Interviewee: Kita san

Date and location: 8 March 2019

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: When did you start farming?

A: Hmm… I am not sure. I think 2013… I started growing 50 different types of veggies, for the first time in my life. With my friends in Muikamachi, it had been my dream of growing my own food, and finally I had this land, we can finally sow the seeds and grow. With my friends we grew everything we wanted to eat, that’s for our own consumption.

Q: Is it like a piece of farmland?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it in rural area?

A: It is in the middle of rice fields, with some small fields or gardening area that we could veggies and we could rent the land for free.

Q: So that was around 5 to 6 years ago?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you want to grow your own food?

A: It has been my dream for more than 10 years. Before I could start, I always wanted to grow veggies and see how things grow for the whole year. I wasn’t just interested in harvesting, I wanted to start from seeds.

Q: The whole process?

A: Yes!

Q: Why are you interested in knowing the process of how the plants grow?

A: I’m not sure. In japan it was not easy because my family has no experiences and land to grow rice or veggie. For new farmers, it is not easy to farm in Japan unless you have family members who are farmers. It just came up in my mind that it’s my dream. I only had two dream in my childhood, one is to keep horse and growing food. I don’t know why and how it came to me.

Q: You mean you didn’t come from a farming family?

A: No.

Q: How would you describe my farming practices now?

A: What do you mean? How do I find my farming practices now?

Q: What are the features of your farming practices now?

A: Ah…my features. I follow synecoculture culture, after I learnt permaculture in Tokyo and New Zealand… at that time…Ah…sorry, when I started, I was inspired by Fukuoka Masanobu. I wanted to follow his method, no tilling, no fertilizers, nothing…do nothing farming. But the landowner doesn’t allow us to do that, so we started with organic farming. For the first three years, I followed organic farming.

Q: What do you mean by organic farming?

A: We did tilling and give organic matters, we bought organic fertilizers. We also weeded occasionally. It gave us a lot of harvest as a result. We went to the garden everyday just to take care of it.

Q: In the beginning, you did organic farming, and then?

A: Then…I started going to New Zealand, 2014 January/February, that is the first snow…I couldn’t wait until winter, so I went to New Zealand. I stayed at different farms in New Zealand through woofing and helped them through permaculture. I learnt peamaculture there.

Q: In the beginning, you just went to New Zealand for farming?

A: Yes.

Q: But in the process, you learnt permaculture there?

A: Ah, I went to two farms in New Zealand. In the beginning, I needed to choose which farm I want to stay, when I chose, I searched by the percentage of organic farming they do and I chose higher percentage, like more than 80%. Eventually, those farms followed permaculture concepts, so I came to know about permaculture by woofing.

Q: And then you came back to Japan?

A: Yes, after three months I came back and started farming again, but I couldn’t do much. You know, I couldn’t plant trees with that small land. That’s why after three years I was looking for the place that I can plant trees, that’s why I came to Tokamachi in 2016.

Q: You started working on that piece of land in Matsunoyama since 2016?

A: Ah… that piece of land since last year.

Q: Previously where did you farm?

A: Previously near shared house in the village, there are some lands I could use. Villagers and neighbours said if you want to you can plant trees there.

Q: You also planted trees there?

A: Yes.

Q: Just trees?

A: Also rice and veggies, since I moved to Tokamachi, we had a small veggie farm and I also planted fruit trees.

Q: Where did you learn synecoculture?

A: That’s the year before last year. Two years ago, 2017…I told somebody that I’m doing permaculture, and then he gave me the copy of synecoculture. ‘You might be interested in this’, and then… yes, I was fascinated and it’s just have all the answer and the things I was wondering. How I could do permaculture here, I found some difficulties following permaculture, but synecoculture gave me all the answers, how I could do everything I wanted to do. It is just…for me planting trees does not hurt anyone and it is good for other people, it’s for me, it’s good for land and it’s good for animals. That was the goal I was looking for…

Q: Can you give an example of something that permaculture doesn’t fit here but synecoculture fit?

A: Because permaculture includes housing for instance, and water… using rainwater, it is a big system that I have to design. But synecoculture focuses more on growing, it is directly influential to environmental problems, if I want to solve the problem. It is about… it doesn’t include housing, but it gives you the logic. It is a logic, synecoculture is not a manual for growing, it is based on physics.

T: I read a little bit of the book from you. It says … you just throw the seed on the land, if the seed wants to grow, or if the situation comes for the seed to grow, it just grows. It is the synecoculture method.

A: The reason why we do that is to replace the weed with food, that’s why we do that. That’s the only reason, you could sow…. You could some more works to make it …

T: Better?

A: Yes, like increasing the germination rate, then you could do that. But synecoculture is…. I think the key word is physics. The founder of Synecoculture, Mr. xxx in xx city, he is a… he only talks about physics, how you could grow things under any conditions. You have to think what you should do based on your physics, it’s not about philosophy. He said veggies grow by energy, not by things like nitrogen, that kind of things doesn’t matter, it is all about energy balance. If it is all weeds, or If you pull all the weeds, it is like desert. Or no plants at all, maybe no insects, no animals, and then this land has no energy there. In synecoculture, you welcome different things, you welcome animals, you welcome insects, you welcome rainwater, then the energy of that land increases, that’s why plants are better in this land.

Q: Where does this energy come from? Mainly from the nature?

A: Yes, everything already has energy. We don’t need to give.

Q: Including non-human objects?

A: Yes, the stone has energy. I’m not sure about plastic things. In nature, surely water, stone, sunlight… they all have energy.

T: I feel is more like let the nature be, maybe permaculture and stuffs, we use…natural resources, but synecoculture is more like…let it be.

A: in Synecoculture, to gather all the energy, it requires a lot of work in the beginning. Later, they just grow by themselves... In Japan we have forest everywhere, it is all green in the mountain, it looks like that the energy is already there. But synecoculture researchers they do it in the desert of Africa, that’s why they started from scratches where there is no water, no weed, no green, they started growing trees, making food in the dessert.

Q: you just mentioned that they gather energy? It is done by sowing the seed, planting different crops?

A: Yes.

Q: Anything else to gather energy?

A: Maybe I can send you the link.

Q: What about in your own farming? what did you do to gather energy?

A: I planted trees, fruit trees and also different families of annual plants. To increase the diversity gives you more energy.

Q: Increase the plant diversity?

A: Yes, and I planted herbs and Japanese mints for instance to … prevent…to keep animals and insects away a little bit. I do not mind having insects and animals around but it is too… for the future… there is no fruit yet but later when I get fruit that might be helpful.

Q: Do you face any challenges when you try to apply synecoculture?

A: The first thing is I’m not good at physics, I don’t particularly like studying. I still don’t think I understand, maybe I only understand 50% of this method. I’m still on the way to…

Q: What is the physics that you are learning? Pure physics?

A: Yes, very scientific. But I have advisors from synecoculture, they are the research team, they came here to see my land, they said, ‘okay, you are doing well’, just to make sure I’m doing right thing.

Q: There are something ‘right’ to do?

A: Yes, for instance you cannot use... chemicals, or you should never feed your plants. Giving organic matters is the worst thing you could do in synecoculture.

Q: And you cannot water the plants?

A: I never water… I did some last year because we had no rain last year. For young trees, I gave a bucket of water for a few trees, but even the trees I never give water, they did not die.

Q: Is it like there is a set of regulations from synecoculture?

A: Yes, they do not allow you to say ‘I’m doing synecoculture’ if you feed your plants with fertilizers.

Q: How about positive experiences? Do you have any positive experiences?

A: it is all positive experiences, it is so nice to plant trees and have my own garden, it is the best place. Basically all you need to do is just plant and sow seeds, and any time of the year you could do. Also, you need to eat a lot of fruit to help you have more trees.

Q: How do feel about fulfilling the dream you had since you were a child? Over the years, you tried different methods, changed your plans… what are the positive experiences?

A: I think my dream was… now your question makes me realize that all I wanted is just to feel that I’m part of the nature, and that came true by doing. That’s why I like synecoculture best, I don’t have to kill any plants or insects, it is like we are all friends. We are all living in the nature.

Q: At the beginning when you wanted to grow, you did not realize that you wanted to grow because you wanted to be part of the nature, you just had an idea?

A: Yes, just an idea of growing… I wanted to experience the natural cycle…I always want to die in forest and go back to soil, I eat things from forest in nature so I go back to it, I’m part of this cycle.

Q: Is it like you don’t distinguish yourself from nature? You won’t distinguish that this is human and this is nature, instead you want to be one with nature?

A: Yes. I really do not agree with the idea of the separation between human and nature. Before I started growing my own food, I sometimes see nature as an object. Nature is there, it is beautiful. You know… that kind of idea, it is not like I’m part of it. I like it very much that now I feel I’m part of nature, instead of seeing nature as beautiful.

Q: This is really cool, and you are enjoying what you are doing.

A: Yes.

Q: Now I will show you some pictures of the artworks nearby. Could you share with me the messages you got from the artwork?

A: Okay.

Q: Have you seen some of them?

A: Yes, I have seen this one, this one, this one and this one.

Q: Could you pick an artwork that you feel can illustrate your farming?

A: That’s an interesting question. I like this one… which is traditional Japanese house, I don’t know if it represents my farming method though. In Synecoculture, we do not grow rice because … it is possible but… the reason is very interesting. The reason is that, fruit is the only plant in nature that they want us to eat them, they want to be eaten by humans and animals, that’s why they are sweet. For other plants, they do not want to die but … they are not that happy because they want to flower. The rice is all seeds, so they want to go back to soil and they want to grow but we all eat them. That’s why I think fruit is one of the most suitable food for humans.

Q: You can take your time to look at the photos and pick one that you would like to talk about.

A: Maybe this one and this one, for the rest I’m not very interested because of the rice fields. (Kita san choosing the artworks…). Maybe this is (Human re-entering nature) the process of what I’m doing.

Q: What messages did you get from the artwork?

A: it’s like a …. It represents what I just said that humans are part of nature and it is the same…we are equal, we are just friends. Because there are plants, and they give us what they have, and we helped each other. I could get that message from this one.

Q: How did you see the equal part? Can you describe more from the picture?

A: This person is standing next to the tree, it looks like they are both looking at the front, not seeing each other or not doing anything to each other. They are just living…and looking at the same direction.

Q: Like they co-exist in the same space?

A: Yes.

Q: How about the vines?

A: Yea, the cover is to protect the person, it looks like his clothes.

Q: How about in winter, when the vines faded in winter, what do you observe? How about in your farming, your farm also changes according to the seasons, what are your observations?

A: In winter, we are quiet, we are not sleeping but preserving energy inside our body. The plants are still there, they are not dead (referring the human re-entering nature in winter).

Q: In synecoculture, plants are keeping energy in winter?

A: Yes. Just like snow has different energies than Spring, it is crystal shape… The synecoculture is researching on the different energies snow has, compared to water, they have the idea that the reason why the rice here tastes better is because of the snow.

Q: How about the plants? Humans are keeping energy in winter, how about plants?

A: Ah, they save energy for the Spring. The energy is there, but … we only see it there but we don’t see it under the ground. Another day I harvested maple, it told me that the tree drinks a lot of water even in winter, we got these four litres of water for one and a half day, four litre of water from just one small hole of the tree. I was surprised, how much water they are drinking every day.

T: Actually the hole, they cure. We have been doing from that mountain last year, I forgot to take off the tube last year, this year I found that the hole closed. It cured in a year, it is amazing.

Q: Do you want to talk about the other artworks?

A: Yes, I used to think that this kind of things (Potemkin) are not necessary in nature, now I think these are also part of nature. They are also natural materials from the Earth, like iron and metal, and these all goes back to nature. Compared with plastics, I think these things are part of nature.

Q: That’s interesting. When you see the picture, you actually think that they merged?

A: Yes, I think it is kind of powerful, like the shape.

Q: Why did you change your mind about metal?

A: I think it is by learning and practicing synecoculture, I see things as physics, like what is … I think this changed me a little bit, my perception of different elements.

Q: How do you see synecoculture and traditional farming practices in Japan?

A: For traditional, you mean like the Edo era?

T: Like the mainstream practices now?

Q: The traditional practices, not the mainstream practices now.

A: My image of old traditional farming is from Edo era, there is no chemicals. Compared to that, how do I see the differences?

Q: Yes.

A: Synecoculture is born only because we destroyed the nature. It is to make ecosystem working and functioning again, that’s the main reason why we do synecoculture. It is like … it is not really for eating and growing food. If the ecosystem is working, we have food in nature. We somehow destroyed part of it, that’s why it is hard to get natural food. You only get processed food in certain areas. You cannot get food from forest. That’s the difference, I think. Going to Jyomo era where we first started growing rice, or we first started to settle. I’m not sure if that was a good idea, do we really need to settle in certain place and cultivate? Do we really need to cultivate? Can we live by forests? Can we live by travelling and finding food? That kind of lifestyle, does that fit more to nature? I’m not very much sure. But I think the best food for me is food that I can find in mountains, it is there, it is in forest.

Q: Did you just say that you are not sure about whether we should cultivate, or we should pick fruit from nature?

A: I’m not sure about settling or moving. If you really want to live by foresting, this area is really hard because … people and villagers preserve a lot of food in winter. They make pickled food in Spring and … they have many jars of preserved food for long winter, that’s how they live here.

T: Yes, I am always wondering why people here do not move in winter. Especially like right now, we have all the technology, but 40 years ago, it was difficult to live. I always wonder why people just keep living here, it might be easier, you know. And about Jyomo era, it is like 15,000 years.

Q: My last question, where would you put your farming practices, do you think you are exploring a completely new practices…Where would you put yourself in a spectrum like traditional, organic…

A: In the matrix?

Q: Yes.

A: now I think synecoculture is the newest and best method in the world. Scientifically, because the researchers specialize in physics and agriculture, it just takes time to prove that it will spread more. It just started… Am I answering your question? I think sooner or later people will want to try the method, it gives you 5-10 more times of harvest than other methods of using machinery or chemicals. As soon as we have this successful case, there is no reason … Oh maybe big company may not be happy to learn that.

Q: Is it something based on modern science?

A: I think it is not just nature but whole universe, because energy originally comes from universe and it is not only sun. It’s there.