

From Nomads to Settlers: How Has *Kokoro* also Changed?

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“Fleeing” is a natural strategy for survival. Then, why does our *kokoro* avoid it?

In old Japan, fleeing from a *mura*, or closed community, led to being faced with a fear of starvation. Arguably, Japanese society became free from starvation in the 1960s. However, children at school today fear being excluded from perceived “mura” by general consent, as they see their schools or classrooms being just as closed as *mura* of the past. Also, the phrase “reading the situation (to avoid being excluded)” is often used, indicating that the *mura* system is still deeply rooted in Japanese society with different features matching the times.

“Tono Monogatari” by Kunio Yanagita includes stories of *yamabito*, mountain dwellers, who kidnap young women from villages and eat children. They seem to be a negative reflection of the mentality of people in the Tohoku region, wishing to flee from the burden of living on this ground, and to escape to any other places whatsoever. Not only people in the past or people living in the Tohoku region, but also all of us have such wishes. The way we see nomadic people, such as “Futen-no-Tora-san” (“A wonderer called Tora”, a hero in Japanese movie series), reflects our fear, yearning, contempt, and envy toward fleeing from the community and floating on the outside.

Around 10,000 years ago, human beings changed their way of life from nomadizing to settling, starting to build houses and villages. This change in their survival strategy forced them to realign physical and mental capabilities and social systems, which had been developed through nomadic life where people were constantly on the move, allowing them to easily flee from anything uncomfortable or dangerous.

However, after the “settling revolution”, society as a whole faced new issues that had not been problems for nomads, such as: building houses as protection from natural disasters; securing food and water, and materials to make tools; dealing with waste; solving relationship problems; and separating the living from the dead. To solve these issues, people in settled societies have chosen to expel filth and anxiety accumulating in the *mura* community by conducting ceremonies, such as the Festival of the Weaver (Tanabata, or the Star Festival) and the Festival of Wind and Rain, and observances, such as *yamai-*

okuri to fend off disease and *nusutto-okuri* to punish thievery.

This settling revolution has brought about a “society we cannot escape from”, in which we are bound by morals that do not allow us to flee. Unconsciously taking for granted that the settled lifestyle is a prerequisite condition, members of society come to see “fleeing”, “leaving”, or “departing” as indications of disease. I believe that this mindset has to change to allow people to gather or leave at will, and that we must discuss more deeply about how to design a “society that allows members to flee”.