

Asahi Shimbun - The clocks of the world tick at their own time.

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Like this year, 1991 was the Year of the Sheep. At 00:00 hours on Jan. 1, 1991, a colossal hourglass started "trickling" away the time at the Nima Sand Museum in Tottori Prefecture. Standing 5 meters tall, the high-tech computerized timepiece sheds an estimated 640 billion grains of sand every year

In the United States, a project is in progress to create a mechanical clock that will keep going for 10,000 years

It ticks once a year, with the century hand advancing once every 100 years and the cuckoo popping out on a millennium. A prototype has already been constructed

Directing the project is Daniel Hillis, an inventor and computer designer who has been described as "the developer of the fastest computer, who has turned to making the world's slowest clock." "When I was a kid, the future was a long way off," said Hillis. "But the funny thing is ... it's as if the future has been shrinking one year, per year, for my entire life.... Some people say that they feel the future is slipping away from them. To me, the future is a big tractor-trailer slamming on its brakes in front of me just as I pull into its slipstream. I am about to crash into it." A completely different civilization may dominate the world 10,000 years from now

"The only way (for a human-made object) to survive over the long run is to be made of materials large and worthless, like Stonehenge and the Pyramids," he mused. "The important thing is to make a very convincing documentary about building the clock and hiding it." In Japan, people have rediscovered the charm of the American song "Grandfather's Clock." The song is about a clock that lasted a century-roughly a human lifespan. It stopped ticking on the day the "grandfather" died. The lyrics are filled with nostalgia for the old clock, which had "lived" much like a family member

There are different spans of time in this world. There is the hourglass trickling sand for one year, the 10,000-year clock ticking away for what seems like an eternity, and there is the old grandfather's clock that symbolized a man's life

- The Asahi Shimbun, Jan. 1.

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