

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, December 2022

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

## End of the Year Contemplation

Recently, it's been getting colder. When I am frozen to my bones and want to feel warm from the inside out, nothing is better than soaking in a hot bath. So many countries, so many customs. Traveling always surprises me when I encounter different customs followed by different people. Even on domestic trips. On this trip, I learned about a special Japanese bath culture.

The other day, I tried mixed bathing in Tohoku for the first time. I was curious about this traditional bathing custom and soon found myself in an extraordinary space. There were 7 or 8 naked men and women in this open air hot bath. Some were chatting and others looked meditative and calm. Alongside the bath, over a low fence, a river flowed through a gorge. The leaves were turning yellow and red. Unexpected communication is one of the pleasures of traveling. A guy soaking in the same bath talked to me. I was shy at first but somehow relieved at the same time. Soon a friendly middle-aged couple joined in our conversation.

This sort of mixed gender bathing could never be characterized as lewd or disturbing to public morals, something English language media often imagines it to be. When it comes to konyoku nudity, it was simply refreshing for me that day.

My new onsen acquaintance told me that the onsen had a long history. One legend records that Minamoto Yoritomo wounded a soaring hawk with an arrow. He followed the bird to a secluded pool where he was amazed to see the bird soak its body in the healing waters and soon fly away.

The spot has such wonderful scenery that 220 years ago, the Iwamatsu family tapped into the natural hot spring and built a mixed bathing facility.

So, why did men and women bathe together? It occurred to me that it wouldn't be fair if only men or only women could enjoy this beautiful spring and the others would have to use some less attractive location. And today still many men and women want to enjoy this special bath culture together.

In the Edo era (1603-1868), men, women, high and low ranking people took the same bath together. Male professional bathhouse workers called Sansuke took care of customers, both men and women, scrubbing backs and massaging shoulders. Sansuke needed both intensive physical and mental training to perform their services proficiently. In those days women didn't hesitate to pay an extra fee and allow Sansuke to wash their bodies.

Going to a mixed bathing facility was a daily routine until the Meiji government, due to Japan's efforts to Westernize, forbade the practice at the end of the 19th century. Most bathhouses have had separated men's and women's facilities ever since.

In the 1960s, about 40% of Japanese still didn't have the habit of bathing at home, perhaps because private baths were not absolutely necessary, especially in cities, because so many good public baths were available, but since then the number of bathhouses and especially konyoku has decreased year by year. However, the traditional Sansuke's services still exist at a few onsen resorts in Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures today.

My next destination is either a natural open air bath on a mountainside covered in fallen snow

or a hot spa where a Sansuke does a good job!

(Miwa N.)

At the foot of Castle hill, hidden by trees, it stands serenely next to Saka no ue no Kumo Museum. Bansui-so, the tiny French Neo-Renaissance-style villa celebrated its 100th-anniversary last month. This house is the oldest reinforced concrete building in Ehime and is designated a National Important Cultural Property.

The villa was initially built as the second residence of a descendant of the lord of Matsuyama. Fortunately, it survived WWII without damage, and the landmark was commandeered by GHQ after the war.

You can enjoy time-traveling there back one hundred years with its authentic interior: mirrors imported from Belgium, a spacious spiral staircase, the large stained-glass window on the landing, furniture, mantelpieces with antique gas stoves, crystal chandeliers, and more.

Today, this villa is a popular location for wedding photos and exhibitions of roses, paintings, and calligraphy. I enjoy jazz concerts in the reception room when our condo's former super performs there. For the past year, Bansui-so has been hosting some attractive anniversary events.

Last Christmas evening, after the candle service and caroling at the nearby Protestant church, we made it to the quiz rally sponsored by both Bansui-so and Saka no ue no Kumo Museum. We posted our photos of the event on social media, and we got some official museum goods in return.

The lit-up elegant French Chateau was truly spectacular.

Why not drop by on your way home to see the villa's very romantic illumination from 5 pm-6 pm everyday in December this year? Here's the thing. They are holding a Night Museum program for adults: Fri. 12/16 6:30 pm- 8:30 pm. A Night Tour and Music Concert over a glass of wine. ¥800. Sign-up is required in advance.

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)

I live in the Ono area, a suburb of Matsuyama City. There are many ancient tombs and ruins here. One of them is the Hazaike Tumulus.

Last week, my friends and I went to visit Hazaike Tumulus Park. There is a park office building there with information for visitors. The view of Hazaike Pond from the mound and the autumn leaves on the nearby mountains were very beautiful.

The Hazaike Tumulus was discovered by chance during a reclamation project in 1992. Excavations that began the following year revealed it to be a burial mound that provided insight into the funerary rituals of the late *Kofun* period (mid-6th century). Excavations on the grave were conducted from 1993 to 2008, and the tumulus was designated a National Historic Site in 2011.

The burial mound is elliptical in shape, about 41m long and 23m wide at its widest point.

Five burial chambers were discovered, of which Stone Chamber No.1 and No.2 have been excavated. In addition to earthenware (*Sueki*), a wooden coffin more than 1,400 years old and a human bone were found in Stone Chamber No.1. The bone had a fly pupa shell still attached to it, indicating the rituals associated with burials in the late *Kofun* period.

A window was installed at the entrance and exit of Stone Chamber No.1, allowing visitors to peer into the horizontal stone chamber. Inside the space, artifacts found in the chamber as they were when it was last closed are reproduced.

The actual burial accessories found in Stone Chamber No. 1 and No. 2 are on display at the

Matsuyama City Archaeological Museum.

In addition, a full-size model of Stone Chamber No. 2, which cannot be visited on site, is reproduced at the Archaeological Museum. Visitors can go inside. If you do, you will feel as though you've gone back in time to the *Kofun* period.

(Hiroko.T)

2022 is going soon. The older we grow, the sooner time as we call it seems to go, and 87 years have passed since my coming into being.

Now, I'm acutely aware of approaching the close of my time.

The aggravation to my physical functions and the limits of their flexibility have been accelerating. I find it difficult to stand up from the sofa after watching TV, an activity which now occupies a substantial part of my day. I used to get to my feet spontaneously until recently.

And many people stride past me when I am trudging along a sidewalk. What's worse, I have difficulty walking without a cane owing to both a backache and a limp.

When working in the kitchen preparing a meal, I'm obliged to adopt a stooping posture, which puts my back to excruciating torture. 87 years of age exceeds the average life expectancy of Japanese men by 5 years. As I said, I'm very conscious of my physical movements becoming stiff and awkward. About time I realized my days were numbered.

Returning to dust is an inevitable consequence of being a living thing. Then, I'd like to accept my fate while I'm still leading a self-reliant life. I'm most afraid of falling into senile dementia.

Looking back on the vicissitudes of my 87 years, I don't care whether my life turned out satisfactorily or not. That point of view will yield nothing but negative thinking, remorse and self-inflicted humiliation. For better or worse, I have only to approve of my one and only life. I have fully lived my life. That's what it's all about.

I can do nothing as to decide when and how to come to an end. I have no other choice but to resign myself to Nature or Providence. Needless to say, we are part of Nature. Therefore, I adamantly reject applying life support as far as I'm concerned. I have candidly described what's on my mind towards the close of my time.

I conclude my contributions for over a decade to "Outloud" forum by saying my heart-felt good-bye to Vincent-sensei, and so long to "Outloud" readers.

(H. Tarumi)

Editor's Note: You have always been an important member of this literary give and take. And you aren't gone just yet. When you feel up to it, send us a contribution. Your thoughts and opinions are always, always greatly appreciated.