ordinary days are called *ahida*. We feel comfortable in conjecturing that *tokiori* has the same origin as *orime*, which means *sechi* (節) (point, notch, partition, demarcation). The word *tokiori* is used in many other areas as well. It seems that *toki* is an

ancient equivalent to *sechi* (節). Nowadays, however, *tokiori* is defined merely as an expression to mean *tokidoki* (時々 = from time to time). People simply take *tokiori* as a reference to days when they cook *mochi* (rice cake) or *sekihan* (rice cooked with *azuki* beans) without recognizing the ancient etymology.

According to Yanagita, farmers' days off are called *tokiyori*, whereas working days are called *aida*. The Japanese word for *time* is *jikan* (時間), which is pronounced as *tokioriaida* in folklore.

In addition, Yanagita points out that the word *orime* is an ancient folklore expression, which existed even before *sechi* (節). In some areas, people used variations of this word such as *orime-sechibi*, *shichi* or *orime-kirime*.

Since *sechi* (節) is a word of Chinese origin, there ought to have been a precursor to it. Today, *orime* is the only expression known to people as a precedent to *sechi* (節). In some parts of Kagoshima Prefecture, people use expressions such as *oime* or *oime-setsubi*. Those which are referred to by *oime* and *oime-setsubi* are a full spectrum of festive occasions in Japanese folklore, both major and minor, which ordinary people have observed for centuries, such as *o-hi-machi* (御日待) on Oct. 15, *tsuki-machi* (月待) every month (Traditional social gatherings, held on predetermined nights, at which neighbours talked and feasted while awaiting dawn or moonrise), *nōshin-sai* (農神祭) on Oct. 10 (Festival of agricultural deities), Harvest Festival on Sept. 19 as well as so-called *go-sekku* (五節供) (5 major festivals in a year including *jinjitsu* (人日) on July 1, *jōshi* (上巴) on March 3, *tango* (端午) on May 5, *tanabata* (七夕) on July 7 and *chōyō* (重陽) on Sept. 9). It should be noted that, with regard to *shōgatsu* (正月) (New Year observances), only *tano-kami-sai* (田神祭) (Festival for Shinto god who protects rice plants and brings about abundant rice crops) on Jan. 14 is incorporated in the list. The examples in Okinawa evidence that *oime* is the same as *orime* (折目). In Okinawa Island, as is the case in Ōsumi Peninsula of Kagoshima, people have been using the word *orime-sechibi* (折目節日). In Kikaijima Island, there is a word *shichi-unmi*, sometimes simply *shichi*, which is the same as *sechi-orime* (節折目). *shichi* is a variation of *sechi* (節), which is corroborated by the fact that a traditional ritual for bathing neonates on the day of *sechi-orime* (節折目) in August according to the lunar calendar is represented as *shichi-yoku* (節浴) in *kanji* characters. Although it is not clear whether *shichi* encompasses all festivals and feast days through the year, it is doubtless that *orime* (折目) and *sechi* (節) shared the same etymological origin. In Sasuna of Tsushima Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, *sechibi* (節日) is called *orime-kirime*.

Modern people use the word *sekku* (節供), and *o-sechi* is part of our daily language. Yanagita discusses that the way in which the term of *o-sechi* is used

exemplifies the fact that *shōgatsu* (正月) is the most important festivity for Japanese people:

Since *shōgatsu* (正月) is the most important of all *sechi* (節), it is called *o-sechi* in many places. In Tokyo, *o-sechi* solely means formal dinner that a family enjoys together on the New Year's Eve. On the other hand, in some areas, *o-sechi* means an offering to Shinto deities, which people present before the Shinto altar at home at lunch time during the New Year Days. (*Nishi Mimasaka Hougen-Shuu* = Collection of dialects in West Mimasaka) Furthermore, in some areas, *o-sechi* means joyous feasts to be held during the first 7 days in January to which relatives are invited. For example, in the Awa region of Shikoku Island, this tradition is named *sechi-kyaku* (セチ客) (*Shikama-gun Fūzoku Chōsa* = Study of Tradition and Custom in Shikama County). Likewise, in farming communities around Tokyo, villagers invite each other during the first 11 days of January, offering *udon* (Japanese soup noodle) and other foods. This custom is called *sechi* (*Part 1, Vol. 5, Tabi to Densetsu* (Journey and Legend). This old custom has been disseminated in a wide area around Tokyo including Saitama Prefecture, where people call it *sechi* or *ōban* (Iruma). In north-east of Japan, Feb. 2 is called *setsu*, when parents are to pay a visit to their children for thanksgiving (*Nishidagawa, Part 5, Vol. 10, Tabi to Densetsu* = Journey and Legend).

*o-sechi* is the most auspicious of all *hare* occasions in these areas. It means that the reference to offerings for deities has transformed itself to be a synonym with *toki*.

As for *toki*, there is a Buddhist term *itsuki* (齋). *Otokibi* (御齋日) of *o-toki* is a day of specific religious meaning, when followers in the Buddhist faith congregate in a temple to participate in a religious ceremony or lecture. The reason why 齋 = *toki* is used in folklore culture is that the religious congregation also serves as joyous entertainment for its participants, who engage in a big feast to celebrate the social function. The day of *toki* which is associated with the Buddhist term *itsuki* (齋) is Jan. 16.

What is interesting is that there was a region in Niigata Prefecture where, on the day of *toki*, a member of a family refrained from taking any food, tea or water overnight after having finished vegetarian supper based on Buddhist principles. It signifies that *toki* was, in fact, apart from the religious significance attached to it, a day of *mono-imī* (物忌み) for people to try to avoid evil and bad luck. Either shortly before or after *mono-imī*, there was an official dinner served for the family, which was aimed at exorcising evil spirits from the household. It was conducted following certain manners and protocols. This dinner was called *saishoku* (齋食), the *kun* reading of which was *toki*. Evidently, *toki* signified a demarcation between

ordinary and extraordinary (*hare*) times, which concurred with the relationship between *sechi* (節) and *orime* (折り目). As I said before, ordinary days were called *aida*. The relationship between *toki* and *aida* is represented by two Chinese characters 時 and 間, thus explaining the structure of *time* in folklore culture.

There have been old sayings in western Japan, such as *nen ni san (3) toki ha inu mo shiru* (At least three times a year the dog knows), *nen ni san (3) toki ha inu mo suru* (At least three times a year the dog does) or *nen ni san (3) toki ha yome mo shiru* (At least three times a year the daughter-in-law knows), which have been widely disseminated among rural villages in fairly mountainous areas. The three times refer to Jan. 16, May 16 and Sept. 16. They are all designated as days for devotion to the pursuit of the Buddhist faith. On these days, people avoid killing animals and presented offerings such as sweet rice dumplings or rice cooked with *azuki* beans to the Buddhist altar at home. The point is that, apart from the officially designated *go-sekku* (五節供/句), there were another three more observances for *toki* in those areas. In my recollection, local people made it a rule to have a hearty meal on those three days.

Around Hiba County of Hiroshima Prefecture, May 16 in the lunar calendar was a particularly important day, when farmers took a day off in the midst of rice-planting season, making *toki* dumplings. Interestingly enough, it was the day when daughters-in-law in farming families were openly allowed to eat as much as they wanted during the banquet. I remember an old woman very well, whom I met in Shiratani Village of Kanoashi County in Shimane Prefecture. She quoted an old lyric *shōgatsu mikka bon mikka wasure mo shinai toki no hi o* (three New Year Days, three *bon* days and the Day of *toki* which I never forget!) In olden days, Japanese people observed *toki* faithfully according to the folklore calendar.

There are many reports of festivals centered round *toki* all over South Kyushu. According to Jūrō Ono, a folklorist, a small local festival is organized in each village on specific dates. For instance, in Ono and Matsubae villages of Ashikita Town, Ashikita County, Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyushu, *toki-matsuri* (*toki* Festival) is conducted by people in the forestry industry. The designated dates are Jan. 16, May 16 and Sept. 16. The one in January is called *asa-doki* (Morning *toki*), the one in May *hiru-doki* (Day *toki*) and the one in Sept. *yū-doki* (Evening *toki*). As is suggested by the names, the actual time for starting a feast varies among the three festivals. It is considered that the day 16<sup>th</sup> is an unlucky day. Since the deity of *toki* is demoniac and horrendous, villagers are prohibited from walking into mountains to work on that day. (Jūrō Ono, *Nōkō Girei no Kenkyū* = Study on Rituals in Agricultural Societies. Tokyo: Kōbundō 1970)

On the days of *toki*, villagers construct a mound at the entrance to the village, on which they plant a pine tree called *totsu no matsu* to symbolize a sanctuary.

They cook rice cakes called *totsu no mochi*, which are wrapped in straw containers. People enjoy a feast called *totsu-kagura*, when children and the youth in the village disguise themselves as deities called *totsu-no-kan*, visiting each home to give their blessing. They also participate in a *sumō* (2,000-year-old form of wrestling) tournament which is called *totsu-zumō*.

(*ibid.*, p. 363)

The primary purpose of this observance is to welcome and pay homage to the deity of *toki*.

In Okinawa, the word *toki* is still preserved in local communities, signifying those who have the gift of prophecy to designate dates for religious ceremonies. It is worth noting that, in addition to the Chinese character 時, 颯 is also utilized for *toki*. For example, the name *toki-no-ōyako* (時の大家子) which was mentioned in *Haneji Shioki* (羽地仕置) was a stage name. In olden days, *toki-no-ōyako* was selected among those who were illiterate. Presumably, those who were appointed *toki-no-ōyako* exercised mystic power, thereby determining days for festivals. However, when a writing-oriented calendar was adopted in those communities, festival dates eventually came to be fixed. This change took place around the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Before the adoption of the written calendar, the Chinese character 姿 used to be symbolizing those men who were in disguise of deities. *toki-yuta* (時ユタ) is a combination of 時 and ユタ (巫). We can speculate that, since the dates of *toki* were determined supposedly by the superhuman and supernatural power possessed by these men, they were concurrently assigned to the task of fortune-telling for the community.

It is said that calendar books which were compiled by *toki* in ancient Okinawa were culminated in what is called *toki-zōshi* (トキ双紙) today. Fortune-telling was obviously associated with supernatural power. Like *yuta*, *toki*, who used that power, was persecuted by political authorities. It is also known that fortune-tellers in folklore culture, who derived and developed from *toki*, were called *sanzesō* (三世相), who not only decided schedules of ceremonies based on the folklore calendar, but also performed fortune-telling for many other phenomena in life, such as good luck and bad luck, outcome of real estate trading, journeys for distant locations, marriages, funerals and so forth. The majority of *sanzesō* were male. The word symbolizes that those men were able to envisage three worlds (三世), that is to say, the past, the present and the future, by capitalizing on their expertise in calendar. It is said that *sanzesō* did not have the mystic power which *yuta* could exercise in fortune-telling. However, when the first prophecy was pronounced by *sanzesō* on New Year Days in the lunar calendar, it was believed that one's destiny for the year was determined by that. It was believed that *sanzesō* prophesied how the new year would develop, not only based on their knowledge of calendar, but also by some spiritual power which they possessed. The expression of *otoko-yuta*

(male *yuta*) is still preserved in society.

Interestingly enough, we observe that the custom of *sanzesō* has been in place in Tsugaru District of Aomori Prefecture as well, which, in many aspects, is sharply contrasted with Okinawa. In this region, *sanzesō* has been known as a title of a book for years. During the Edo period, the book was called *Dai-Zassho* (大雑書), and deep rooted in daily life of ordinary people. The content of *Sanzesō* has been largely revealed by Junichi Koike, who has made strenuous effort for elucidating this book in recent years. What is of particular importance is that we can trace some influence of the principles of Yin and Yang, which had been assimilated in Japan since the middle ages, in the situation where *sanzesō* came to be called *Dai-Zassho*.

Furthermore, *Hoki Naiden* (籠篋内伝), a primary textbook of Yin and Yang, was translated into Japanese to construct *Rekihōsho* (曆法書), a book on calendar. As a matter of fact, *Rekihōsho* is a treasure house of so-called folklore knowledge, which depicts the reasoning and rationale of fortune-telling. It is aimed at envisaging *toki-no-un* (auspicious times) for individual people along the past, the present and the future. It is well known that, at some point of time, this book was published under the name of *Dai Zassho Sanzesō* (大雑書三世相), which gained massive popularity as a reference book for day-to-day rituals and protocols for ordinary people. However, it is unknown how *Dai Zassho* and *sanzesō* were integrated together. (Junichi Koike, Tsugaru no sanzesō—Shomotsu no Inshō to Denshō = *Sanzesō* in Tsugaru—Impression and Passing of Books on to Future Generations, *Seiken Banashi Kenkyū* = Studies of People's Chats for Socialization, March 1997 No. 7.)

Unlike the case in Okinawa, *sanzesō* in the Tsugaru region refers to a calendar book which has been used in fortune-telling, and not to those who are involved with this practice. On the other hand, in Okinawa, the book is somehow personified in people's perception. What could it mean, I wonder. The point is that *sanzesō* is a culmination of the knowledge of calendar, and that people capitalized on it to measure time, thus controlling auspicious times. *munushiri* (物知り = people with lots of knowledge) is the same as *sanzesō* in Okinawa. This expression also means fortune-tellers, *toki*, *hidori-nushi* (people who determine dates), *yuta* and so on. Although it seems that each of them has a different function, it would be fair to say that underlying all of them is a common trait that they control time by means of the fortune-telling skill.

## 2. Unit of Calendar: Day, Month and Year

*Toki* seems to be an ancient Japanese expression. In order to describe the attributes of *toki*, we use various words such as day, month, year (*toshi*), spring,

summer, autumn, winter, morning, daytime, night and so forth. These words also represent changes in natural phenomena. *hi* (日) refers to the sun and the period of time when the sun shines. It refers to a combination of day and night, covering an elapse of time until the recurrence of the sun in the following morning. The criteria for measuring *tsuki* (月) is the waxing and waning of the moon, the cycle of which is 30 days. In primordial ages, *tsuki* became a clear-cut model of *toki*. Reading the moon was the same as measuring months. *tsuki-yomi-no-mikoto* (Deity of the moon, the brother of *Amaterasu*) symbolizes the deification of moon-reader. Moonlit nights are counted as *mikazuki* (3<sup>rd</sup>-night moonlight), *jūsanya* (13<sup>th</sup>-night moonlight), *jūgoya* (15<sup>th</sup>-night moonlight), *nijū-niya* (22<sup>nd</sup>-night moonlight) and *nijū-sanya* (23<sup>rd</sup>-night moonlight). These words reflect the custom of measuring time based on moon-reading. *tsuki-yomi* was translated into *hi-yomi* (*kayomi*) (day-reading), from which the word *koyomi* (calendar) was coined. We can observe here that time was calibrated by the ancient Japanese, who defined *sechi* in accordance with periodic phenomena such as *the moon and the day* or *the sun and the moon*.

As for *toshi* (year), it is represented as 年穀, meaning rice crop. In ancient times, agricultural people developed a lifestyle in which time was measured based on a cycle of rice cropping activities, covering a period from sowing to harvest. This custom has been preserved for centuries. They have also upheld the concept of cumulative years, defining a continuous passage of time to include last year, this year and next year. In fact, this concept was a culmination of human wisdom about time.

Kazuo Higo discusses that the naming of months, 12 segments of a year, carried a certain meaning in ancient Japan. He referred to *Manyōshū* (the earliest extant collection of Japanese poetry) in presenting this idea. In those days, months were named *mu-tsuki*, *u-zuki*, *sa-tsuki*, *mina-tsuki* and so on, instead of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, 2<sup>nd</sup> month and so forth as is the case in the present. For instance, the 5<sup>th</sup> month was called *sa-tsuki*, because *sa* meant *ta-no-kami* (the deity of rice field). *Sa* made compound words such as *sa-nae* (rice seedlings), *sa-otome* (young girls), *sa-naburi* (a festival to celebrate the conclusion of rice-planting) and others. According to some folklorists, *sa-tsuki* was a month when farmers acknowledged the rising power of *ta-no-kami* and followed the observances of planting seedlings in rice paddies. This ritual was particularly important for rice-cropping society. *kanna-tsuki* (神無月) means a month of gods in the harvesting season, when crops (年穀) are presented to Shinto deities as the sign of worship.

Included in barely surviving fragments of *Gishi Wajin Den* (*Wo-jeñ in Wei zhi*: a section dealing with the Japanese in the Wei Chronicle) is an article that contains *sono zoku ha seisai shisetsu wo shirazu tadashi shunkō shūshū wo hakarite nenki to nasu* (其俗不知正歲四節但計春耕秋收為年記). This description verifies that the

sequence of months had already been fixed in those days, and that *shunkō shūshū* (plowing in spring and harvesting in autumn) was used as a criterion to count time.

*Mina-tsuki* (水無月) is a month of water, which implies a growing season of rice as well as the rainy season. *Shimo-tsuki* (霜月) means a month with lots of frost. *Naga-tsuki* is September, when people have long moon-lit nights. (Kazuo Higo, *Jōdai ni okeru Jikan no Kannen = Perception of Time in Ancient Times*, *Shichō* No. 48; March 1953)

As is shown above, time in rice-cropping societies was based on a cycle time from sowing to harvest, which was defined as *toshi* (年) (year). On the other hand, in the case of societies where slash and burn farming was carried out, a unit of time was normally three to four years. It was Hirofumi Tsuboi who examined that the temporal perception in the latter was essentially different from that in the former. He published a paper titled *Ningen to Tsuchi Tono Jikan* (Time for Mankind and Soil), which was incorporated in his book *Minzoku Saikō* (= Folklore Revisited. Nippon Editor School Publishing Dept. 1986). Contained in the paper is the following:

I visited Miyake Island in Tokyo in spring 1982. When walking about in Tsubota Village, which was supposed to be one of the places in the Island where ancient custom was well kept, I happened to meet an old woman. She was slashing and burning fields. The area of her land was approximately 1,465 m<sup>2</sup>, which she divided into five segments. The pattern of her farming is that she cultivates cereals and root vegetables in one of those segments for about three years on end, after which she gives up farming in that particular section. Instead, she plants fodder (cow feed) or alders (to be used as firewood or materials for charcoal) in the first section. During the following three years, she continues her farming in another section, which she has also slashed and burnt to prepare a farmland. After 15 years, she will have completed a full cycle of rotation, coming back to the first section of land, which she cultivated 15 years before. This woman uses three kinds of tools for slash and burn, that is to say, a hatchet, a saw and a hoe. When I met her, she was cutting down an alder tree with a diameter of 20 cm, using those tools. She slashed off branches and put them away. She dug up roots of the tree, dried them, burnt branches, trims, bushes and weed, thus preparing a farmland. I was watching her work, listening to her. She was 77 years old. She said, "I have lived too long. That's why I am still working like this in slash and burn. Usually, farmers' life comes to an end, when they have completed three cycles of cultivation in rotation of fields. It means that a farmer normally completes a full cycle of cultivation for the five sections of land in 15 years. When they complete the three full cycles, 45 years will have passed. That particular woman I met married at the age of twenty, when she started to live in Tsubota Village. It

seems that, judging by what she talked to me, a life span for villagers is supposedly 65 years. For this reason, the woman thought that she had lived too long.”

As is exemplified in the above anecdote, there are two different sets of criteria for *toshi* (年) (year) in the Japanese archipelago. They are discerned between rice cropping societies and those with the tradition of farming, in particular, slash and burn farming. According to the 77-year-old woman in Tsubota Village, *toki* is measured by means of the cycle time of slash and burn farming, in which the completion of three cycles takes 45 years. She married at the age of twenty, and she would live to be 65 years old, because it was the normal life span for the islanders. Despite that prospect, however, she was already 77 when the author met her. In this context, she contemplated that she had lived too long. On one hand, the islanders in Miyake Island observe an institutionalized calibration of time, which was based on a writing-oriented calendar and was generally adopted in modern society. At the same time, however, when it comes to the custom that was deep-rooted in their ethos, there is another concept of *toki*, which has survived many centuries. The point is that this *toki* is not shared by rice-cropping people.

As time passed, in addition to the ancient nature-oriented calendars, a writing-oriented calendar was introduced into Japan from China. When *toshi* was cumulated many times, it was translated into *yo* (世). *yo* could be either 世 or 節. 節 (フシ) means a bamboo joint, whereas *yo* means the section between two 節 (フシ), namely, two bamboo joints. This idea was led to the measurement of time. It would be fair to say that *yo* virtually corresponds to a life span of people. In addition, there is an expression *yo-no-naka* (世の中 = world), which contains both temporal and spatial dimensions in it. It refers to social relationship. While counting the number of years and defining a seniority system in society, people developed the perception of modernity, which established the social relationship.

Furthermore, at a later stage, came the Chinese zodiacal symbols with twelve animal signs, which disseminated the idea of sexagenary cycle of time in Japan. It is worth noting, however, that, unlike the Chinese from whom the sexagenary cycle was learned, Japanese people showed more interest in the twelve zodiacal symbols than the sexagenary cycle itself. With this development, time came to be calibrated in more detail and defined in smaller segments. It was during the *Taika* Reform when a day was categorized into *asa* (朝 = morning), *hiru* (昼 = daytime) and *yū* (夕 = evening). People measured time by using a specific tool for the first time in history. As a matter of fact, it was around that time when the imperial power emerged as the controller of time in Japanese history.

### 3. About *Toki-no-un* (Auspicious Times)

Up until 1872, the lunar calendar, which is called *kyūreki* (old calendar) had been playing a major role in daily life in Japan. It had a profound impact on the rhythm of secular life among the Japanese for many centuries. For example, this observation is clearly endorsed in the following remarks made by a local person in Tsugaru District, Aomori Prefecture:

*Kyūreki* (old calendar) is the calendar what was introduced from China, but *shinreki* (new calendar) is the one what was invented here in Japan. The Chinese calendar was managed all according to the moon. Now though, everything is done according to this new calendar. But, even now, we can't totally forget about the old calendar. And why not? Because we used to talk a lot about *chishigo*. *Chishigo* is, for instance, the time of a child's delivery. Nowadays, we talk about *high tide* or *ebb tide*. But we called it *chishigo* in the old days. It has something to do with the moon, and without *chishigo*, fishermen have a poor catch at sea.

We often used to say, *chishigo kutte igu* (Let's go along with *chishigo*). You go along with *chishigo*, which is just what happens to you. When I was 26 years old, Dad died. He died because the *chishigo* had left him.

So, everything was determined by *chishigo*, a baby born, somebody dying, or whatever. Without *chishigo*, no one can come into this world or go from it. That's just the way things are.

(*Tsugaru no Minwa* = Folk tales in Tsugaru. Vol. 9, Group of those who preserve folk tales in Tsugaru; Oct. 1994)

(\*Translated to suggest dialect in Tsugaru)

The notion that a child birth is controlled by the tide and the moon can be traced in the distant past. I suspect that *chishigo* implies that there is a cryptic association between life on one hand and blood (*chi*) or tide (*shio*) on the other. Here let us review another reference which is also recorded in Folk Tales in Tsugaru:

I always say to my children, *setsubun* (a traditional ceremony to dispel demons by the practice of scattering roasted soy beans as a magical rite) isn't just a day for chucking beans around. I was brought up by my stepfather, who knew what was what.

I said to my children, Let's do *setsubun*. It isn't just a day for fun. You shouldn't just sling the beans around. It is the day when you work out what

the whole of the year is going to be like. But they said, *setsubun*?! Why bother? My children just made fun of the practice, so I told them off. I said, If you behave like that, let's not have *setsubun* this year. You don't deserve it. (\*Translated to suggest dialect in Tsugaru)

As is shown in his remarks, the folklore calendar dictates that fortune-telling should be given on *setsubun*. It was required that the folklore calendar reveal so-called *toki-no-un* (時の運 = auspicious times) to people.

We roast soy beans at *setsubun*, sticking a bowl or plateful in front of the altar at home. When we eat them, we make it a rule to serve the beans in a big wooden box like container. They are roasted three times. We stir them in a pan using brand new chopsticks. After roasting three times, they are presented to Shinto and Buddhist deities. We do fortune-telling with what's left. Beans are set out to represent the twelve months of the year and roasted. The beans get burnt black. If smoke still keeps coming out of some of them, we roast them some more so they turn really black. When smoke stops, we set fire to the tip of the chopsticks what were used for roasting the beans. Then we burn the beans one after the other, the January one to the December one. They keep burning. Looking at the way the hot air goes up from each bean, we can see what each month's weather is going to be, by judging which way the wind will blow.

If the bean ashes are pure white, we are going to have good weather in those months, but if they're all black, it's going to be all rain. However long we burn them, some ashes stay black and never turn white. Some are half white, and half black, which means rain for half the month and fine weather for the rest. If there is a smear of black left in the ashes of a bean, we can work out how much rain will fall during that month according to just how big it is. That's how we foretold the weather. (\*Translated to suggest dialect in Tsugaru)

The above reference clearly points out an essential role of the calendar. The real purpose of the calendar was not counting days, months or years, but predicting one's destiny.

There are cultural assets called *hayama-gomori*, which is still in place at old Kanazawa Village in the outskirts of Fukushima City, to the north of Tokyo. This observance is centred round an oracle, which is proclaimed on Nov. 18 of the lunar calendar every year by *noriwara*, who is a local shaman following the folklore tradition. On the previous night, villagers confine themselves in a sanctuary of the village shrine, thus purifying themselves before being given the oracle. Early in the morning on Nov. 18, they climb up Mr. Hayama, where *noriwara* proclaim the oracle for the year. Thus *yo-no-naka* for the new year is known to them.

For instance, the oracle on Jan. 18, 1905 in their record reads as follows:

世中	四分	日	五分	雨	四分	風	五分	五穀	六分
蚕	六分	桑	五分	大麦	六分	小麦	五分	大豆	五分
小豆	四分	大根	五分	な	三分	あわ	四分	きみ	四分
ひい	五分	そば	五分						

(things in general: 40%, sun: 50%, rain: 40%, wind: 50%, 5 representative grains including rice, wheat, millet, millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) and soy beans: 60%, silkworm: 60%, mulberry: 50%, barley: 60%, wheat: 50%, soy beans: 50%, adzuki beans: 40%, Chinese radish: 50%, rape seed: 30%, millet: 40%, millet (*Panicum miliaceum*): 40%, barnyard millet: 50%, buckwheat: 50%)

(*Kanazawa No Fuyu Gomori*=Winter Rite of Kanazawa Village, Education Board of Fukushima City; 1984)

It was a prediction of crops for the following year. In particular, the first phrase of *yo-no-naka-gobu* signifies that things are going to be not too bad, nor too good, in general. The oracle predicted that, in the following year, the villagers were going to have good crops of silkworm and barley, and poor crops of millet.

As for a fire, the fortune-telling was more specific by pointing out certain villagers' names. For example, one of them reads: Beware of a fire at the household of Heikichi Kitsuneda, who lives to the north of the village shrine. In particular, stay alert when they hire craftsmen working in their premises towards the end of March. Another one reads: Beware of a fire, which might break out from a bathroom in the house of Daisuke Hanzawa, who lives at Oomorigoshi in the south, in the middle of May.

When these oracles are given by *noriwara* in the mountain, the villagers listen to them respectfully. They are keen on being advised about potential disasters. So they ask many questions regarding a fire, war, disease, theft and so forth during the session. It is a tradition deep-rooted in the village life. On Nov. 18 of the lunar calendar each year, they follow this ceremony, receiving forecast for the following year. That day makes an important 節 for the villagers.

The primary purpose of *hayama-gomori* lies in the fortune-telling for agricultural crops. At the same time, the prophet predicts disasters that might strike the village in the near future, thereby recommending people to take precautions against them. It would be fair to say that, before the introduction of an officially recognized calendar which was writing-oriented in nature, *koyōmi* (calendar) used to play a role of yardstick, with which to identify certain omens of *yo-no-naka*. As is exemplified in *hayama-gomori*, given certain premonitions for

the following year, people were engaged in traditional observances, which symbolized the sphere of *hare* (extraordinary) in life. People performed the ritual for the purpose of countering any potential misfortune in the future. That was an essential function of *koyomi*, in which *toki-no-un* (auspicious times) were defined.

The point is that *toki-no-un* had little to do with individual people, but that it was about the destiny of a local community, which was mutually shared by the community members altogether. We can guess that *toki-no-un* was a vital element of folklore calendars. As time went by, however, this particular function of calendar was gradually diluted and evaporated among Japanese people, who, nowadays, simply use calendars for checking whether certain days are supposedly lucky or unlucky for individual interest. Today, calendars are used merely as a guidebook for national holidays, Sundays and other holidays.

#### 4. Royal Power and *Koyomi* (calendar)

In the ancient Japanese monarchy, in so far as it was the prerogative of the emperor to determine the destiny of his nation, to control time was an extremely critical function at the imperial court. It is well known that, when Prince *Naka no Ōe* came to the throne and established the Ōtsu dynasty along Lake Biwa, he had a water clock constructed. For the first time in history, time was officially counted, and announced by the sound of drums. The Chinese history also endorses the fact that it was an extremely critical role for a king to manage the system to announce time for his subjects. To control time signified to regulate people's life. It was a vital attribute of the monarch.

In the dimension of folklore, there were people who served in *hi-shiri* (knowing date) and *hiyori-mi* (weather reading). The former means to read days, which is combined with *tsuki-yomi* (month reading) to create *koyomi* or *kayomi* (calendar). The function of these people was to compile and distribute a calendar. In ancient Japan, within the imperial court existed an official called *hiokibe*, who was to report directly to the emperor. Later on, during the middle ages, there were people who engaged in this function based on the Chinese principles of Yin and Yang.

As I discussed in a previous section, *hiyori-bito* in Okinawa is a man who, in disguise of a deity, predicts weather and determines specific dates for festivals and rites. During the Edo period, *nanushi* (village headman) assumed the responsibility of *hiyori-bito* in each village, who predicted the weather and governed village politics as an officially acknowledged intermediary between the villagers and higher authorities. The village headman came from a prominent family in the local community, who was possessed of books on calendars based on Yin and Yang. He was versed in the history of village.

On the other hand, *hi-shiri* is considered to carry sacred nature, aspiring to emulate a virtuous emperor. It should also be noted that, despite such attributes, the list of those who served in this function included travelling Buddhist monks of high virtue or those from a discriminated social class. To trace the descent of *hi-shiri* from olden times is somewhat a complicated job in the present environment.

*Hi-yorimi* was branched from *hi-shiri*. It was institutionalized over years, thus being given certain power in society. In the hierarchical power structure, which was headed by the emperor, the royal authorities were secured, when *hi-yorimi*, as part of the function of *hi-shiri*, stabilized and coordinated social order under the imperial rule. When the imperial prerogative was exercised over time, *yo-no-naka* (the world, society) came to be recognized in people's perception as the space and time in which the monarchy should be maintained.

As for calendars, even nowadays, we have the nomenclature of old calendar, new calendar and middle calendar (one month slow). Japanese people are familiar with the odd discrepancy which we experience between what the new calendar designates as time and what we observe in natural phenomena through seasonal changes. When the Meiji Restoration government introduced the institutional shift from the old calendar to the new one, it triggered various repercussions in the world of folklore. It was because the latter had been deep rooted in day-to-day life of the Japanese. During the transitory period, some Japanese regarded the newly adopted solar calendar as the New Year Days of Christians, whereas, in general, it was taken as the New Year Days at the imperial court. In contrast, the old calendar was interpreted as the New Year Days of the Tokugawa Family (*Shōgun*). Evidently, it was not such an easy job for Japanese people to depart from the tradition and custom based on the old calendar to shift to the new calendar. The reason why people took the new calendar as the one for the imperial court was that they were fully aware of the system that the emperor designated the names of eras since the nation-building age.

As I discussed before, in the old calendar, time was calibrated based on the waxing and waning of the moon. If so, how was it translated into people's life style? For instance, there is a reference to a moon-watching party held on Jan. 15 in *Tōno Monogatari* (Tales of Tōno), which was written by Kunio Yanagita. During the party, villagers cut half six walnuts to prepare twelve walnut pieces, which are briefly placed in a fireplace altogether and then quickly taken away from the fire. The walnut pieces are aligned to represent the twelve months from January to December. Fortune-telling is provided for each month according to how the walnuts get roasted. For example, if some pieces stay red-coloured for long, the weather is to be clear and fine on moon-lit nights, whereas, if dark-coloured, it is to be cloudy. If walnuts explode making a loud noise, a high wind is to blow. On the following morning, the villagers get together and report to each

other the fortune-telling which they have obtained at home. By exchanging that information with each other, they can confirm that virtually the same prediction has been obtained all over the village. If the forecast specifies that there would be a gale on the night of Aug. 15, it is recommended to advance the time of rice harvest for the year.

This custom of moon-watching party can be found at Iwai City in Ibaraki Prefecture near Tokyo as well. *The Study of Folklore with Municipality History in Iwai* includes the following record:

The rent for farming land was sometimes paid in cash, instead of rice crop, by tenant farmers to the landlord. In this case, the value of rice crop was translated into monetary value..... It was natural, therefore, that farmers tried to sell their crops at prices as high as possible. However, in the past, most farmers were quite ignorant of the way in which the market was run. Instead of trying to understand the mechanism, they attempted to forecast market prices by reading the moon. It is said that, even today, there are some farmers who still follow this custom. According to the old practice, if the crescent rises in the evening over the horizon in an upright position, the prices will increase, whereas, if it rises in a flat position like the bottom of a boat, the prices will decline.

As a matter of fact, this way of forecasting market prices based on the moon-reading derived from the folklore perception that the lunar power controlled the calendar. Widely disseminated among the local people around Iwai City is the religious faith in the *Tsuki-yomi* Shrine (moon-reading shrine) in this area. They have a women's association for mutual assistance as well as religious faith called *nijū-san-ya-kō* (association on the 23<sup>rd</sup> night). The members of this association congregate on the night of Nov. 23 in the old calendar, paying a visit to the *Tsuki-yomi* shrine, where they listen to the fortune-telling about things in general, in particular, about crop cultivation in the coming year. This practice is called the fortune-telling of *tōbōsaku* (Dong-fang Shuo = a cultured sage in ancient China), and founded on the knowledge of Yin and Yang. Clearly, *Tōbōsaku Hiden Okibumi* (Record of Secret Wisdom of Dong-fang Shuo) has been widely assimilated into folklore culture in this region. We can imagine that the content of this book was somehow united with the moon-reading calendar that had been in place in Japan since the distance past. What is amusing is that the Chinese sage, Dong-fang Shuo, has been personified as a learned old man called *tōbōsaku* in the Japanese folklore. The secular belief is that this old man knew everything about mankind as well as the world. In some places, he was named *yo-no-naka-jii* (old man of worldly knowledge). It is very likely that *tōbōsaku* was simply a legendary figure, and not real. However, in traditional folklore communities, there was always an old man of valuable knowledge, who could be compared to *yo-no-naka-*

*jii*. He examined the weather, climate, winds, the movement of clouds in the sky and whatever, thereby forecasting the prospect of yearly crop. He was a man of empirical knowledge of climatology, with which he could provide weather forecast for the community. This skill was called *hiyori-mi*.

In recent years, Junichi Koike has been focusing on the study of Dong-fang Shuo, in order to elucidate one aspect of folklore culture. More case studies are required in order to understand in what way the weather-reading of *tōbōsaku* (Dong-fang Shuo) was related to the fortune-telling for local communities in Japan. Some light can be shed on this subject from the angles of *sanzesō* and *Dai Zassho*, both of which are known as primary textbooks for Yin and Yang in the sphere of Japanese folklore. It would be probably right to think that, *tōbōsaku* was a personification of various practices delineated in those books. Furthermore, it would be meaningful to review similarities between *tōbōsaku* and *toki* or *hiyorimi-pitu* in Okinawa. We could discuss that, at the end of the day, all these practices were aimed at the stabilization of imperial power. The emperor was the controller of time in society. I trust that all these themes are interesting challenges for future study.